

EQUALITY NEWS

Winter 2017-
2018, Issue 4

Welcome!

Welcome to the fourth Regional Equality newsletter!

In this issue you'll find lots of inspiring articles and views from many of our women members who have recently taken the plunge and have become active in GMB. They are making a fantastic and obvious difference in the workplace, in society and in the trade union movement as a whole, and inspiring a whole new generation of GMB reps and equality activists.

Key campaigns and recruitment opportunities illustrate this newfound motivation and commitment – see the features about the Menstruation to Menopause campaign, and the WASPI campaign (women and pensions).

There are also news updates and viewpoints covering 'hidden disabilities', GMB Race members supporting the refugees in France, and historic moments marking Transgender Memorial Day at Ealing Council.

February marks LGBT History Month. The region and GMB Shout! are hosting the first ever LGBT+ Summit on 27 January. If you self-identify as LGBT+ and you're a GMB London region member, now's your chance to get involved – see page 15 for details on applying.

You can get involved by joining any or all of our dynamic equality self-organised groups (SOGs) - see page 19.

Finally, the Regional Equality Forum wishes you and your loved ones a very happy, healthy and joyful 2018!

Don't forget to drop us a line by contacting any of the SOGs, with your feedback and your own articles and photos. We love hearing from you! Happy reading!

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Black History Month Walk

By Naome Kyokushaba-Katsigazi

My name is Naome and having been a member of GMB union for six years. It wasn't until 2016 when I was invited to GMB London Region's Women's Conference that my activism doors were opened. The conference provided an insight into the wonderful work undertaken by the union and the varied self-organised groups (SOGs) within GMB union as a whole.

I subsequently became a member of GMB Sisters and GMB Race apart of the SOGs. I am a committee member of GMB Race and I have been privileged to engage in different initiatives and causes that celebrate the issues that we stand for.



I took part in London Walks in celebration of Black History Month in October 2017. The tour was educational and very insightful and in particular, the relevance of Black History to our society. From the works of various guilds, the influence on the architectural and symbolism within our society today such as the Obelisk that adorn the major cities

such as Temple - London, Paris, Rome, Washington, Istanbul to mention but a few and the influence of black scholars to politics either through a revolution or by use of literature.

My involvement with the union enhanced my zest for equality and social justice which inspired me to support those in need in whatever way.

As part of the convoy from the GMB Race, we visited Calais in November 2017. I witnessed humanity at its best during my visit as I endured adverse weather conditions whilst distributing aid to the refugees; a young refugee gentlemen selflessly offered me his waterproof disposable jacket to shield me from the rain.

I made a decision to train to become a workplace organiser to continue to represent the marginalized members at my workplace for better working conditions and fairer practices.

'Together we rise, Solidarity'

GMB Women's conference 2017 in Liverpool - Celebrating our past and forging our future

GMBWOMEN17 was quite an inspirational moment for a lot of women.

From my experience so far attending the GMB Women's events such as this helps improving women's body confidence and challenging objectification in all areas of life including personal relationships.

Women are growing to have the power to lead (YES WE CAN), the future is the feminist, empowered women, women that roar and women's rights are human rights.

These are all GMBWOMEN inspired to aspire meaning that "let's rise up to a great plan, an abundant hope of fulfilling a worthwhile mission and convey a feeling of joining a higher cause, influencing soulful action."

Hazel Madziva

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GMB Sisters London Region Women's Conference 2017

Jane Muncaster, Branch Equalities Officer

At the second weekend conference organised by volunteers from GMB Sisters, delegates found themselves engaged, inspired, moved and surprised by the many issues which were raised and the stories which were shared.

Presentations ranged from a walk-through the complicated organisational structure of GMB (and way that women members can negotiate it), workplace policy issues such as domestic violence, menstrual periods and menopause through to the history of women's activism and the winning of rights to counter particular discrimination.

This conference is emerging as a very special place for GMB women members to develop their sense of place in the union. As a woman-only event, the feeling of support and solidarity is profound. The diversity of the delegation is also astonishing, representing women who identify with all the strands of the union equalities framework – women, LGBT+, GMB disAbility, young members and black and minority ethnic members.

Noticeable too, this time, was the incredibly wide range of occupational sectors that these women work in. As well as public and private sector employees, there were self-employed women seeking to link with other working women.

