



# **RECORD OF DECISIONS**

**2015 National Women's Conference**

**Southport**

**2015 National Women's Conference  
Decisions**

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## 2015 National Women's Conference Decisions

### Motions

#### 1. Modernising our union

**Carried**

Conference notes that, in a time of austerity and job cuts, our recruitment figures for the past year are still encouraging. We commend our activists and staff for their efforts.

However, there is still a need to recruit and organise more young members in our union. Given that the majority of public sector workers are women, it is essential that we devise ways to attract young women into our movement, and ensure that our agenda is one in which their aspirations are met, and that our organisation is one in which they can reach their full potential as UNISON members.

Conference calls upon the National Women's Committee to work with other appropriate bodies in UNISON to:

- 1) Collaborate with student unions, nursing and technical colleges etc to raise awareness of the benefits of union membership and to recruit eligible students into membership at the end of their period of study;
- 2) Ensure that our branches, regions and formal structures are "user friendly" and easy to access – including by the use of social media;
- 3) Work with regions to identify appropriate student events where UNISON could have a recruitment and information stand;
- 4) work with the national young members' forum to identify the issues which are of concern to potential young women members, and the barriers to them joining a union;
- 5) request that the NEC consider introducing a reduced flat rate fee for students wishing to join UNISON, and to consider an appropriate rule change.

#### 2. Encouraging More Young Women to be Active in UNISON

**Carried**

Conference notes that women make up more than two thirds of the union's membership; however figures show the active involvement of young women is low. At this time of austerity it is crucial we try to encourage more young women to take an active role in our union. The Coalition's attack on public services have hit women hard, services have been cut and employment opportunities decreased; and there is continued uncertainty for those in employment. Recruitment, retention and encouraging young women into activity must be a key focus for the union.

51% of the population is female but women still remain underrepresented in senior positions – this can be bad for society as women are often excluded from the decision making process. In the Northern Region, women currently hold leadership roles, and provide mentoring and coaching to support other women into activity. Extensive organising work has been done to encourage branches to support women

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who wish to become active, helping to overcome a wide range of barriers preventing them from doing so.

Young people engaging with other young people is very effective, in the Northern Region a General Fighting Fund post held by a young woman, was focussed on working with young people, and recruited hundreds of new members. In addition to this there is a very active young members group who have run a number of successful campaigns.

In areas such as the private sector and Community & Voluntary Sector, where there are number of young people working, we must have a clear organising strategy to develop new women activists.

We must also highlight the role young women have in the political work that we do, so their views are heard and represented

Encouraging more women into activity must be a priority for the union.

This motion asks the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) To work with regions to develop mentoring schemes for young women, to support other young women, to become more active in unison.
- 2) Work with reps and the women's group and young members to produce young people friendly publicity to encourage them to become more active in their trade union.
- 3) To work with other organisations, to co-ordinate activity amongst young people.

### **3. The Impact of Zero Hours Contracts on Women**

**Carried**

Zero hours contracts are slowly edging into mainstream local government and other services and are being routinely used as cheaper alternative to permanent contracts. A good example of this appalling practice is within Register Offices, which is an occupation predominately staffed by women.

This practice involves saving money on staffing as zero hours contracts have no 'on-costs':

- 1) No sickness is payable to zero hours contracts – if you don't work you don't get paid.
- 2) Reduced holiday pay costs – only need pay the bare minimum of 1/13 premium to cover holiday as set by the EU
- 3) No pension costs to the Employer – therefore no right to a pension for the Employee

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Conference calls upon the National Women's Committee to investigate the feasibility of a UNISON survey to discover how many zero hours contracts are being used in public services such as Local Government, NHS, Probation Service, Police and others so as to put pressure on Government to halt the practice.

### **4. Increasing participation of low paid and part time women**

**Carried**

Increasing participation of low paid and/or part time women is not a new subject but an important one as many women find themselves on low salaries and working in part time or on zero hours contracts. UNISON women members total two thirds of the current membership and although strides have been taken to increase their participation and to be inclusive more needs to be achieved.

Labour Research in their article, "heeding women's voices" (March 2014) says that Job cuts in the public sector could have adversely impacted on UNISON's female membership still further. In 2013 a recruitment campaign by UNISON was targeted at women after research indicated many union members said UNISON was expensive and they were not sure of the benefits.

Ensuring members know of the benefits of being in UNISON is the key to increasing participation, communication and knowledge needs to be conveyed to the women membership as a whole. Ask the question are we using the correct methods to appeal for the women members to become involved? UNISON should rightly be seen as insurance in the workplace to bargain, represent and negotiate. Participation needs much more commitment as women need time, flexibility, childcare or carer cover to be able to participate.

There are many barriers both in the workplaces, by employers and in UNISON that need identification so women can progress and become involved. The barriers include finance, time, childcare, respite care, education, resources and communication.

Having policies that cover flexible working, time off for education and learning, work/life balance, women & health including menopause and domestic violence for all women workers would be a step forward as some employers do not have adequate policies.

UNISON has a comprehensive education system nationally and regionally which covers improving English and maths to leadership and mentoring courses and a bursary scheme. We have reserved seats for women and low paid women, women's conferences and a system that ensures proportionality and equality within delegations.

All women and young women in particular need to know what we have to offer as they are the unions present and future. So we ask the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Develop a strategy for communication with women in regions and branches.

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- 2) Update and ensure that women's issues are prominent on the National website with regional web link
- 3) Research the actions that can assist Low paid and part time women to participate.
- 4) Campaign for branches to give expenses upfront regionally and at National level
- 5) Report back to the 2016 conference on progress made.

### **5. Changes to Working Hours**

**Carried**

Since the introduction of the Health & Social Care Act more care is expected to be provided at home, Women working in the NHS, Local Government and Voluntary Sectors are seeing the move towards a 24 hour / 7 day service being implemented at a rapid rate and more and more requests for flexible working being turned down as they don't meet the needs of the service.

Increasingly the workforce is required to provide extended hours of work including, in some areas covering a 24 hour shift pattern where previously this was not required.

This significant change to working practices is creating increasingly disproportionate difficulties for women, who it is known generally have more responsibilities to organise to enable them to attend work.

Conference therefore calls upon the National Women's Committee to work with all relevant bodies including service groups to review UNISON guidance on various policies with a view to improving negotiations further on flexible working, and the implementation of shift patterns that don't have a disproportionate impact on women workers

### **6. Legal equality facility time for women**

**Carried**

At the Discrimination Law Conference in January 2014 Professor Sir Bob Hepple QC said that "if a new government enacts only one new piece of equality legislation it should be to require equality representatives at workplaces" – such reps would require a legal right to time off to "be involved in drawing up and enforcing employment and pay equity plans".

Currently equality reps have no legal right to time off to undertake their trade union equality duties. The TUC argued in a 2005 submission to the former Women and Work Commission that trade union equality reps should be given the same statutory rights as learning reps – paid time off for training and for undertaking their role. Training included developing the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence to undertake the role effectively and capacity building for effective engagement with employers.

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TUC research published in 2010 concluded that a key factor in equality reps effectiveness was the amount of time they were able to spend on their duties and without a statutory right that time was limited. The research reported that equality reps greatly enhance employers' quality work and have a positive impact in the workplace. There was evidence of employers support with one saying "It is in our interests to develop competent equality reps."

The TUC research also found that though less than half of equality reps surveyed were women (46%) that this was unsurprising given that the role is largely undertaken by reps with other established roles due to the lack of specific time off. However it was also noted that 63% of those who had not had previous rep experience were women which indicated that the role was playing a part in attracting more women members into union activity.

The activities that equality reps undertook included –

- Providing advice and information on equality matters;

- Encouraging and supporting workplace diversity and fairness;
- Workplace mapping and tackling discriminatory patterns;

- Assisting with flexible working;

- Supporting and advising members on sexual harassment issues;

- Encouraging discussion of sex equality issues on the collective bargaining agenda.

This matter is especially important for UNISON given that nearly three quarters of our members are women a majority of whom are low paid. The lack of equality facility time is therefore directly discriminatory and is also indirectly discriminatory in that women's time is heavily pressurised due to caring responsibilities.

Four years of the coalition government and its austerity policies have rolled back equality successes for women and significantly increased workplace inequality. The lack of equalities facility time seriously impairs women activist's abilities to challenge discrimination against women in the workplace – it is becoming a 2nd class matter for better days. The implicit – if not explicit – perception is that women's equality is not as important as other TU issues.

