

THE FIGHTBACK STARTS HERE - CHARTER FOR WOMEN CONFERENCE ASSERTS

By

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Delegates from the Charter for Women met in London on Saturday 30 November 2010 to assess the impact on women and children of the Coalition government's onslaughts. The Conference was chaired by historian Mary Davis, who said that the Coalition is the worst government since 1815 in its impact on working people.

Angela Eagle, Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, showed how the deficit, so often cited as the reason for the Slash and Burn approach that is upon us, is actually a chimera. "It is all rubbish" she said, "The need not to frighten the bond markets is a non-existent problem, for which the solution is to do extreme things".

Most brutally, revenue raised by 2014 from personal direct tax and benefit measures in the Budget will siphon £6billion from women and children. More than £2billion will come from cuts in support for children. Women and children will pay more than the banks. "The fairness concept must be reclaimed" said Angela.

Sarah Veale, Head of Equalities at the TUC showed the disproportionate impact of the cuts on women and families. Just one example - cutting the £190 Health in Pregnancy grant means that 800,000 women will lose £150million. Overall, 72% of the impact of the attacks will be on women, with the most vulnerable losing most.

Diana Holland, Unite Assistant General Secretary said "The cuts are deciding life chances for our daughters and grand-daughters. Things hard won are being

rolled back". In the centenary year of International Women's Day it is vital, she said, to counter the idea that there is no alternative to the current situation.

We should oppose, resist and unite in the broadest possible coalition. Citing the recent outright and immediate abolition of the Women's National Commission, Diana said that many Women's organisations have been gagged.

Diana offered us three slogans:

In the workplace – pay up

In society – link up

In campaigning - speak up.

Sharon Allen Secretary of the Charter for Women Steering Group reminded us that the welfare state was created when the UK was bankrupt after two world wars in 20 years and debt was more than 100% of GDP.

The ghosts of the 1834 Poor Laws are with us, concepts of the deserving and undeserving poor are creeping in, demonising those receiving welfare benefits. This is a grim scenario which we must organise against.

The conference was clear that women are angry, that we need to spread that anger. We have to spell out a broader version of fairness based on an alternative policy of fairer taxation and distribution of wealth.

The Fight Back starts here" summarised Mary Davis. Women from the conference will return to union branches and other organisations with renewed determination and optimism.