The weekend was a chance to talk about how trade union membership not only offers working women the security of workplace representation, but also a framework for political activism which can empower, energise and liberate in many ways.

I would really like to talk to anyone who would like to hear more about the conference or opportunities to get involved with any of the GMB self-organised groups (GMB Sister, GMB Shout – LGBT, GMB Young London, **GMB disAbility** and GMB Race).

GMB SISTERS

A women's group for all who self-identify as women, join in with us if you can, you will be made more than welcome.



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GMB National Women's Conference 2017

Linda Cox, Secretary GMB Ability

Honoured to be the chosen delegate from GMB London Region Ability self-organised group at the first ever National Women's Conference on 5th/6th November at The Liner Hotel, Liverpool.

A stressful cross country train journey was undertaken by Sue Hackett, Mel Bartlett and me, owing unfortunately, to several fatalities on the train lines in the one day. Nevertheless we got to Merseyside late, but unscathed. Our condolences go out to the families of the victims that day.

The hotel had a nautical period style with a mirrored conference room. Sue, Mel, myself and Young Member Ruth from North West and Irish region chatted in one of the 'cabins' for some hours before retiring.

The conference itself began after lunch and registration. We were all placed around tables randomly and not according to region as we are used to. We opened with an ice breaker exercise. Each delegate was asked to write down the name of a woman who had been an inspiration to them. Many women chose their mothers or grandmothers, several had chosen Sue Hackett, including myself. Then we had to approach a delegate we had not met before and discuss our chosen role model until a horn sounded and we moved on to the next person. This was an effective exercise which forced us to move out of our comfort zone and 'mingle'.

The rest of the day covered many women's issues, some of which had been discussed at the Regional Women's Conference, but as always it helps to gain fresh perspective on things from members of the other regions.



Linda Cox at conference

The evening social event was a meal, comedy and disco/karaoke. We had a special guest, *Honorary Woman* Tim Roache, who gave an excellent speech on the current harassment allegations and pledged to tackle any issues there may be inside the union. He then gave several renditions of popular tunes on the karaoke.

The following day we had a number of campaign building exercises and some excellent presentations and speeches. One of our ladies announced she had just beaten cancer, which was pretty amazing! The final session saw a member volunteer to speak of her personal experience with domestic violence. It was very harrowing, it touched us all.

Many thanks to all the organisers, speakers and to the members themselves. As usual, GMB women's solidarity rocked the conference – this time on a national scale!!

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London Region
member who
self-defines as
a woman?

All travel, food
and hotel costs
will be met by
GMB

You don't have to
be a rep or
Branch official to
attend

We are
particularly
looking for
members who
have had little or
no involvement in
the Union before



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London Regional Women's Conference 2018
Saturday 12th - Sunday 13th May

**Wyboston Lakes
Conference Centre
Bedfordshire**

**Closing Date For
Applications
26th January 2018**

Would you like to
meet other GMB
women and find
out how you can
get more
involved with the
Union?

Members can
self-nominate
themselves
directly to the
Regional Equality
Officer by
completing the
form

If you would like to attend, please complete the online form by following this link: <https://goo.gl/forms/wWYMqMOP8S5L6noi1>

Contact: Sue Hackett, Regional Equality Officer
equality.london@gmb.org.uk or call
020 8202 8272 for an application form to be sent to you by post

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'Poorest and most vulnerable hardest hit by Tory Reforms'

Brief Outline of the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Report

Reported on by May Bullman, Social Affairs Correspondent, article published in The Independent, 17.11.2017

Stephen Jones, GMB disAbility

These details were e-mailed to me by a local activist who is involved with the Redbridge Traders Council.

Below are some key points from May Bullman's details and comments on the EHRC report:

- Disabled people, the elderly and lone parents will suffer financial losses far greater than the general population under reforms introduced in recent years – due to changes in tax, social security and spending reforms.
- Women will suffer an annual loss more than

double that of men. Black households will face a loss of income more than double that of white families.

- The EHRC has asked the Government to provide a full and cumulative impact assessment of all current and future tax and social security policies.
- The report has carried out such a cumulative impact assessment which showed that families with a disabled child will see a reduction of £2,500 p.a. compared with a reduction of £1,000p.a. for non-disabled households, twice that amount if there are 2 disabled members.
- The report gives further details on how women, black households and lone parents will suffer significantly greater losses financially than other comparison groups, and disabled people are the biggest losers.
- The report goes on to outline the potential impact of the implementation of the Universal Credit system will have on the most vulnerable, i.e. the disabled.