Now more than ever women's equality should be centre stage. The inequitable effects of the austerity policies need tackling:

- How zero hour contracts affect women;

- Segregation of 'women's' work into low pay jobs and the need for a living wage and pay equity plans;

- Employer sickness absence monitoring resulting in 'survival of the fittest' and the particular impact on older women;

- Lack of affordable and accessible child care;

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Effect of increase in stress and mental ill health on women.

Conference requests the National Women's Committee to -

- 1) Discuss facility time for equality reps with the TUC with a view to raising it with the next government;
- 2) Work with Labour Link to influence the next labour Government to extend facility time to equality reps.

### **7. Equal Pay**

**Carried**

This conference notes:

- 1) That it is 40 years since the Equal Pay Act came into force.
- 2) The efforts of UNISON to champion equal pay for its women members winning a series of landmark cases and forcing employers to introduce equality proofed pay systems.

However this conference further notes

- a) That the gender pay gap has closed by approximately 10% in 40 years however that the narrowing has virtually come to a standstill in the last 15 years.
- b) That the gender pay gap is at its highest for those women between the ages of 40-49 and those in managerial positions.

This conference asks the National Women's Committee to work with the National Executive Council and the relevant service groups to:

- i) Continue to campaign for equal pay in all workplaces
- ii) Provide information and training to branches to enable equal pay audits to be carried particularly in areas where equality proofed pay structures have not been implemented.
- iii) To monitor existing pay structures like single status and Agenda for change so that they continue to be equality proofed.

### **8. Harmonisation of In Work Threshold and Benefit Cap**

**Carried as Amended: 8.1**

Conference will be aware that thousand of women in work are suffering poverty, low pay, zero hour contracts and lack of job security. In 2012 there were 5.1mil working in low paid jobs, the majority women. Annual median pay now stands at £21,200, some £3,400 lower than the pre-recession peak of 2008/2009 according to the resolution foundation, which will continue until 2018.

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While we have seen this government attack welfare benefits, there are still many woman workers above the threshold for in work benefits who are struggling. They are unable to access initiatives available through different government schemes. For those on welfare benefit the threshold is £ 26,000 which the Tories intend to reduce to £23,000. The cap for low paid workers to be eligible for products and services that those on benefits can access is £16,010.00.

These initiatives include warm home discount to help with electricity bills over the winter period and the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) a government initiative to improve energy efficiency in the home, including replacement boilers. Under this current rule landlords who have tenants in receipt are also eligible for the ECO scheme.

Using the national consumption figure set by the regulators, energy prices have increased by £120.00 (31.9%) for electric and £316.00 (58%) for gas between 2007 and 2012. With access to initiatives like ECO, households could save up to £200.00 per year just by changing their boiler.

Conference notes that existing UNISON policy is to oppose benefit caps in principle and instead focus on just and fair entitlement to meet living and housing costs. As a minimum there should be regional benefit caps to take proper account of rent differences in the country rather than a crude national one. Additionally, Universal Credit will add to the complexity around access to passported benefits, including energy efficiency schemes.

This conference instructs The National Women's committee to

- 1) Work with Unison's "There for You" charity to highlight energy efficiency schemes and how to access them.
- 2) Campaign for a revision of anomalies under Universal Credit to help low paid women - including child care costs, child benefit and other passported benefits.
- 3) Work with other UNISON bodies to lobby the government for schemes to improve housing standards/energy efficiency/fuel poverty to ensure that they allow low paid women as well as out of work women to have equal affordable access to these schemes.

### 9. Women Apprentices

**Carried**

Conference notes the much lower number of women that become apprentices in areas such as engineering, construction and information technology

Female apprentices are more likely to end up in low paid jobs. So whilst there are apprenticeships available for women, female dominated areas tend to offer lower wages and less chance of career progression.

According to a TUC report the amount of women doing low skilled work has tripled over the last 20 years, even though young women are better qualified than young men. Research shows that of all apprentice starts in 2011/12, the uptake by

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women is 83% in healthcare, 91% in childcare, 93% in hairdressing whilst only 2% in construction, 3% in engineering and 10% in Information Technology.

The report also stated unions, employers and government must work together to provide better careers advice in schools for young women.

Conference requests the National Women's Committee to work to promote wider access for women to apprenticeships in areas where they are underrepresented, which could lead to access to better paid jobs and close the gender pay gap.

### **10. Gender budgeting – Counting the Cost**

**Carried**

Since June 2010, austerity policies have reduced employment opportunities for women, who make up the majority of workers in the public sector, where wages have been frozen and jobs lost, and making it harder to combine earning a living and taking care of families.

The Treasury says that “we are all in this together” yet research published by the House of Commons Library showed that 80% of the revenue raised through changes in the tax and benefit strategy since 2010 has come from women's pockets. For the first time in five years the gender pay gap has widened. Women's unemployment is still 50% higher than its pre-crisis level (men's is 41% higher) while long-term unemployment for women continues to rise overall and at a faster rate among women than men.

Overall the government's austerity measures have exacerbated inequality between men and women and this does not arise from any economic imperative but reflects a policy choice.

This conference applauds the work of UNISON for publishing 'Counting the Cost, how cuts are shrinking women's lives' in June 2014. This information is hugely important in for raising awareness amongst our women members and in encouraging an increase in women's political activism and in encouraging them to call for a change to such gendered economic decisions.

In undertaking this work, UNISON has collaborated with The Women's Budget Group (WBG). This is a voluntary network of people from women's organisations, trade unions and universities that examines the gender equality impact of government budgets. It has already produced a toolkit for women's groups 'Women and local cuts, Challenging Gender Equality Impact Assessments & Local Government Budgets' which provides clear information and ideas.

We call on the National Women's Committee to

- 1) Continue to support and work collaboratively with the Women's Budget Group
- 2) Commission new research and to work with the WBG to develop training courses and education materials around this subject.

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- 3) Work with Regional Women's Committees and groups to publicise the research findings, training course and education materials produced.
- 4) Report back to our 2016 conference

### **11. Women Against Cuts**

**Carried as Amended: 11.1**

This Conference remains opposed to all cuts in Public Services.

We totally reject any employer asserting that cuts are inevitable. Kirklees Council have consistently underspent over the last 11 years, and like many Councils, could 'save' millions of pounds by maintaining all services 'in house', having a public service procurement policy, cutting private sector involvement in public service delivery and having no further private consultancy companies being paid to 'offer' support and advice and in-house training.

Women suffer disproportionately from cuts. They play a vital role in our economy as both workers and consumers and the cuts are having a major impact on women's incomes and well-being.

As women make up 65% of the work force, all job cuts and pay freezes in the public sectors will have a greater impact on women's lives.

Conference notes that the National Women's Committee were asked to report to the 2015 Women's Conference with the amount of women members who have been made redundant due to cuts in the public sector. This will carry the painful truth of the Government's austerity programme.

With Labour pledging to continue the Tories public spending cuts, women need to be supported by their unions to organise resistance. Where jobs and services have been won, it has been through our own union organisation and commitment to campaigning amongst our members, joint union working and within the community. In Tower Hamlets women as workers and service users have spearheaded successful campaigns to save 4 nurseries from closure and the axing of the social work team in childrens and adolescents mental health.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to continue the initiative agreed at last year's Conference to work with the Women's Committees and other UNISON Structures in a renewed campaign to highlight the impact of cuts on women and to highlight the need for greater public investment.

Conference also calls on the National Women's Committee to draw attention to women fighting against cuts and especially to successful campaigns we can learn from.

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### **12. Women and Housing**

**Carried**

Conference is deeply concerned at the impact of the rising cost of housing on UNISON members, particularly for those living in private rented accommodation.

Recent research found that spiraling rental costs and stagnant wage growth mean 1.6million households are forced to spend more than half their disposable income on housing – and single women, particularly those from low and middle income brackets, are among the worst affected.

The combination of low and frozen pay; reduction of housing benefits; the so-called bedroom tax and the lack of affordable housing to buy and rent has contributed to this situation.

As a consequence, many women are being forced into shared accommodation, which is frequently unsuitable and may increase the vulnerability of women and their children.

Conference therefore calls upon the national women's committee to work with the NEC and Labour Link to:

- 1) Campaign to abolish the bedroom tax;
- 2) Campaign for a national local authority house building programme, and more local authority housing provision;
- 3) Provide advice and assistance for UNISON members who wish to report sub-standard housing without repercussions.

