



Women, Public Services, the Economy

Prospects for Women under the Present Government

Overview

- State driven austerity measures are having long lasting consequences for women in the South West – reflecting what is happening for women generally across the UK
- We are seeing the systematic erosion of the social infrastructure that women are both employed in (approx. 40% of all female employees) and rely on – public sector services, community groups, Sure Start, childcare, care for the elderly
- These austerity measures are not framed by government as cutting back on the infrastructures that support women, children, family life but as gender neutral, part of the “we’re all in it together” discourse

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- 2010 – 2013 the cumulative cuts led to 20% cut in social care, 18% cut in early years education, 27% cut in social housing – these figures continue to escalate (Reed et al 2013)
- Women's Budget Group estimated that the cumulative effect of tax, benefit and public sector cuts hit female headed households the hardest
- In families with children single mothers lose the most – 15.6%
- Among pensioners single women lose the most – 12.5%
- Among those of working age with no children single women lose the most – 10.9%

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Why are Single Mothers Hit Hardest?

- Patriarchy enmeshing with economic and ethnic discrimination becomes virulent: single mothers enduring class and ethnic inequalities hit hardest by power and subjugation of the state.
- Because single mothers in poverty have less choice, they are vulnerable to the bedroom tax, housing benefit cuts, and benefit caps – as a result many are presently having to move children from the schools, homes, friends and families that they love.
- They experience policies that exacerbate poverty: welfare to work jobs providing cheap labour (whatever their qualifications), bolstering what would otherwise be a falling economy; job focused interviews when child is 1 year old; benefit sanctions if miss an appointment eg. Sometimes when they are children were ill; sometimes English not their first language and didn't understand the letter

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Impact in Bristol - examples

- Already saw the effects in 2012 on single parents involved in SPAN and UWE's 3 year research programme tracking single parents through the Job Centre and after. All those who got jobs went into cleaning, low paid childcare, supermarket work – whatever their qualifications
- City Council Consultation on the Housing Strategy for Bristol 2015 presented to the Women's Commission estimates over 700 families will be displaced next year due to the benefit cap with no prospect as yet of housing them – families could be declared homeless with a cost to the city; and to the generations to come

Women, Public Services, the Economy

Opportunities for activists/researchers: locally; nationally

- WBG believe the financial crisis acts on “three interacting spheres: finance, production and reproduction” with the sphere of reproduction and the public services that support this sphere increasingly marginalised.
- Reproduction is “directly concerned with the daily and intergenerational reproduction of people as human beings especially through care, socialisation and education” Includes “unpaid work in families and communities and paid work in public services like health and education” ... the care essential for human well-being.”
- “Feminist economics go beyond “policies privileging markets and money over people” see the economy as a “gendered structure” and insists on the incorporation of reproductive and care work into alternative economic policies that include “public provision of transgenerational reproductive services – Transcending the Financial Crisis in the United Kingdom: D. Elson and R. Person (members of the WBG) Feminist Review (2015).

Women, Public Services, the Economy

Opportunities for activists/researchers: locally; nationally

Campaign nationally for Plan F Alongside the Women's Budget Group. Plan F would:

- Reverse cuts to public services and social security that have adverse effects on women eg Children's Centres, care for the elderly, bedroom tax and benefit cap
- Invest in social infrastructure – care, health, education, training, social security, housing, public transport.
- Improve working conditions in public sector and subcontracting in private sector. Strengthen contracts, collective bargaining, Living Wage.
- Create a Social Security system for a fairer share of caring and the costs of caring between women and men, families and the wider community
- Increase investment in social housing and insulation of homes

Women, Public Services, the Economy

Opportunities for activists/researchers: locally; nationally

Paying for Plan F – Creating a caring sustainable economy

- In part pays for itself – increasing weekly earnings generates more revenue from income tax and N.I. and saves on social security payments
- Reversing tax reductions since 2010 would save billions. Rise in threshold for personal income tax will cost £12 billion a year from 2016/17. Does not benefit those with incomes below tax threshold mostly women. Corporation tax cuts cost £7.9 billion a year from 2015/16
- Action on tax debt, avoidance and evasion saves £120 billion p.a.

Women, Public Services, the Economy

Opportunities for activists/researchers: locally; nationally

Campaign Locally – some arenas

- Leverage in Bristol given elected Mayor has signed the European Charter for gender equality and has committed to principles of the Fairness Commission on housing, transport, women, training etc
- Bristol Women's Commission Economy Group lobbying Council to enact vision in Enterprise Zone Temple Quay - key research needed on gender sensitive planning and infrastructure inc. public transport, training, secure contracts, living wage, childcare, ESOL classes, women in digital services. Working with Women's Voice to agree a Charter.
- Join Fair Play South West Campaigning Manifesto for women to be safer, healthier, financially secure and with a voice in public policy making
- Lobby through NEON? ACORN? to prevent eviction of Bristol families

Women, Public Services, the Economy – Some Contacts

- Nationally - Women's Budget Group
wbg.org.uk – research, briefings, actions
- Bristol Women's Voice -
www.bristolwomensvoice.org.uk umbrella organisation for women's equality in the city
- Fair Play South West -
www.fairplaysouthwest.org.uk - women's equality network for the South West