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IS YOUR WORKPLACE DISABILITY READY?

IT'S ABOUT
YOU

ABOUT YOUR
DISABILITY

ABOUT YOUR
WORK CULTURE

WHEN THINGS
GO WRONG

WHEN THINGS
GO RIGHT

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE YOUR SAY!



Please fill in our survey online via this link:

www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/gmb-gettingdisabilityready

The survey will run from 21st November to 31st March 2018

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Hidden 'Hidden Disabilities'

Stephen Jones, GMB disAbility

In almost 20 years' experience representing GMB members I realise that hidden disabilities account for most disability issues in work settings.

Whilst physical disabilities are usually clearly visible (i.e. people walk awkwardly, with a limp, use sticks, crutches, are in a wheelchair or use hearing aids or need special IT equipment because of visual impairments etc.), people with hidden disabilities often give the impression of being 'normal'. Yet their manifold problems are often profound, but tend to be ignored or trivialised by employers.

There are many different kinds of hidden disabilities and details below are by no means exhaustive.

The silent killers

We all know that cancer is a potential killer. Although much progress has been made in treating many types, the UK is not a leading country for providing effective, lasting cures or dramatic improvements for many patients. Furthermore, drugs and therapies used in treating these conditions have serious and often debilitating side effects.

Many people suffer from various heart problems, and whilst much can be done to help such patients, there often is the risk of a recurrence of the problem, especially in cases of strokes and heart attacks. None of these problems are clearly visible.

Employers may tolerate sickness absence in such cases for a while, but then tend to find ways of easing them out by inflexible sickness absence procedures, disciplinary actions or capability assessments etc.

The disablers and cripplers

There is a raft of diseases which severely disable people; some are progressive in their course, such as MS, Motor Neurone Disease, Parkinsons Disease, Alzheimers or Dementia. Drugs and therapies are available for some types, which may help to alleviate the problem for a while, but the effects on individuals are profound. Then there is a range of more 'modern' diseases, like ME/CFS, Fibromyalgia Syndrome, Guillain Barre Syndrome, IBS etc. Some of these may fluctuate in severity in some cases, whilst in others the condition is progressively disabling. Employers often are not familiar with the complexities of such conditions and the need to make necessary reasonable adjustments.

Taboo diseases and conditions

People suffering from HIV/AIDS may be afraid to reveal the fact to their employers for fear of being ostracized or dismissed. The same applies to those who suffer from dyslexia where dismissal is a frequent outcome due to some inadvertent misdemeanour.

Female members may suffer in silence from complex and painful gynaecological conditions like endometriosis, because they realise that disclosure is likely to be met by a response of the problem being trivialised or brushed aside when in reality it is very disabling.

The multitude of mental health diseases

We have different types of depression (clinical depression, stress-related depression often due to pressures at work, post-natal depression etc.). We hear of bipolar disorders, anxiety disorders, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), frequently affecting ex-military people and those who have experienced severe trauma, like those involved in tower-block fires or arson attacks. Serious

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behavioural problems can develop in diseases like MS, dementia etc., all considered as mental health problems. We tend to forget about the devastating effects which schizophrenia imposes on those affected and the unpredictable behaviour which often results as a consequence.

Problems for individuals are sometimes exacerbated if the affected person falls under more than one Equality Group, e.g. a person belonging to a racial minority group also has a mental health condition. The combined effects can be devastating for individuals.

In conclusion, we admire people with physical disabilities when they engage in competitive sports like the Paralympics for instance – well done and good luck to them, but much needs to be done to address and rectify the endemic discrimination against people who suffer from hidden disabilities.

History by Ealing E10 Branch

On 20 November, Ealing Branch E10 held its annual candle light vigil to remember and honour Transgender people killed across the world for being themselves. The vigil, organised and led by Clair Barnes, Ealing branch member and GMB Shout! committee member, was unique this year in that Ealing Town Hall raised the Transgender flag in solidarity with the Trans community and dedicated this to mourning the trans and gender non-conforming people who have been killed.

Clair stated that she was proud of her Council in acknowledging this day and by doing this raising awareness of this problem. Also she says that from her knowledge, Ealing, probably the only council not only in London but the UK to fly the Trans flag on this day.