### **13. Attack on Child Benefit**

**Carried**

This conference believes that child benefit is one of the most valuable and important planks of the British welfare state.

Together with a national health service and maintenance of employment, a universal children's allowance was one of the three pillars of the welfare state set out by william beveridge in his seminal 1942 report.

Since 1946, when the first family allowance order books became valid, mothers have received a payment from the state for at least their second child – irrespective of family income.

Introduced to help alleviate poverty for women and children, the most important aspect of the benefit is that it is paid directly to the mother.

According to a 2012 survey from the child poverty action group (scotland), families in Scotland are more likely to spend child benefit on clothes, food and nappies than in the UK as a whole. Across the UK, the report finds parents increasingly using child benefit to pay for essentials, and parents expressing anger and disbelief at current cuts to the benefit.

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The decision by the coalition government to effectively freeze the benefit, means test it and remove its universality, is regressive and unfair and will directly affect women and children throughout the uk.

Conference is, therefore, dismayed that the Labour party has decided to continue with the freeze and ensures that children are continuing to pay for a deficit not of their making.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to work with the labour link committee to lobby the labour party to rethink its decision and, if elected in 2015, lift the freeze and reinstate the universal nature of this crucial benefit.

### **14. Women in Prison**

**Carried**

At the 2009 National Women's Conference in Southport UNISON women welcomed the Labour Government commissioned Corston Report and its recommendations in respect of women in prisons in the UK.

In particular conference welcomed the proposal for small, multifunctional non-custodial centres, which the report recommended be widely dispersed across the country.

Conference is disappointed therefore that the current coalition government has failed to implement many of the recommendations of the Corston report. Conference is also concerned that under this ConDem administration a significant proportion of women convicted of non-violent crimes and who pose no risk to society are still being incarcerated.

According to Psychologist Stephanie Covington women in custody are five times more likely to have a mental health problem compared with women in the general population, and almost eight in 10 exhibit some level of psychological disturbance on admission. One in three have suffered sexual abuse, and more than one in two have suffered domestic violence; half have attempted suicide at some point in their lives. "And going into prison retraumatizes them – so basically, we are amplifying or compounding their problems," she says.

Statistics on the Women in Prison campaign group's website reveal that that for 85% of mothers in prison, prison was the first time they had been separated from their children for any significant length of period, and that imprisoning mothers for non-violent offences has a damaging impact on children and carries a cost to the state of more than £17 million over a ten year period.

Conference reiterates its belief that for all these reasons and more, prison is a cruel and unjust punishment for the vast majority of women affected by the criminal justice system, and that imprisonment should be used only in cases where women pose a threat to public safety: the majority of women should be dealt with in the community, in programmes specifically designed to meet their needs.

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Conference therefore calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Liaise with the NEC and other appropriate UNISON bodies to urge the Government to fulfil the recommendations of the Corston Report.
- 2) Consider inviting a speaker from Women in Prison to address the 2016 National Women's Conference.
- 3) Work with Women in Prison to raise awareness of the need for more community focused, non-custodial sentences for women affected by the criminal justice system.

### **15. Young women, stress, and mental health**

**Carried**

This Conference believes that the Government's austerity agenda is leading to intolerable pressure on workers as cuts mean having to deliver services with fewer resources, and pay freezes/cuts make it more difficult for people to cope.

This Conference also believes that women are amongst the hardest hit by the austerity agenda. They are very often expected to hold down many additional roles, - including parenting, caring, and household responsibilities.

This Conference further believes that young women are especially under pressure as they are new to the world of work, often experience the lowest levels of pay, and can experience high levels of bullying and harassment.

This Conference notes that there is a growing level of stress arising amongst young women, and a growing incidence of mental health problems, but that mental health remains a generally taboo subject.

This conference calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Call on service groups to ensure that employers are making adequate provision through employee assistance programmes etc. for employees experiencing stress and mental health issues, and that every effort is made to ensure these are promoted properly, and especially to young women employees;
- 2) Promote support for National Mental Health Day on 10 October 2015.

### **16. Marginalisation of Mental Health, the Impact on Women**

**Carried as Amended: 16.1**

Conference notes that women are more likely to be treated for a mental health problems than men.

As reported by Mental Health Foundation 29% of women compared to 17% of men are treated for mental health problems. One in four women are treated for depression, compared to one in ten men. Women are also disproportionately more likely to experience anxiety; this is highlighted by those suffering from phobias or OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder), who are more likely to be female.

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Conference also recognises that many of these mental health problems will affect older/elderly women who may have suffered from their effects for many decades. Similarly isolation in old age can lead to mental health problems for older/elderly women, a situation exacerbated by the diminution of services in health, public transport, day centres and other community facilities so that many such women become lonely and isolated and lacking essential support.

Conference is concerned with Central Government cuts to Local Government funding, real term cuts in NHS funding and cuts to Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) funding is having a huge impact on the range of mental health services available or accessible.

Conference also notes under this Tory-led Government the NHS has been hugely fragmented and privatised due to the Health and Social Care Act which has impacted on the provision of mental health services.

Conference further recognises the NHS will be on all political parties agendas in the run up to the General Election in 2015. However, conference remains concerned that mental health will continue to remain a Cinderella service within the NHS. This has, and will remain, to have a disproportionate greater impact on women, the larger users of the service.

Conference welcomes Andy Burnham's manifesto pledge to repeal the Health and Social Care Act should Labour be elected in 2015 and that Labour will work towards an integrated Health and Social Care system with mental health as an integral part of the system.

Conference, therefore calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Continue to work with Labour Link and other agencies on examples of best practise working and to continually campaign for proper investment of mental health services
- 2) Encourage regions to collate and record information from branches where public owned mental health services are threatened, restricted, reduced, outsourced or cut, to enable the impact on women in particular including older/elderly women to be accurately gauged going forward from 2015
- 3) Examine, collate and feedback the effects on staff within the mental health arm of NHS, many of whom are women, to gauge the load as a base reference for the future
- 4) Continue working with and including relevant CVS' to lobby for a fairer funding settlement for Local Government
5. Report back to NWC in 2016 with any identified actions to combat further attacks on this service in particular

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### 17. Black women and fibroids

**Carried**

Conference, fibroids are small benign tumours that grow on the walls of the womb, inside and out, and can range from a single growth to multiple. For most women they give no cause for concern and grow unnoticed. But, for others, the genetic disorder can mean heavy and painful periods and lead to fatigue and anaemia. In the worst cases, it can make conceiving more complicated, cause infertility and increase the risk of miscarriage. Common indications are pain, heavy menstrual bleeding, pressure on or adjacent organs such as the bladder.

Medical treatment available:

- 1) Tablets or injections to manipulate hormones that effect fibroid growth, however discontinuation of treatment will result in re-growth
- 2) Myomectomy - surgical procedure- that removes just the fibroid, not the entire uterus
- 3) Hysterectomy - removal of the uterus
- 4) Microwave Endometrial Ablation - gynaecologists remove fibroids via a probe
- 5) Uterine Artery Embolisation (UAE) - the arteries feeding the fibroids are blocked off under local anaesthetic, this procedure does not remove them, but will cause it to shrink.

Conference, Black women suffer disproportionately from fibroids and are three to five times more likely to develop them than White women. Black women also tend to have larger, more numerous fibroids at diagnosis. Fibroids seem to occur at a younger age and grow more quickly in Black women as well. Fibroids are the reason behind 30 percent of hysterectomies in white women and over 50 percent of hysterectomies in Black women.

Those who are overweight, started puberty early, or have not had children, are also more likely to have fibroids. Dr On said: "Fibroids are non-fatal. They do not kill you so the medical community doesn't care much about them. They think hysterectomies can cure it so their job is done, but there are psychological side effects and many other side effects'

"Common sense will tell you that unless you start collecting data and continuously revising your statistics, how do you know what the situation is? Does it make sense not to have research on a condition that is so poorly understood you don't even know the exact causes of it?"

As Dr On pointed out, the most common form of treatment for fibroids is a hysterectomy, the removal of the womb. For women still hoping to conceive, they can undergo a myomectomy which removes the fibroids, but leaves the womb untouched. However, myomectomies have a high recurrence rate of about 75 percent meaning a life spent in and out of hospital.

