

# a charter *for* women

**Women constitute half the working population in Britain** and yet the gap between men's and women's earnings is widening despite the fact that girls perform better than boys in public examinations. (55% of girls gain five or more A-C grades at GCSE compared with 44% of boys.)

Women over 21 have had the right to vote since 1928 and yet only 27% of local authority councillors are women, 18% of all MPs and 24% of MEPs are women. In the home, up to one in 10 women experience domestic violence each year, one in four will experience this type of abuse at some point in their lifetime. An incident of domestic violence takes place in Britain every six to 20 seconds.

The oppression of women is consistently denied or trivialised by the mass media and the state. New Labour claims that they have made great progress to equalise opportunity for women – the facts do not bear this out. On the left, there is a tendency to subsume women's issues within the general class struggle, or to relegate them to a secondary position. The right have always trivialised or ignored our concerns.

Women's membership of trade unions is rising. However, women are not represented in proportion to their numbers within the trade unions. The position for black women is even worse.

Women have always fought for their long-denied rights; we must do so again.

We hope to inspire a new and inclusive socialist feminist theory and practice that will motivate a new generation of women activists and revitalise the fight for women's liberation. One of the ways of doing this is to unite around a **campaigning programme**. This is the purpose of the **Charter for Women**. It does not offer new policy but instead seeks to bring together the key demands for which progressive women are fighting in various arenas. The charter covers three broad areas, social policy, the labour market and the labour movement. It raises the main progressive concerns/campaigning points under each heading. We want it to be discussed, adopted and promoted by all progressive women's groups and organisations.

For us the price of progress is eternal vigilance – we must ensure that women's demands are heard and acted on.

**Thus far the charter has been adopted by the following trade unions/women's organisations:**

Amicus  
Aslef  
CDNA  
CWU  
CYWU  
FBU  
NASUWT

NUJ  
PCS National Women's Forum  
POA  
RMT  
TSSA  
UCU  
UNISON  
National Assembly of Women  
SERTUC Women's Rights Committee

**Make sure that your organisation adopts it too!**

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## **In society**

- Highlight the feminisation of poverty and campaign to reverse cuts in welfare state and public services.
- Expose the ideologies that are used to perpetuate women's inequality (for example, the notion of 'family values' and the 'family wage').
- Draw attention to the role of the media and other cultural agencies in shaping gender identities that reinforce the unequal relationships between men and women.
- Campaign for greater support for lone mothers, carers and women fleeing domestic violence.
- Improve access and rights to abortion.
- Ensure that women and girls are entitled to the full range of free and high quality educational provision (from nursery to university) and subject choice.
- End women pensioner poverty by increasing the State pension in line with average earnings.

## **At work**

- Campaign to end institutional and other forms of racism and ensure that the status and pay of Black women workers is a bargaining priority.
- Campaign to reduce the gender pay gap and highlight its causes
- End job segregation by improving training and opportunities for women.
- Ensure that unions fight more equal value claims.
- Campaign to change equal pay law to permit 'class action' (group claims) and remove employer 'get out' clauses.
- Campaign to raise the level of national minimum wage to at least half, and rising to at least two-thirds of male median earnings.
- Demand statutory pay audits.

- Equalise opportunities and improve conditions for women workers.
- Demand full-time right for part time workers.
- Root out bullying and sexual harassment.
- End casualisation and especially zero hours contracts.
- Reduce job segregation by providing training opportunities for women in non-traditional areas.
- Campaign for affordable child care including pre-, after-school and holiday provision.
- Campaign for a shorter working week for all.
- Improve maternity leave and pay, including paid paternity leave.
- Campaign for a change in the qualification criteria in the Industrial Injuries/Disability Benefit scheme, to end discrimination against women and in particular to extend the list of disorders in the prescribed disease schedules.

## **In the labour movement**

- Tackle the under-representation of women in the labour and trade union movement structures by proportionality and other measures.
- Ensure the accountability of women's structures to women.
- Maintain and extend women's committees, women's courses and other measures to ensure that women's issues/concerns are collectively articulated and actioned.
- Campaign to raise the profile of the TUC, STUC and Welsh TUC's women's conferences as the 'parliaments of working women'.