Transgender Remembrance Day began in 1983 following the brutal murder of Rita Hesler. Since then the Trans community vowed not to forget Rita and all other trans people murdered and on 20 November this memorial takes place. It is a day we must never forget as trans people are the most marginalised group.

As well as the trans flag flying proudly over Ealing Town Hall, there was a roll call of many of those we have lost globally, followed by a minute's silence. The leader of Ealing Council, Julian Bell, and other Ealing councillors joined in the minutes silence and said a few words.



Members at Trans Memorial Day vigil

The event raised awareness as passers-by stopped to talk and ask questions, all of whom supported the vigil and were surprised that over 300 trans people have been killed around the world. The figure is likely to be higher as many go unreported.

Clair was also part of a GMB Shout! working party, Putting the T Back in LGBT which helped raise awareness of trans workers issues in the workplace, for example, via GMB reps' guidance (available on GMB Shout's website at <http://gmbshout.net/resources.html>).

This is the second time that Ealing council have held a candlelight vigil and it will now be an annual event at Ealing Town Hall on 20 November.

Is humanity failing us?

Fevzi Hussein, GMB Race

The end of November 2017 saw a group of GMB activists from GMB Race take to Northern France, laden with a significant amount of emergency aid. Blankets, clothing, food and toys were all in healthy supply.

Godwin Akasie, Patricia De Villa, Nayara De Villa, Naome Kyokushaba-Katsigazi and myself set off from our starting point at CWU HQ in Wimbledon at 0800 and apart from myself and Patricia this was a new experience for the others having not ventured to the refugee camps in Northern France previously.

We were greeted at the aid depot in Calais by enthusiastic volunteers. There must have been 30 volunteers all of whom were giving up their time to help the brilliant Care4Calais charity. Many had been there for a few days.

On this trip we had the opportunity to get hands-on and a group of volunteers were organised to go to a couple of refugee distribution points in Calais woodland where Somali and Sudanese refugees were living in desperate conditions. Godwin and Naome went with this group. The rest of us drove



Volunteers helping with distribution of donations

up to Dunkirk. The 14-seater minibus that we brought came in very handy as we were able to ferry all the volunteers safely there and back.

The weather was bitterly cold and it did not stop raining all day. When we arrived in Dunkirk we knew the sights that were going to greet us were going to be tough but seeing the very young children there was particularly difficult.

We wondered what journeys these poor souls had to undertake, travelling thousands of miles to escape persecution, oppression and conflict, only to be treated by the French authorities so inhumanely.

In Calais, Godwin and Naome were kept busy. They were able to communicate with the refugees and Clare Moseley (founder of Care4Calais) said they both did an extraordinary job in very difficult circumstances, especially as they were first-time volunteers.

"At the distribution point in the Calais woodland, we met and interacted with hundreds of deprived refugee youths, mainly from Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan, without shelter and bare minimum for human existence. Our distribution of donated clothing materials in winter jackets, boots, credit-loaded telephone handsets, and food did not go half the long queue that stretched over 200 meters in the rains that showed no mercy for anything in its way. It was a humbling experience – a day that brought to the fore, once again, how the brotherhood of man, called humanity, is failing to recognise the need to share their privileged fortunes with their fellow humans." Godwin Akasie

On the day we gave out 100's of warm coats, many waterproof, warm blankets and some food parcels. Care4Calais relies so heavily on our support. If you go to their website you can make a

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donation and also find out more if you wanted to go down to Northern France and volunteer.

It is an unforgettable experience.

It is tough, very tough, seeing these people suffering, but the flipside of this is when you see them smile. A smile that shows they still feel there is some hope for them.

We arrived back in Wimbledon 12 hours after we originally set-off. It was a tiring and difficult day - as difficult as it was it was uplifting to be able to offer these incredibly vulnerable people some humanitarian assistance.

If you want to learn more about the trip contact the GMB Race self-organised group.



GMB Congress 2018 in Brighton

A reminder to all Branch Secretaries - your delegate nomination forms should have been sent to the Regional Office by 31 December 2017 and Branch motions need to be in **by 31 January 2018**.



TUC Equality Strand Conferences

Nomination forms have been sent to all GMB London Region Branches, if you would like to be considered as a delegate, please contact your branch to nominate you.

TUC Women - nominations have to be at Regional Office by 5 January 2018

TUC Young Workers - nominations have to be at Regional Office by 5 January 2018

TUC Black Workers - nominations have to be at Regional Office by 2 February 2018

Please note, you have to self-define as a Woman for the Women's Conference, be 30 years and under for Young Workers and BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) for Black Workers conferences.