Health disparities are not a new phenomenon, especially when it comes to level of health care and access to services that Black women receive. Why don't medical

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institutions seem to care about Black women's high rates of unnecessary hysterectomy?

Conference, fibroid embolisations – an alternative treatment, involves injecting grain-sized particles into the womb using small needles that cause the fibroids to dry up and shrink by 60 percent.

The recovery period is two weeks and does have a few side effects, including abdominal pain and passing big blood clots, but it is a “small price to pay” for a treatment that has almost permanent results without going under the knife.

What is “really bad news from a cosmetic point of view” for Black women, said Dr Walker, is that the cutting open of the body can lead to unsightly scarring because Black skin is likely to develop keloids. The procedure is available on the NHS so why don't more GPs recommend embolisations or, at least, brief patients on all the options? “There is a problem in this country and that problem is lack of information. GPs claim not to know anything about embolisations, even though the knowledge is readily available and has been published in all the medical journals,” said Dr Walker who has been carrying out the procedure since 1996.

Conference therefore call on the National Women's Committee to work with

- a) The National Black Member's Committee to produce information leaflets on fibroids that highlight the alternative treatment options.
- b) Community based and health organisations to raise the issue of fibroids amongst Black women, develop treatment initiatives and highlight the alternatives to hysterectomies
- c) Work with the health service group on seeking to influence Clinical Commissioning Groups and Public Health England on this issue.

### **19. Endometriosis and Adenomyosis; A Workplace Issue**

**Carried**

Endometriosis and Adenomyosis are chronic and painful conditions where cells from the lining of the womb are deposited in other parts of the body instead of being lost during menstruation.

These cells continue to change in size and bleed in response to a woman's normal menstrual cycle. This can affect bowel, bladder and kidney function, and cause pain in joints and bleeding from the sites where cells are. The impact is more than gynaecological, particularly if other organs are affected.

It affects more than 1.5 million women in the UK beyond puberty, regardless of age, ethnicity and reproductive history.

- 1) 10% of women worldwide have endometriosis - that's 176 million women worldwide.

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2) Endometriosis is the second most common gynaecological condition in the UK.

The symptoms include: persistent pain, heavy and irregular periods, painful urination, bowel problems, particularly diarrhoea and bloating, back and joint pain, depression and pain during sex.

Endometriosis disrupts women's lives, in the workplace and elsewhere, it is a condition of which many people are unaware, and which many women can find it hard to talk about and get support with. The cost to both women with the condition and their employers will be great and highlighting this through our women's networks will be a worthwhile exercise to undertake.

Few HR and OH departments are well informed about this disease; attendance management and health and safety policies are often not supportive of women with this condition this can result in our members being unfairly punished through attendance management for a condition that is inescapable.

a) Conference calls upon the National Women's Committee to work with all relevant bodies including regions and branches to collect current information on this condition and to also pull together examples of model policies regarding endometriosis including attendance management and health and safety.

b) Additionally we ask the NWC to highlight the cost to women suffering from this condition financially and physically and to raise the cost to employers who manage our Women members with this condition inappropriately.

c) Conference further calls upon the NWC to share this information with all branches so that when our employers seek to negotiate new or amend existing sickness policies we can ensure this condition is factored into the sickness management process.

d) Conference also believes that endometriosis should be recognised as a condition within the remit of the Equalities Act, and therefore placing on the employer the duty to investigate and provide reasonable adjustments.

### **22. When a Definition is not Enough**

**Carried**

When a Definition is not Enough.

Conference welcomes the Home Office Consultation "Strengthening the Laws on Domestic Abuse" and wants to ensure that a change in the law is affected to better reflect the definition of Domestic Abuse. However, conference notes that one in four women still experience Domestic Abuse.

Conference also notes that the definition of Domestic Violence was amended in 2013 to include coercive control and psychological abuse, however, conference is concerned that the law has not caught up to reflect this change in definition.

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Conference understands at present, the criminal justice system and the laws related to domestic violence and abuse are structured around individual incidents of violence and that many women cannot get help from the criminal justice system because the cumulative effect of many instances of non-violent forms of abuse cannot currently be taken into account.

Conference recognises that the law is often unable to protect women experiencing psychological abuse and coercive control where no obvious physical violence or injury occurs.

Conference further notes that the laws used to prosecute domestic violence, including breaches of restraining orders, damage to property, assault, rape, kidnapping, murder, do not describe domestic violence/abuse in its essence, these laws miss the fact that domestic violence/abuse is about fear and a pattern of continuing acts and not one or two individual acts of violence.

Conference states Enough is Enough, and that the law should be changed to reflect the change in definition. A new criminal offence of domestic violence and abuse should be introduced which includes physical and psychological abuse and coercive control along a continuum rather than focusing on individual violent incidents, conference believes, strengthen the protection available to women. It would also extend protection to a larger number of victims who currently sit outside the law.

Conference understands that psychological abuse can have a life-changing effect on victims and where a victim is experiencing psychological abuse, the end result of domestic abuse can still be fatal. Domestic Violence is a serious crime that leads to two homicides every week, two too many. Conference, believes that the seriousness of the pattern of abuse is not always understood or identified as the law does not recognise many women currently in abusive relationships as victims of ongoing abuse because there is no evidence of physical violence or physical injury.

Whilst the consultation period ends in October 2014 conference wants to be assured that this issue receives the priority it deserves.

Conference therefore calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Campaign for a change in the law to better reflect the definition of domestic abuse
- 2) Raise awareness amongst UNISON members
- 3) Work with Labour Link to lobby Labour MP's and Police and Crime Commissioners to work to change the law
- 4) Work with other sympathetic MP's and Police and Crime Commissioners
- 5) Work with the relevant organisations to promote this issue

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### 23. Older Women and Domestic Violence

#### Carried as Amended: 23.1

It is often assumed that domestic violence is mainly experienced by younger women, and that older women's experiences can be put under the category of 'elder abuse'. Older women may experience even more barriers to disclosure than younger women, and may therefore be more reluctant to report violence. As a result, despite women over the age of 45 making up 22% of the national population, they are known to be a group who under-report sexual and domestic violence and abuse. Indeed, statistics confirm that in Redcar and Cleveland, women aged 45+ make up 25% of the population, suggesting there is an even larger proportion of women who may be routinely experiencing domestic and sexual violence and be unable, or unwilling, to take steps to end the abuse - or simply not know what steps to take or who could support them.

Conference also notes motion 35 from National Retired Members' Conference 2012 on Domestic Violence which highlighted this issue in relation to elderly women and the very real problem of its under reporting in this demographic and not just its greater incidence than may generally be thought, but also recent tragic cases where women over 60 had been killed by their lifetime partners often after enduring decades of abuse.

Older women may experience more barriers to disclosure than younger women, and may therefore be more reluctant to report violence. These barriers include;

- 1) Leaving a lifetime home environment
- 2) Stigma and shame, fear of consequences such as financial insecurity
- 3) Older women may not see their experiences as relevant
- 4) Lack of understanding about what constitutes abuse
- 5) Physical frailty or disability
- 6) Older women's experiences of violence may be historic and therefore they may have forgotten the incidents, or see them as no longer relevant
- 7) Isolation
- 8) Confusion, disassociation, prolonged trauma
- 9) Cultural issues
- 10) One consequence of repeated and prolonged violence is premature death, therefore older victims may underestimate lifetime experiences of abuse

Some facts and figures for you from 2012....

- a) 1.2 million women suffered domestic abuse.
- b) 400,000 women suffered sexual assault

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- c) 70,000 women were raped
- d) One incident of domestic violence is reported to the police every minute
- e) On average, 2 women each week are killed by current or former male partner.

National Women's Conference asks that National Women's Committee carries out research to enable material to be produced that will help to encourage all including older/elderly women to come forward earlier and to raise awareness of this issue nationally and its effects across the entire female age spectrum.

### **24. Domestic violence - a gendered issue**

**Carried**

Conference notes that research from the home office has shown that nearly 90% of severe and repeated domestic violence is experienced by women. The Home Office report on Domestic Violence, sexual assault and stalking (findings from the British Crime Survey) reported that "women are the overwhelming majority of the most heavily abused group. Among people subject to four or more incidents of domestic violence from the perpetrator of the worst incident (since age 16), 89 per cent were women."

Conference is concerned that on an average week in this country two women are murdered by their male partner in extreme cases of domestic violence, and 1 million women experience at least one incident of domestic abuse each year. UNISON and our trade unions are part of that society.

