

SISTERS

ON THE MOVE



Journal of the
ASLEF Women's
Representative
Committee

Winter 2008

IN September 2008 The Equality and Human Rights Commission published its first survey on women in positions of power and influence. The report is part of the Commission's 'Working Better' project and revealed a worrying trend - that women's progress is either in reverse or stalled, with only a few significant increases.

A wider report by the Commission this year showed there are fewer women holding top posts in 12 of the 25 categories for which figures are available. In another five categories, the number of women remains unchanged since 2007's index. Women's representation has

increased in just eight areas.

The report compares women's progress to the pace of a snail. A snail could crawl:

- nine times round the M25 in the 55 years it will take women to achieve equality in the senior judiciary.
- from Land's End to John O'Groats and halfway back again in the 73 years it would take for equal numbers of women to become directors of FTSE 100 companies.
- the entire length of the Great Wall of China in 212 years, only slightly longer than the 200 years it will take for women to be equally represented in Parliament.

The report traditionally estimates the number of years it will take for women to achieve equality in key areas at the present rate of progress. This year's report indicates it will now take 15 years longer (55 years in total) for women to achieve equal status at senior levels in the judiciary, and women directors in FTSE 100 companies could be waiting eight years longer (73 years in total).

The Commission estimates that if women were to achieve equal representation among Britain's 31,000 top positions of power, an additional 5,600 'missing' women would rise through the ranks to positions of real influence.

Just 11 per cent of FTSE 100 directorships are held by women, and women make up just 19.3 per cent of MP's.

Nicola Brewer, the Chief Executive of the Equality and Human Rights Commission said; 'We always speak of a glass ceiling. These figures reveal that in some cases it appears to be made of reinforced concrete. We need radical change to support those who are doing great work and help those who want to work better and realise talent.'

'The Commission's report argues that today's findings are not just a 'women's issue' but are a powerful symptom of a wider failure. The report asks in what other ways are old-fashioned, inflexible ways of working preventing Britain from tapping into talent - whether that of women or other under-represented groups such as disabled people, ethnic minorities or those with caring responsibilities. Britain cannot afford to go on marginalising or rejecting talented people who fail to fit into traditional work patterns.'

In the rail industry this issue is particularly relevant. The numbers of women in our own trade union make up less than 3 per cent of the total and the profession would not be considered traditionally as a woman's profession, however it is stereotypes like this that the Equality and Human Rights Commission seeks to challenge.

There should be no 'all male' professions', glass ceilings should be shattered before they become concrete, and the fight for women's equality must continue until equality is achieved whether it takes 20 years or 200.

- Further information can be found on the Equality and Human Rights Website.
- If you feel you are not being treated fairly at work, contact a member of the women's representative committee. For names and contact information please contact Victoria Holloway - Equal Opportunities Administrator on 0207 317 8600 or vholloway@aslef.org.uk

MARCHING TOWARDS EQUALITY



IN 2005 there were over 14,000 reported rapes in England and Wales and an estimated 80,000 unreported rapes take place every year. 1 in 5 women experience sexual assault in adulthood and yet our conviction rate is the lowest it has ever been, one of the lowest in Europe, at only 5.3%. This means that more rapists were convicted in the 1970s when Reclaim The Night marches first started than they are now.

So why march?

We march for a woman's right to walk home at night, to travel home from work in the early hours and to feel safe doing so. For female train operators it is often necessary to travel to and from work in what are considered the most dangerous hours. It is important that women operators feel safe, free from the intimidation and fear that can come from working at these times.

Since Reclaim the Night first took to Britain's streets on 12th November 1977, women have had at least one night when they feel safe to walk the streets of their own towns and cities.

When a man called Peter Sutcliffe began murdering prostitute women in and around Leeds, feminists in the area were angry that the police response to these murders was slow and that the press barely reported on them. It seemed that it was only when young student women appeared among Sutcliffe's victims that the police started to take the situation seriously. Their response was to warn all women not to go out at night. This was not a helpful suggestion for any woman, let alone for those women working in prostitution who often had no choice about whether they worked at night or not. Feminists and a variety of women's and student groups were justifiably angered by this response. So the women organised a resistance of torch-lit marches and demonstrations — they walked in their hundreds through the city streets at night to highlight the fact that they should be able to walk anywhere and that they should not be blamed or restricted because of male violence.