Dates for the Disabled Workers and LGBT+ Workers Conferences will be published soon.

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Ryan wins Regional Activist Award

Tony Scattergood, GMB Young London

GMB Young London returns from the Youth Members Summit in Scotland feeling more rejuvenated and driven than ever before.

First, we'd like to say a big thank you to our national youth officers Mel and Ross for running such a fantastic event that was captivating right from the first minute to the last. It was fun, it was creative and at times, in the spirit of true democratic debate, feisty and engaging.

Young London contributed two important motions to the weekends discussion which were met with enthusiasm as well as serious contemplation. All our members are encouraged to take part in steering the direction our young movement heads in, and there is no better way to do that than to attend a summit and submit motions.

We were fortunate to be joined by newly elected Scottish Labour leader, Richard Leonard. Richard was a GMB Industrial Organiser for twenty years,

and when he heard we were nearby, he took the time to visit us and speak to us about the importance of collective action, trade unions and their historical association with the Labour movement.

Finally, we'd like to say a huge congratulations to our young member Rachael Hookway who was elected as Secretary for the Young Members Network and our Chair, **Ryan Maynes, who received the Regional Activist Award.** Ryan has been a great leader and an inspirational figure in the Young London movement and we couldn't be more proud of his recognition.



Ryan Maynes - award winner!

Here's to an even better 2018!

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Equality Icon: Chevalier d'Eon - diplomat, spy, revolutionary, swords-champion

Carl Banks, Secretary, GMB Shout!

GMB Shout's really interesting and informative Trans Day of Visibility event on 31 March got me thinking about who my icons and inspirations are, and why they are important to me. The following individual is definitely in my top five!

I love history, and a couple of years ago, I went on the Soho LGBT history tour, run by 'centred', showcasing individuals who have lived challenging and inspiring lives, made unique and vital contributions to science, the arts, culture, the community, politics and LGBT+ rights.

I learnt so much about the many diverse LGBT+ people who've lived, worked or loved in Soho, and who were described entertainingly and knowledgeably by the tour guides.

For me though, no one had led such a thrillingly mysterious, highly accomplished and extraordinary life of intrigue and success (and who had the longest name I'd seen in a while!) as Charles Geneviève Louis Auguste André Timothée d'Eon de Beaumont (1728 – 1810) or more briefly and better known as the Chevalier d'Eon, or later on in life as Lia.

Born in France, the Chevalier d'Eon first came to Britain as a diplomat in 1762. He helped to negotiate the Peace of Paris, ending the Seven Years War, a conflict that involved many of Europe's main political players. His negotiating skills helped shoot d'Eon onto the international political stage in France, Britain and Russia.

Intriguingly, at the time there was some doubt as



Portrait of Chevalier D'Eon, National Gallery

to whether d'Eon's diplomatic role on behalf of France was purely just that or whether, in fact, espionage and subterfuge were the name of the game. Whatever the truth of the matter, d'Eon was awarded the Croix de Saint Louis for diplomatic achievements on behalf of France.

The wheel of fortune turned and later, the Chevalier was exiled during a period of French court intrigue. Was he involved in murder? True to form though, he remained the subject of scandalous gossip, wafted by courtesan fans and whispered by street sellers, as rumours began to circulate - about d'Eon's gender!

Extraordinarily, these were encouraged by d'Eon himself, as he fanned further the greedy, gossipy flames of rumour by buying himself women's clothes and by secretly encouraging financial speculation at the London Stock Exchange on the question of his gender.

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This reached such heights that it prompted a court case at which, in July 1777, the Court of King's Bench declared its verdict - that the Chevalier was indeed a woman.

The Chevalier had won the right to 'be' a woman, as well as probably gaining hugely from the Stock Exchange speculation. She also D'Eon was allowed to keep the title of Chevalière and decorations - becoming the first woman to receive such honours in French history.

Living life as a woman, in 1785 d'Eon returned to Britain. Unstoppable as ever, she became renowned for public fencing demonstrations wearing the cumbersome style of dress of the time. She took on the European swords-champion and decisively defeated him in a single combat competition.