Conference notes that in describing domestic abuse as "gender-based" we are categorically not alleging that all perpetrators are male and all victims/survivors are female. Conference recognises that men and boys can also be the victims of violence. We also note with concern the rise in domestic abuse in same sex relationships: UNISON's national LGBT Conference in 2013 noted that 37% of same sex relationships have featured non-consensual violence. Conference affirms our opposition to all violence, whatever the gender or age of the perpetrator or victim.

Conference reiterates our recognition that, in a sexist society, male violence against women plays a particular role in limiting the participation of women in all areas of civil life, including trade union activity. Therefore, we must address the particular problem of male violence against women.

In noting that domestic abuse is gender based we reiterate our recognition that historically physical and sexual violence has been used to control women, and there is still widespread tolerance for sexism and abuse of women. The Everyday Sexism project was established to record women's experiences of sexism, harassment and assault – as at October 2014 there were 45,000 tweets and tens of thousands of posts on the website. The Zero Tolerance project in Scotland works with individuals, communities, women's and men's organisations, schools, the media and others to address the causes of violence against women, and bring about change - their research found that half of all young men believed that forced sex was justifiable in some circumstances; worryingly one third of young women also accepted this.

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Conference welcomes the UN General Secretary in 2006 stating “Violence against women is not the result of random, individual acts of misconduct, but rather is deeply rooted in structural relationships of inequality between women and men”. However, we remain concerned at the lack of progress and the recent moves to dilute the recognition of domestic abuse as a gendered issue – for example by the media publishing sensationalist data on the number of incidents of abuse by women which ignore patterns, severity, repetition and circumstances.

Conference is concerned that women order their day and lives around the restrictions to safety and freedom of movement which the background threat of men’s violence imposes, sometimes without them even realising it. Some women were surprised when it was pointed out to them that their own “habits” of not going out alone after dark, or of holding their keys in their hands whilst walking home in case they are attacked, are carried out because of a fear of violence from men. The women reported that they’d never thought of it in that context previously, it was just something they did.

Conference notes that despite significant social changes men continue to grow up within a deeply misogynistic male dominated culture where violence against women is commonplace and acceptable.

Sexual harassment and male violence against women can - and sadly do - occur within the labour movement and within our trade unions and labour movement groups at all levels.

In 2011 new Crown Prosecution Service guidance was published following a review of allegations of rape and domestic abuse. The research recorded that “During the 17 month period of the review, there were 5,651 prosecutions for rape and 111,891 for domestic violence. During the same period there were just 35 prosecutions for making false allegations of rape, six for making false allegation of domestic violence and three for making false allegations of both rape and domestic violence.”

However, it is still the case that women report that when they have been a victim, they are not believed. They may face allegations that they inflicted the injuries on themselves and/or inappropriate questioning of their mental health status, alcohol consumption and sexual history.

In a Mumsnet survey in 2012, 83% of those who had been raped or sexually assaulted failed to report it to police and 29% did not even report it to friends and family. More than half of the female respondents said the legal system, the media and society at large is unsympathetic to rape victims.

Conference notes that the fear of stigma and the fear of not being believed prevent many women from reporting violence. In 2014, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Tom Winsor, said: “Domestic abuse is not only about violence; it is about fear, control and secrecy. It is essential that the police make substantial reforms to their handling of domestic abuse, including in their understanding of the coercive and psychological nature of the crime as well as its physical manifestations. They must create the conditions so that victims have the confidence to call for help, in the knowledge that they will be believed and kept safe.”

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Conference notes that as a member-representation organisation, the situation facing UNISON is different to that of the police, and that we are obliged to represent all our members to the best of our ability. Therefore, in any incident or allegation there must, of course, be a fair and impartial investigation that protects the rights of all parties. Conference notes our branches manage this on a daily basis. For example, in a situation where a member has put in an allegation against another member, each member has a representative who is there to protect their individual interests and to support them, but any investigation resulting from their allegations is independent, fair and impartial.

Likewise, if legal advice were sought in a situation where both a complainant and the person complained of sought UNISON's assistance, the same test would be applied to both parties in that there would be separate legal evaluation of the complaint and the defence, and separate representation for both parties, where this was judged appropriate within UNISON's legal guidelines.

Conference believes that it is essential that anyone reporting violence is confident that reporting such an incident would be taken seriously, and that all women who complain of male violence, both in and outside of the trade union movement, have the right to be listened to, their allegations taken seriously and properly investigated with appropriate action being taken if proven.

Conference believes that in adopting this approach we would be showing our million women members that when women complain of male violence within our movement, our trade union will provide support for them.

Conference further recognises that, as a self-organised group for women, we have an obligation to speak up for women's rights and to defend women's interests. We believe that male violence against women is not acceptable in any case. It must not be tolerated from those who hold office or power in our movement: our movement must be a safe space for women.

Conference therefore calls on the national women's committee to:

- 1) Organise a fringe meeting at national delegate conference 2015 to improve understanding of the issues raised within this motion; share good practice throughout UNISON on campaigning and organising around ending violence against women; using the UNISON domestic violence guidance to negotiate workplace policies on supporting the victims of domestic abuse;
- 2) Work with the NEC to issue guidance to branches on:
  - a) how to support women who allege violence
  - b) how to ensure branches can represent all parties fairly and impartially in any investigation.

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### 25. Intimate Terrorism and Coercive Control

**Carried as Amended: 25.1**

Conference recognises that in March 2013 the UK Government widened its definition of domestic violence and abuse to include coercive control. Under the new definition controlling behaviour is described as: “a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.”

Coercive behaviour is described in the revised definition as: “an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.” Conference welcomes this change.

However, conference is aware that these changes were to a non-statutory definition of domestic violence and abuse and, that at the time this definition was changed, there was no corresponding change to the law.

Conference therefore welcomes the recent campaign to create a new criminal offence of coercive control.

Coercive Control is a term that was developed by the academic Evan Stark to describe a form of partner abuse that survivors report as being akin to a form of domestic or intimate terrorism. Unlike domestic violence, which has been commonly understood to be an incident or series of incidents of physical violence perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner, coercive control can leave no obvious, physical evidence of assault on the victim/survivor. Instead, coercive control explains the range of tactics used by perpetrators to intimidate and control women. In Stark's own phrase, the concept explains 'how men entrap women in everyday life'.

“It is a pattern of behaviour which seeks to take away the victim's liberty or freedom, to strip away their sense of self. It is not just women's bodily integrity which is violated but also their human rights.”

UNISON women have long recognised that domestic abuse encompasses more than just physical violence, however we remain concerned that the police and other criminal justice agencies continue to fail women who report these crimes to them. Indeed, a 2014 report from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) into the police response to domestic abuse “Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse” found that while most forces and police and crime commissioners had said that domestic abuse was a priority for their areas, this wasn't being translated into an operational reality. When the report was released in March 2014 HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Tom Winsor, said:

“Domestic abuse is not only about violence; it is about fear, control and secrecy. It is essential that the police make substantial reforms to their handling of domestic abuse, including in their understanding of the coercive and psychological nature of the crime as well as its physical manifestations. They must create the conditions so that victims have the confidence to call for help, in the knowledge that they will be believed and kept safe.”

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Conference notes that this well defined pattern of behaviour is especially relevant to older/elderly women who may not have suffered domestic violence per se, but may well have been subjected to a form of control previously tacitly accepted by society whereby men were permitted, even encouraged, to “control” their wives. In such a scenario women may well have internalised this approach and even perceived it as “normal” for married couples.

Conference welcomes these comments and the renewed focus on holding those who terrorise women through coercive and controlling behaviour to account.

Conference therefore calls on the National Women’s Committee to:

- 1) Continue to raise awareness of coercive control as a form of domestic abuse across the entire age spectrum.
- 2) Work with UNISON’s communications and other relevant departments to highlight coercive control as a form of domestic abuse in UNISON magazines, its website and other publicity.
- 3) Work with the NEC and include coercive control in any guidance/briefings/training issued to branches on how to support women who allege violence and/or domestic abuse.

### **26. Increasing Black Women’s Participation in Women’s Self-Organisation**

**Carried**

Conference, with women making up over 70% of our membership, it is of concern that only a few Black women members actively participate within the union at branch, regional and national levels.