Today we march for the same reasons. Because it is not acceptable that a large portion of Britain believes that women are sometimes wholly or partially to blame if they are raped, for example because they have been drinking, or because of the way they are dressed, or simply because they have been misunderstood by a man. On this day we remember the women who have walked before us, and say as they have said; that we are NEVER to blame for rape and violence. Today we demand the right to walk

the streets in our towns and cities at any hour without fear of rape and violence. We will Reclaim the Night!

So join our fellow sisters on Saturday 22nd November. Assemble in Whitehall Place at 6pm for a 6.30 start. The Women-only march to Friends Meeting House, Euston Road followed by a mixed rally for men and women, featuring invited speakers and a market place.

More details can be found at <http://www.reclaimthenight.org>

Diary of an ASLEF delegate



11 MARCH 2008: On my way to Eastbourne to attend my first TUC Women's Conference. To say I was nervous was an understatement, but I needn't have worried, all the other sisters, Pauline Cawood, Wendy Hurst, Gillian McVittie and of course Sharon Allen, the Equalities Adviser quickly and expertly put me at ease and very soon I felt part of a well oiled team.

12 MARCH: The first day of Conference covering a wide-ranging agenda. So far so good.

13 MARCH: ASLEF's big day. Wendy was the first to speak. She was seconding

an emergency motion. Wendy was followed by Gillian who moved a motion on 'honour killings'. It is hard to comprehend that in some cultures this practice is considered acceptable. After lunch it was my turn on the rostrum and not wanting to let the team down I suppressed my nerves and seconded a motion on transport safety. Last, but certainly not least, Pauline moved a motion on post-natal depression. Another long day almost over, but still time for a bit of networking.

We joined members of the Fire Brigades Union and the Prison Officers Union in the evening and it was a real boost to know that there are other sisters out there in the

same, or a similar position to us with regards to some of the issues we have in the workplace.

We were able to swap ideas and by the end of the evening had established new friendships. We rounded off the evening with the traditional union cabaret and song contest which was a fun way to finish. ASLEF's rendition of 'When I'm Sixty Four' was very well received!

MARCH 14: Time to complete any outstanding business before making our way back to our districts feeling we'd done a really good job for women and for ASLEF in particular. Pauline was re-elected to the TUC Women's Committee, actually

RECLAIM THE NIGHT

WE have all experienced that feeling - we need to use the loo. But where is the next available toilet and how long will it take to reach it? When we arrive at the station will we have enough time to use it without delaying the train? And importantly will we have a strong enough stomach!!

In anyone's book there is a severe problem with toilet facilities available on the rail network. Male or female, the toilets available to us as traincrew are few and far between. Those that do exist are often inaccessible, dirty, unhygienic, dysfunctional... Some are laughingly described as 'unisex' - this really means male of course and comes with the compulsory wet floor that you try to prevent your trousers dangling in.

For women this lack of decent facilities is a real problem. Not for us the option of peeing in the washer bottle, a drinks bottle, the sidings or out of the single leaf door. We have to cross our legs and hold on until we can find somewhere suitable. Equally why should our male colleagues have to resort to such unhygienic options? We ALL need decent, clean, easily accessible toilet facilities while we are at work. Urinating is after all a basic human need.

The complications of 'holding on' are well known: discomfort, pain, urinary infections or cystitis, kidney infections. A tendency to reduce fluid intake is often associated with difficulty accessing toilets and this has its own problems, such as dehydration. Lack of proper hygiene during the menstrual cycle can also lead to Toxic Shock Syndrome.

Our biggest problem is few drivers are prepared to put their head above the parapet and make their voices heard. Few are prepared to delay their train so they can use a suitable toilet. If a problem does not hit TOCs/FOCs in the pocket nothing will change. Women drivers are disproportionately affected because they do not have alternatives like a handy water bottle. There are drivers who do stand up for their right to wee - and they are being harassed by management as a result. Some are being asked to explain their delays, others are being sent for medicals. This is happening to men as well as women, but because women have no alternatives we are more noticeable.