Her exciting and breathtaking heroics continued. The portrait of her by Thomas Stewart, held at the National Portrait Gallery, London (previous page) reveals her next incarnation. In it d'Eon is wearing the revolutionary cockade demonstrating her zeal

for the new French Revolutionary government. She wrote to them in 1792, with her usual bravado, commitment and self-assurance, offering to lead an army of women against France's enemies.

Yet, all great things and people must come to an end and d'Eon passed away in 1810. D'Eon was buried in the churchyard of St. Pancras Old Church, Camden. This burial place has interesting historical links to other revolutionaries of the time: Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, parents of Mary Shelley, author of 'Frankenstein', and both were philosophers, writers and earliest advocates for Women's Rights and Anarchism respectively, and personal icons of mine as well. A memorial tomb there commemorates them.

So, what do I think d'Eon's greatest contribution was? For me, until the late twentieth century, it could be argued that no transgender individual enjoyed such public and political recognition and perhaps, arguably, acceptance in later life. She is an icon, a pioneer, and a role model – fearless, intelligent, wily and exciting. I wish I had an iota of her chutzpah!

Whether historical fact or heightened fiction, the tour really inspired me to find out more about more the lives and contributions of LGBT+ people.

We'd love to hear from you about your equality icons – famous or unknown, family, friend, real or fictional – email your choices and reasons and we'll publish these in future newsletters.

- **Email: equality.london@gmb.org.uk**

LGBT History Month is February. Contact GMB Shout for ideas, invite speakers and to let us know what you are organising to reach out to LGBT+ members: info@gmbshout.net

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11am – 3pm

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lesbian gay bisexual trans +

LGBT+ Summit 2018

Topics to be covered include:

LGBT+ In the workplace

LGBT+ in GMB

How you can play your part

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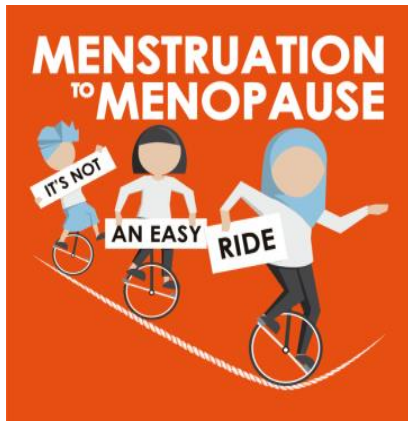
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Donate a Tampon!

Stella Ikanik,
GMB Sisters and Regional Equality Forum



GMB Sisters have been working on a campaign entitled, "Menstruation to Menopause;" It's Not an Easy Ride! A workplace model policy has been drafted; it's designed to be easy to implement but effective.

The policy will focus on:

- **training**
- **free sanitary products**
- **removing the taboo**
- **adequate conditions and facilities.**

We will need your support to implement the policy in your workplace.

Meanwhile, a new research by UK Plan International has shown that, **1 in 10 girls in the UK from low-income families are missing school because they simply can't afford sanitary products.**

This means, female pupils could be skipping up to a week of school every single month because they can't afford tampons, towels or menstrual cups and they're too afraid to ask for them due to the ridiculous stigma and shame still attached to periods.

Women and girls are resorting to using socks, toilet roll and newspapers in place of tampons and towels. Yes! This is happening in the United Kingdom in 2017-2018!

Although thousands selflessly give to foodbanks to help those in need, donations are mostly made up of food with few sanitary or hygiene products.

We want to end period poverty by giving these products to those who can't afford them.

Pads and tampons are not cheap, but for anyone with a period, they are an absolute necessity, it's heartbreaking to think that young women have to endure stigma, shame, and health issues because they can't afford to pay for essentials like sanitary products.

It's even more absurd that they are not free for those who need them.

Period products are as essential as food but for those living in poverty they come way down the priority and shopping list.

Thankfully, there are a few things you can do to help women and girls in the UK who can't afford to buy sanitary products during their period:

Please search online for your nearest food bank or shelter and donate a box of sanitary products to those who need it most.