It is undeniable that Self Organisation is an integral part of UNISON’s structure and it is important that Black women are enabled and encouraged to be part of all the women’s self organised groups throughout the union’s structure.

Conference recognises that even though all Black women are automatically part of their Branch’s women’s self organised groups, the progression for Black women to regional women’s SOG could be difficult because of the different ways regional women’s SOG are organised.

Conference, it is good practice to encourage proportionality and fair representation for both Black women and white women within the women’s self organised groups.

While it is acknowledged that regions have the autonomy to organise their SOGs in the most appropriate way for them to be serviced by the regions, it is important that Branches are encouraged and facilitated to allow Black women to participate at the regional level of the union with a similar progression of our Black women activists to the National Women’s Committee from their regional women’s group.

Branches need to ensure that whenever possible they encourage and enable Black women members to attend the regional women’s group on their behalf. Increasing Black women’s participation ensures that the women’s structure at branch, regional

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and national level is fully inclusive and truly reflects the diversity of women's self-organisation. This might include giving consideration to having a policy of sending at least one Black woman from the Branch to the regional women's group.

Conference, this motion seeks to increase Black women's participation throughout the women's self organisation structure in the union and asks the National Women's Committee to work with the National Black Members' Committee and the NEC to:

- 1) Carry out a survey to determine the level of Black women's participation at branch level and the level of Black women's progression from branch to regional SOG
- 2) Work with branches to actively encourage the inclusion of Black women activists in the regional women's SOG with consideration of sending at least one Black woman where possible.
- 3) Consider any barriers that might exist which effectively deters Black women's participation.
- 4) Where branches have good practice, seek to share these with other branches.
- 5) Report progress in the annual report of the National Women's Conference 2016 with proposal and recommendations to enable the continued participation of Black women at the various levels of UNISON's structure.

### **27. Encouraging Diversity in Women's Committee's**

**Carried**

In UNISON more than 70% of our total membership are women. UNISON is committed to fair representation and proportionality (Rule D4.1). However, we know in the public sector where many of our members are Black Women we see very few represented at Branch, Regional and National Committee level; despite statistics nationally telling us that Black people are still amongst those most likely to join a union. In furtherance of the Rule Book aims of self-organisation, (D 4.2.1, 4.3.2, 4.3.4) and in line with the union's aims and objectives; we acknowledge that further specific work can assist and encourage the participation of members who may feel marginalised. A high percentage of Black Women members can be seen working in health, social care and local government, many as low paid members and at a time when UKIP is promoting division in our communities; it is crucial that UNISON continues to lead the way in its view that diversity in our society adds value to us all.

We know from Freedom of Information requests carried out on behalf of North West Region and the wider union; that in many of our Local Authorities Black Women, whilst poorly reflected in number within the workforce (5% rather than 12% statistical expectation) are more likely to be selected for redundancy than their white counterparts. We need to do what we can to give a voice to these women.

A Motion was carried at UNISON National Black Members Conference 2014 which was "Encouraging Black activists". The motion suggested many ways in which we

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could do this, for example to look into Black Members' representation in our SOGs and Branches; support and encourage involvement in other areas of the union in order for them to come together and respond to the disenfranchisement taking place in their workplaces.

In line with the recommendations of that motion, we see it as extremely important that at a Regional and National level we would do what we can to encourage Branches to actively promote the involvement of Women in all their diversity, and with consideration to all the self organised groups, specifically in this case, Black Women.

We ask that the National Women's Committee works across regions to encourage Branches to do what they can to empower ALL Women, Black, Lesbian Gay Bisexual, Disabled, women from all cultures and religious backgrounds, to become activists stewards and to become involved with their SOGs, and to consider participation in their Branch Committees with the view to becoming active in their regions and the wider union as a whole.

This conference asks that the National Women's Committee:

- 1) Conduct a survey of Branches Nationally to establish:
  - a) - The membership of Black Women within branches
  - b) - The number of Black Women members involved at branch level
  - c) - The number of Black women represented within the Women's self organised groups (where they exist)
- 2) Work with branches to actively encourage the inclusion of Black women (where appropriate) across the country.
- 3) Make known the figures as to how many Black delegates attend National Women's conference in order to document our continuous progress in working toward their greater inclusion.
- 4) Report progress to the National women's conference 2016 with a view to continuing the work and publishing final results in the Annual Report of the National Women's Conference 2017.
- 5) Include this work in the National Women's Committee action plan.

### **28. Saying what we mean**

**Carried**

Conference believes that inclusive language is important in ensuring that all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) women within the women's movement and UNISON women's self organisation feel welcome and valued.

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Conference also believes that language, and our understanding of language, is constantly evolving, and that as women, including LGBT women, we should always be mindful of this.

Conference is aware of the impact and power of language and notes that within women's self organisation there can be a tendency to discuss women's issues from a hetero-normative viewpoint. This can result in LGBT women feeling that women's self organisation is not an appropriate forum for their issues to be addressed and can result in exclusion.

Conference notes that language is often discussed within the transgender community, and new words and phrases are emerging as this community finds a voice within wider society and within our union.

Conference understands that it is easy to continue to use words and phrases without fully considering the effect that these may have on already marginalised groups of women within women's self-organisation. For example, some people use the word "straight" as if it is an opposite to "LGBT", which amongst other issues, ignores the fact that many trans women are straight. Sometimes our language silences the voices of people who identify as non-binary – that is, people who do not identify as either male or female, or who identify as both male and female.

Conference calls on the national women's committee working with the national LGBT committee to:

- 1) Look into the issues around language inclusivity and the evolving language in regard to LGBT women;
- 2) Work towards publishing guidance for regional women's groups, branches and individual activists on making sure that the language used is inclusive;
- 3) Seek to ensure that all future publications from the national women's committee are inclusive in the language used, and consider revising previous publications, where necessary, to make them inclusive also.

### **29. Disabled Trafficked Women's Rights - What Rights?**

**Carried**

This Women's Conference is concerned to learn about recent reports of abuse towards disabled women in the human trafficking industry. This is an industry where escaping is often met with even greater barriers than usual for non disabled women as accessible support systems are extremely hard to find, and their built environments and accessible information services are virtually non-existent for disabled women. Finding a refuge that can accommodate disabled women's needs is exceptionally difficult for those women who already live in the UK and need to escape violence however, the prospect of breaking the additional language and other barriers faced by migrant women compounds those enormous difficulties.

Women with learning difficulties and women with mental health impairments are at an increased risk of becoming victims of human trafficking, they are being coerced with promises of work and then being sold as prostitutes. There have been

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numerous and increasing numbers of cases involving disabled women and girls who are victims of this heinous crime. Some of those disabled women may face abuse simply for 'shaming' the family by the mere fact of being disabled, others may have become disabled as a consequence of domestic violence or become disabled as a result of war etc. Each woman will have their own experience of the discriminating barriers she faces as a woman with impairments and it is important that UNISON policy takes account of these women in a social model context – where it is not the impairment or condition that determines discrimination but the barriers faced in accessing a full and equal opportunity to life.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to liaise with UNISON's National Disabled Members' Committee, the UNISON Police and Justice Committee, Labour Link and other external bodies including Police and Crime Commissioners the Women's TUC and organisations that are run and controlled by disabled women to develop a campaigning charter to stop this exploitation and form of disablist and sexist abuse from happening.

### **30. Proportionality**

**Carried**

It is over 20 years since UNISON was formed and proportionality and fair representation were enshrined in the new Rule Book for the new union. After 20 years, the question must be asked – how well have we done on achieving proportionality and fair representation?

Conference acknowledges the good work to date on developing mechanisms to assist in this endeavour for example reserved seats, scheme of branch representation at national conferences, the UNISON Equality Scheme. However, it is clear from the data from the South East Regional Equality Action Team research and a massive piece of research undertaken over the last two years by a South East branch secretary as part of MA studies at Ruskin, that at a local level, in branches, women for example are still under represented and sometime by a significant number. In the South East work is ongoing with new initiatives being produced by the regional women's committee to address this problem and to develop strategies to assist branches in achieving proportionality.

We believe that the South East is not alone and that regions and branches across the country would welcome and benefit from assistance on how to achieve proportionality and fair representation and address inequality and under representation in regional and branch lay structures. We also believe that the materials and training produced by UNISON to date have been excellent and there are many guides and leaflets that talk about 'self-organisation' and include references to 'proportionality and fair representation'. However, part of the problem could also be that self organisation is too often seen as the panacea to achieving proportionality and fair representation when in reality it is only half the story. Therefore in addition to the guides on self organisation, it would be useful to provide very specific advice and guides for branches on proportionality and fair representation.