One Company Council has at last taken this issue seriously and is using research which says we all need to urinate every 3-4 hours, to push for changes to their diagrams. Together with their employer they have undertaken a survey of all the facilities at their turn around points. This is great news for all drivers in that Company but it only happened because the facilities were so poor in the first place and drivers complained.

If we all stand up for our right to wee,

and encourage our Company Councils' to take the issue seriously, we may get the toilet facilities, and opportunity to use them, that we all deserve. Collette Gibson, WCC Member - District No. One

The Office for Rail Regulation (ORR) is seeking the views of the Trade Unions on occupational health issues such as toilet facilities.

Do you have examples of poor toilet and welfare facilities? Do you have examples of the non-provision of toilet and welfare facilities? For example, for Drivers working on ballast turns.

If you work for a passenger Train Operating Company, does the thought of the poor provision of toilet and welfare facilities put you off from applying for a Drivers job with a Freight Operating Company?

Please could any examples or views be sent to the Head Office IR/HS Dept (or dbennett@aslef.org.uk) as soon as possible, so they can be added to the response to the ORR.

NO TOILETS? SISTERS WON'T STAND FOR IT



increasing her vote.

I would like to say a very big thank you to all the sisters who supported me at my first TUC Women's Conference and would also like to tank Andy Reed, Marion Butcher and Debbie Reay who came down as visitors to support us. I had a very enjoyable time and came away knowing that people do care and do listen to what we have to say.

Six women honoured in stamp set

SIX women who defied the times, fought discrimination and changed attitudes and history have been honoured this month in a new set of stamps.

The set of six stamps is the first collection by Royal Mail solely devoted to women. The most notable and controversial of the honoured women is Marie Stopes, the founder of the first free family planning clinic in 1921. Anti-abortion organisations and feminists condemned the choice of a woman whose opinions in later life became eccentric to say the least. Marie Stopes left her considerable will to the Eugenics society after her son married a woman she considered genetically defective because her daughter in law wore glasses. However the Marie Stopes charity responded that although she courted



controversy her achievements were outstanding.

Less familiar names include Claudia Jones, a journalist, socialist and campaigner for black rights who helped to launch the Notting Hill Carnival in 1959. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, who became president of the National Women's Suffrage Societies and her elder sister Elizabeth

Garrett Anderson, the first British woman to qualify as a doctor.

The set also includes two politicians Eleanor Rathbone, elected an MP in 1929 she campaigned for family allowances (now known as child benefit) and Barbara Castle. Castle, elected to the Commons in 1929 became the fourth woman to enter cabinet,

under Harold Wilson and spent a lifetime fighting for equality. Key among her achievements was the 1970 Equal Pay Act.

Overall this chosen set of women is an eclectic group chosen to commemorate 'six unique individuals whose dedicated work not only changed the lives of other women but society as a whole.'

CONTACTS

The Women's Representative Committee would welcome letters or articles from members, and if you want to contact the Women's Representative Committee Delegate in your district details are as follows:

District 1

Collette Gibson

District 2

Gillian McVittie

District 3

Vacancy

District 4

Pauline Cawood

District 5

Wendy Hurst

District 6

Anne Johnson

District 7

Vacancy

District 8

Debbie Reay

For contact details
Victoria Holloway –
Equal Opportunities
Administrator
on 0207 317 8600 or
vholloway@aslef.org.uk

Skydiver Anne jumps for joy



Hi, my name is Anne Johnson and I'm the newly appointed WRC delegate for District No. 6.

I have been a member of ASLEF for 10 years working for Silverlink train services firstly as a conductor and now as a driver.

I enjoy most aspects of my work especially the camaraderie of my colleagues. However, I would like to see more women in the workplace (it would be nice to have a bit of back up during the PNB discussions!)

I am married to Bob with 2 boys who are now grown up and have left the nest which enables me to pursue my hobbies and interests. I enjoy travelling and adventure sports having recently added bungee jumping and sky diving to my list. I also enjoy riding my motorcycle and acting as Team Manager/Pit Crew when Bob races his classic bike. What spare time I do have left is used going to the theatre, playing badminton or walking - especially in the Lake District.

I would like to say to any Sisters in the District No. 6 who may have concerns or issues they would like to discuss or be raised at the WRC or just a chat in general to please contact me via 07920451253 or at my home depot at Watford Junction B.O.P.