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Menstruation to Menopause Campaign

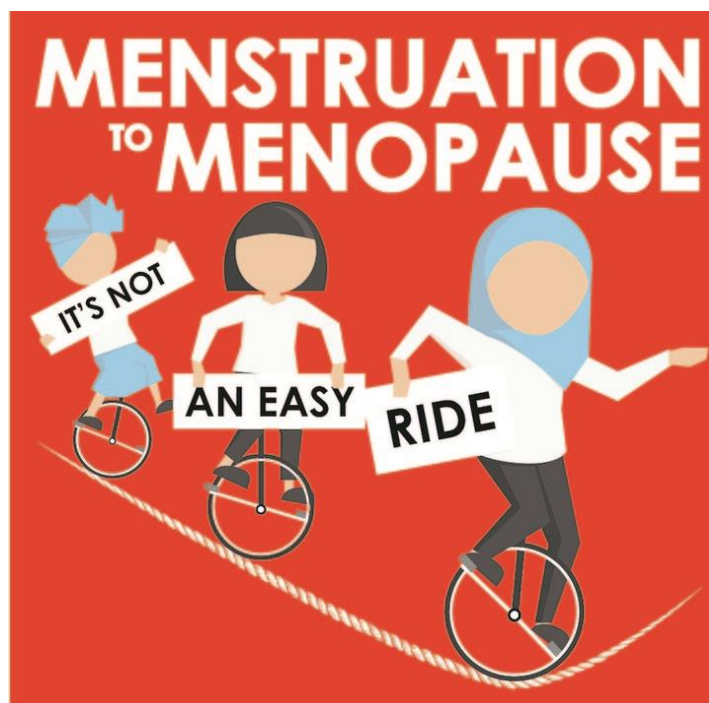
A recent survey gave out the fact that 51% of women had no idea about their periods when they started. [Disney even made an animation](#) about this for schools, which is quite factual, and yet patronising in its advice for girls. It also follows the trend for showing menstrual blood in another colour; we only got red liquid in 2017.

Another amazing fact is that we modern day women start our periods earlier at the average age of 12, whereas women a century ago who started theirs when they were 16. This change is due to several factors; one of them being our better health and nutrition but the main change is due to modern electrical lighting. In the past most women would menstruate with the New Moon and ovulate when full but now our modern electrical lighting is messing slightly with our hormonal clocks.

This first fact quite frankly shocked me that in this day and age women can be so unprepared for something so natural that happens to us all.

It's hardly surprising as there is such shame attached to women menstruating because there are many superstitions and rules about what women are allowed to do during it. For example menstruating women are blamed for turning milk sour and are also not allowed in certain places of worship, so the taboo about talking about it all makes is quite understandable when placed in that context.

Not only are women shamed for doing something so natural, we are also taxed on it too. No doubt that you have heard that sanitary products are taxed as a luxury item at 5%. This was introduced in 1973 at 10% before rising in 1991 to a staggering 17.5%. It was lowered in 2001 to its



current 5% after a campaign lead by Laura Coryton and backed by MP Dawn Primarolo.

A rough calculation means that the average woman can spend up to 5 years and 9 months menstruating.

The BBC have released a [Tampon Tax Calculator](#) which based on NHS information works on the principle that a woman has around 13 periods a year on a 28 day cycle using 22 sanitary products per cycle. This however is deemed to be on the low side as other figures predicting that women can expect to spend over £18,000 in their lifetime. That is roughly 20 Mulberry Alexa Handbags, or a Tiffany Diamond Engagement ring with £5k left over for a wedding ring.

Alongside tax there are also many other factors that happen as part of the menstrual cycle such as cramps, headaches, tiredness, feeling woolly headed or absent mindedness. Yes, it is medically

proven that in the colder months our periods are much more painful with the pain being almost as much as childbirth. This also makes sense as due to the cramping that the uterus does whilst shedding its lining is what causes the clotting that happens, the bigger the cramp, the more painful it is, the bigger the clot. Also that we lose some cognitive function too as there are more things going on such as pain management for your brain to handle during that time.



The idea around Menstrual Leave is that in some countries such as India and enforced by law by unions in Japan where it's called Seiri Kyuka. Italy is taking steps to pass this making this the first western country to do so. It is however controversial, as that in Italy women are already discriminated against for getting pregnant and this taking of time off, be it paid or unpaid, which can prompt bosses to use this as another reason not to hire women.

We propose that women could add the 12 days leave onto existing holiday entitlement. This means that women were able to take it as an option when and if needed without shouting about it.

Some lucky ladies can breeze through their periods; I was not so lucky and was disciplined constantly and nearly lost my job through menstruation problems. This would save so much time; it makes sense for women not to work and struggle through pain or even in some cases find adequate facilities to just do their job. This strategy that has been implemented by a Bristol company called [Coexist](https://www.coexist.org).