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Conference therefore asks national women's committee to work with national SOG and YM groups, learning and organising services, membership participation unit and any other relevant committees and/or department to develop new strategies for achieving proportionality and fair representation which might include training materials, guides and leaflets, training courses.

### **31. Women and politics - why your vote counts**

**Carried as Amended: 31.1, 31.2**

Conference notes that 2015 is the next opportunity for women to make their vote account in removing the malicious condemn government from power.

Many women, particularly disabled, Black, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and low paid workers, don't vote because they don't believe it will change anything. Disaffected voters have gone to the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) as the party of protest. Some have cast their votes for UKIP despite their policies of reducing taxes for the rich and selling off the National Health Service (NHS). UKIP wants to obliterate workers rights and repeal anti-discrimination legislation. Conference is concerned that individual electoral registration (IER) and the end to the legal requirement to register to vote will have a further detrimental effect on turn-out and efforts to defeat the far right electorally.

Conference notes that the turn out in the Scottish independence vote demonstrates that voter apathy can be overcome, and it is therefore essential that we campaign now to ensure that women vote to protect our public services in the next election.

The impact of the government's austerity agenda on women is well documented. Many women who relied on part time work have seen their jobs deleted as companies struggle to survive. We have seen the emergence of zero hours contracts which are often imposed on low paid women. Meanwhile the welfare reform agenda has also massively impacted on women, particularly those with caring responsibilities. We also hear from our disabled sisters of the struggle that many of them face with benefits being cut and opportunities for work even more remote.

The NatCen research commissioned by UNISON evidences the impact of austerity on our LGBT members, including women, and the cuts to targeted services over the past four years under the Conservative-led government. This has led to a fall in pay in real terms while the cost of living rises and workplace conditions worsen.

The future is also bleak – incomes are reducing through pay freezes and below inflation rate increases; further job cuts are planned; pensions are under threat and contributions reduced along with working hours.

Conference believes that the only viable party who can unseat the Tory-led government is the Labour Party, which has a record of championing UNISON's aims, objectives and policies, including equality provisions.

It is therefore vitally important that in May 2015 our women members are mobilised to vote to protect our public services. The Labour Party cannot be complacent. There is the ever present threat of UKIP, with their even more unfair and unjust

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policies than the coalition government, and women's votes are essential to turn the tide.

Conference therefore calls upon the national women's committee to work with appropriate UNISON bodies, including Labour Link, the National Executive Council and other national self organised group committees to:

- 1) Produce materials encouraging women to use their vote to challenge the austerity agenda and how they can use their votes to influence change;
- 2) Re-issue the public services manifesto to give voters the materials they need to challenge candidates;
- 3) Work with the national young members forum to turn out the young women's vote;
- 4) Develop ways of encouraging our members to register to vote in the light of IER, encourage women to take up training opportunities, such as public speaking, and stand for election to political offices;
- 5) Re-energise political education strategies within women's self organisation to increase voter turn-out and women's participation in public office as a means to achieve UNISON's aims and objectives;
- 6) Actively support Labour women candidates who are trades unionists and who support UNISON's values;
- 7) Where possible support Labour's "Community Organising";
- 8) Encourage members to get involved in local constituency Labour Party groups to assist with canvassing and campaigning work on behalf of candidates who support UNISON's aims;
- 9) Raise awareness in our communities and membership of the threat that both the Tories and UKIP pose to women and to workers rights, and the extent to which the Labour Party offers an alternative, viewed with reference to UNISON's aims, objectives and policies.

### **32. Motion - Organising against UKIP and the far right**

**Carried as Amended: 32.1**

This conference recognises the increasing electoral threat of far right parties in the UK and notes with sadness the by-election result of Clacton which gave UKIP it's first MP.

UKIP received the highest number of votes in this year's European elections and now has a significant number of seats in a range of district councils. There is a distinct possibility that UKIP will gain political control of local authorities and therefore many of our local government members next year.

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This conference further notes that far right parties are a fundamental threat to the values of UNISON and the trade union movement including solidarity, social justice and collectivism.

UKIP espouses sexist and racist policies and supports further privatisation in the NHS, the repeal of employment rights, scrapping paid maternity leave, annual leave and sickness pay, a further diminution of trade union rights and massive tax cuts for the wealthy. UKIP also plan to repeal legislation making it lawful for a husband to rape his wife.

Despite this many UNISON members, their families and neighbours are attracted by the “anti-politics” messages of UKIP which gives pithy (and fundamentally flawed) answers to the very complex problems facing working people.

UNISON must organise to combat all far right parties. This conference urges the National Women’s Committee to :

- 1) Have ‘combating the far right/UKIP’ as a standing agenda item at meetings;
- 2) Encouraging our women members to be registered to vote (new registration systems are now in place)
- 3) Encouraging the use of postal voting;
- 4) Increase awareness of the level of threat from the far right and its allies;
- 5) Educate our women members in what far right policies would mean for us; our public services and our society
- 6) Work with appropriate groups in line with UNISON's core values and beliefs to campaign against the far right groups; and
- 7) Aim to win the battle of ideas against the far right and its allies.

### **33. Women Voting for UKIP**

**Carried as Amended: 33.1, 33.2**

UNISON women in Gateshead call upon the National Women’s Committee to target UNISON women members nationally who are going to vote, to use their vote wisely and to look at all policies of political parties who attack women’s equality across the spectrum.

Such an initiative should include UNISON’s retired women members given that retirees are the demographic who vote and too many older/elderly women (and men) have been seduced by the xenophobic rhetoric of fear and ignorance promoted by UKIP.

A main threat to women’s equality is UKIP. This political party is a major backward step for women in the 21st century.

Included in their policies are the following attacks against women:

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- 1) Flexible working
- 2) Maternity leave (they propose two weeks maternity leave and cuts to statutory maternity pay)
- 3) Childcare
- 4) Racial equality
- 5) Equal pay deregulation
- 6) Flat tax rate of everyone

All these areas are at risk of being eroded under their policies.

In addition their policies on Europe could also have major implications for women. Many jobs in the North East depend on our participation in the European Market; major industries could be drastically affected, major employers in our region such as Nissan are threatening to pull out of the region with major job losses if we withdraw from Europe, oil workers, off shore workers, UK migration and community cohesion are all at risk under UKIP policies.

Although these industries employ mostly men the real impact would also be felt by women and especially the children of the region where poverty and deprivation are high. The women in the local region would be suffering from even more cuts as the impact of unemployment has a knock on effect for whole families.

European Social Funding for the Region was worth £157m between 2007/13 and nationally the UK will receive £490.million from the European Union next year. Losses of this scale would also have severe implications on women's lives.

Woman's working rights, including all H&S Regulations, come from Europe. Equal Pay was legislation from Europe. We as woman need to realise that most working rights come from Europe.

UKIP want to de-regulate the laws from Europe this would mean for us as workers that collective bargaining would be affected. Any negotiations would be done on an individual basis therefore reducing bargaining powers for workers.

This National Women's Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to liaise with National Labour Link to produce and distribute to all branches in good time for the General Election to be held 2015 a myth buster/leaflet to remind women members before they use their vote to consider the implications of political parties that attack woman's equality in work, home and the communities that we all live in.

### **34. Beyond the European Elections – what happens next?**

**Carried**

Conference notes that in May 2014, 28 member states of the European Union (EU) elected 751 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to represent their interests. These elected representatives have a 5 year term of office in which to

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advance any number of common policies and promote a Europe that celebrates all its diverse members whilst condemning any form of hate crime and inequality. The UK has 73 MEPs, of whom almost a third (32%) are women. This is significantly higher than the level at the Westminster Parliament (22%).

Conference further notes that over the next five years the European Parliament will play a central role in shaping EU policy for gender equality; against discrimination; on hate speech and hate crime; on free movement; on the rights of transgender people; on health; and on gender and other equality issues in the EU's foreign policy.

Conference is concerned about the progression of far-right parties, parties propagating so-called 'traditional' or 'family' values (which are actually anti-women's rights and anti-LGBT equality), xenophobic, bigoted and racist ideas. There are now 80 MEPs from these parties, threatening the core European values of human rights and equality.

However, although UKIP made great strides in the UK euro-elections, Labour and the Greens - both traditional allies of equality - made some significant gains on the Tories and Liberal Democrats. Across Europe the far right did not make the kinds of gains that were expected, for example Geert Wilders' party did worse than predicted in the Netherlands. Further, France's Marine Le Pen has not been able to form an intergroup of far right allies due to not meeting the requisite number of countries and representatives. This would indicate the far right groups are divided.

But conference notes we have no room for complacency. Many, including many women, want to see Europe broken up. Years of recession, soaring unemployment, and lacklustre leadership have left many women with little faith that the politicians can solve their problems. Worrying developments in the guise of the secretive Trans-Atlantic Trade Agreements (TTIP) threaten to disrupt and erode our employment policies and rights.

Conference believes that we cannot let apathy allow any erosion of our hard fought rights. We must exercise our right to influence and shape future policy by encouraging UNISON women to engage with the MEPs that we voted to represent us, and to engage with the future elections, including the forthcoming general election.

We must not forget what Europe has done for equality and for LGBT, anti-racist and women's legal rights.

Conference calls on the national women's committee to:

- 1) Work with UNISON's International department to keep regional and branch groups up to date with campaigns to preserve rights threatened by faceless multinationals, such as the campaign against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership;
- 2) Consider training for women's groups on political engagement and engaging with international solidarity campaigns;

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- 3) Liaise with the other self organised group committees in meaningful dialogue around joint campaigns to prevent further erosion of our hard won equality rights;
- 4) Signpost regional groups to the ILGA-Europe website for the latest European anti hate crime campaigns.

### 35. Stop Porn Culture

**Carried**

At our National Women's Conference 2013, for the first time, one of our workshops focused on understanding and challenging porn culture. Almost 100 women attended to hear the realities of the porn industry. That workshop revealed that UNISON women's conference has yet to set a policy position on pornography.

The pornography industry has pushed its way into our lives, distorting our conceptions of sex and sexuality. Pornography offers people a vision of sexuality rooted in men's domination of women and women's acceptance of their own degradation.

Pornography is not simply the sexist, naked Playboy photos from earlier times. Those pin-up-type centrefolds look tame when compared to the cruel, violent offerings in online porn today. Today's porn is indoctrinating viewers that women are no more than a collection of orifices to penetrate, today's porn teaches that a woman's sole purpose is to be used, abused and perpetrated upon for a man's pleasure. She is to be subjected to body-punishing sex, slapped, humiliated, called vile names, pounded upon and then ejaculated on.

Unfortunately, pornography has significant effects on attitudes and behaviour in the real world. Studies show that after viewing pornography, men are more likely to:

- 1) report decreased empathy for rape victims
- 2) report believing that a woman who dresses provocatively deserves to be raped
- 3) report anger at women who flirt but then refuse to have sex
- 4) report decreased sexual interest in their girlfriends or wives
- 5) report increased interest in coercing partners into unwanted sex acts

No one claims that all men who use pornography become rapists, or that rape would disappear if there were no pornography. But being exposed to powerful and sexually stimulating messages on a regular basis affects people. As Catharine MacKinnon has put it "Pornography codes how to look at women, so you know what you can do with one when you see one."

And women often feel like they don't measure up to the writhing, oiled, voluptuous female bodies in this pornified culture. Some women report that this self-objectification goes so deep that during sex they are less concerned with what they feel than with how their bodies look.

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Many women are nagged or guilt-tripped by their male partners to act more like the women in porn—to shave their genitals, to strip, to have anal sex or threesomes, to be tied up or spanked, to be filmed having sex—in general, to act in ways that feel demeaning, inauthentic, and uncomfortable.

Internet porn in the UK receives more traffic than social networks, shopping, news and media, email, finance, gaming and travel. It is freely available, just a click away online.

Over thirty years ago, many brave women - and a few brave men - began the work of challenging the pornography industry. Today, it remains that there is much work to do to stop this pornified culture.

This conference is pleased to know that revenge porn is to be legislated against. This is a positive step forward but it does not go far enough.

This conference agrees that pornography is harmful to women and to society at large and undermines UNISON's efforts to campaign for the eradication of sexism and sex discrimination.

This conference instructs the National Women's Committee to:

- a) work with other groups, as appropriate, to raise awareness of the harms of living in a pornified culture
- b) Seek discussions with LabourLink to explore options for legal changes and protections from the harms of pornography
- c) Actively promote our policy and opposition to pornography on the women's pages of our website

### **Composite**

#### **A Female Genital Mutilation**

**Carried**

(Female Genital Mutilation, 18, 20, 21, 21.1)

Female genital mutilation (sometimes referred to as female circumcision) refers to procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The practice of Female Genital Mutilation is widespread across the globe. It is an accepted practice in Africa and the Middle East in Africa it is estimated that 3 million girls each year are subjected to this act.

Sometimes referred to as Infibulation, there are 4 types of this procedure. These range from cutting to burning away exposed genitalia. This is usually carried out using a knife, scissors or a razor blade.

This procedure is usually carried out by women within the community. The belief that to undergo FGM shows purity, cleanliness and good moral values and will result in a successful marriage.

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The impact on the health of these women and girls is immense. FGM puts their lives at risk and the lives of their unborn children. This is clearly a violation of women's rights and children's rights. FGM can result in immediate and long term consequences that include severe pain and bleeding, scarring, shock, infections, injury to nearby genital tissue, urinary, menstrual and childbirth problems and sometimes even death.

Breast ironing another form of mutilation practised in Cameroon, Togo and other African Countries, aims to deter unwanted male attention, pregnancy and rape by delaying the signs of a girl becoming a woman. The girls as young as 10 years old are having their chests pounded with hot objects including irons, pestles and hot stones constantly for as many as five months. As well as being extremely painful it creates problems including abscesses, cysts, infection, tissue damage and the disappearance of one or both breasts. There is estimated to be some 3.8 million teenagers affected by this practise. British schools and teachers have been alerted about how to recognise this awful abuse of young girls and seek appropriate assistance.

It is estimated that in the UK there are 66,000 women and girls who have undergone this act. The figure continues to rise.

The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 replaced a 1985 Act, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, raising the maximum penalty from 5 to 14 years in prison. It also made it an offence for UK nationals or permanent UK residents to carry out FGM abroad even in countries where it is legal. The practice is illegal in the UK and it is also illegal to arrange for a child to be taken abroad for FGM.

Despite the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 it is estimates that that 80,000 women and girls in the UK are at risk with over 23,000 girls under 15 years old who could be at risk each year in England and Wales and that 66,000 women in the UK are living with the consequences of FGM. In the last two years in the West Midlands alone this practice of female genital mutilation has risen by 200%. However, the true extent is unknown, due to the "hidden" nature of the crime. The girls may be taken to their countries of origin so that FGM can be carried out during the summer holidays, allowing them time to "heal" before they return to school. There are also worries that some girls may have FGM performed in the UK.

Over half of doctors in London have stated that they have treated women and young girls who have had this practice forced upon them.

This conference condemns the practice of FGM and welcomes the new legal guidance issued by the Crown Prosecution Service. However, despite more than 140 referrals to police in the past four years there has been only one prosecution in the UK and that was in 2014. In 2013 the West Midlands Police produced a poster which raised the profile of FGM and the support available to victims.

Of the 29 countries tracked by UNICEF, 14 have more Christian citizens than Muslim citizens, i.e. they are considered to be Christian countries. In many countries that have a very high population of Muslims, female genital mutilation/cutting is not practiced. FGM appears to be a central African cultural injunction rather than a faith based injunction.

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National Women's Conference calls upon the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Promote the Home Office leaflet Female Genital Mutilation – The Facts
- 2) Invite a speaker to National Women's Conference 2016 from FORWARD
- 3) Work with the International Committee to produce materials that highlight what's happening to those young girls and women at home and abroad and issue and offer advice to activists, including producing information leaflet for our members and disseminate this information to regions and branches.
- 4) To identify partners with the necessary expertise to signpost to appropriate agencies to seek advice on appropriate support routes for our members and disseminate this information to regions and branches.
- 5) To identify partners with the necessary expertise to signpost to appropriate agencies and Call for professionals, communities and politicians to continue to work in partnership to bring an end to this practice of (FGM) Female Genital Mutilation.
- 6) Work with UNISON women members to raise awareness of those who have already suffered and to prevent the practice of (FGM).