Bex Baxter, one of its founders has implemented successfully the idea of working with natural cycles. Baxter has reportedly said that this has been empowering for all concerned as it has prompted discussion with both sexes and helped to break down the taboos about talking about Menstruation.

I believe personally this would be especially great for Men who are blissfully ignorant about 'women's things'. I also believe everyone wants a harmonious and happy workplace, where everyone can be included and not penalised for doing something natural. After all isn't that what we all want in our workplace?

- **Tampon Tax Calculator** <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-42013239>
- **Disney Movie** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjIJZyoKRlg>
- **Coexist** <https://www.coexist.org>

If you have been affected by any of the issues in this article please get in touch with GMB Sisters or your local workplace organiser.



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GMB SISTERS



A women's group for all who self-identify as women, join in with us if you can, you will be made more than welcome.



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I am a WASPI woman and I am mad as hell!

Estelle Laybourne, Campaigner



Women born on or after 6 April 1951 are facing hardship in retirement as a result of the Government's changes to their state pension age.

The 1995 Pensions Act increased the women's state pension age to 65, and subsequent 2011 legislation fast tracked this in a wholly uneven fashion. A one year difference in date of birth can result in a difference of almost three years to state pension age.

Strong recommendations were made to ensure that those women affected were given fair notice of the changes. Governments have ignored this and as a result hundreds of thousands of women have had no time to make alternative arrangements to cover this deprivation of income. Many women had no warning or only a few years notice of their impending situation.

Some say - So what! **Well this affects some 3.8 m women; with very many of those waiting an additional 6 years to receive their state pension.**

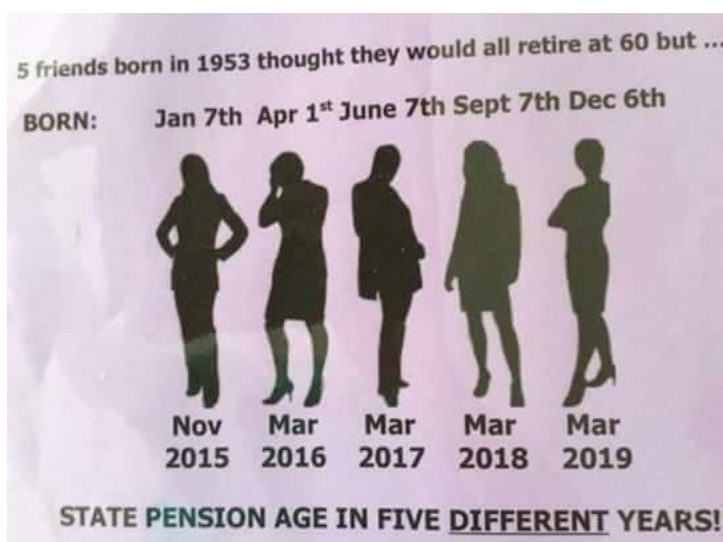
For many this means needing to find anything between £30,000 and £60,000 to cover their living costs until eligibility.

These women had no time to change retirement plans to bridge the gap; and very few have occupational pensions or substantial savings to cover the financial gap. Many are

single women with no other means of support; and it is clear that divorce settlements have been calculated on a pension age of 60. Many have been made redundant as they approached 60 and tried to get work again – to no avail.

Ageism is alive and kicking in the workforce!

Many are already undertaking caring responsibilities or are in ill health themselves.



The WASPI campaign was established in 2015 by five ordinary women and is the only campaign that is seeking amends for all 1950's women.

The WASPI campaign is a national campaign for justice.

It is about respect and dignity for a generation of women.

It is about holding the Government and process to account.

WASPI is asking for fair transitional arrangements and compensation to help 1950s women; not a return to state pension at 60.

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The campaign has cross party support with the APPG, debates have been secured in Parliament on WASPI motions and there have been landmark petitions.

March 2017 saw a second mass rally of 5000 women outside parliament. Initial Crowdfunding raised funds for ongoing legal advice for a legal challenge; and to date some 4000 plus complaints have been lodged with the DWP for maladministration. Further to this funds were bolstered by a grant from the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd.

WASPI membership is growing every day; the campaign is not going away.

There is an active website; there are currently about 80,000 Facebook supporters and some 144 active local groups throughout the country.

However, the campaign needs to continue to build traction and momentum. It needs to continue to build a `Can Do` mentality and challenge apathy or misinformation where it exists.

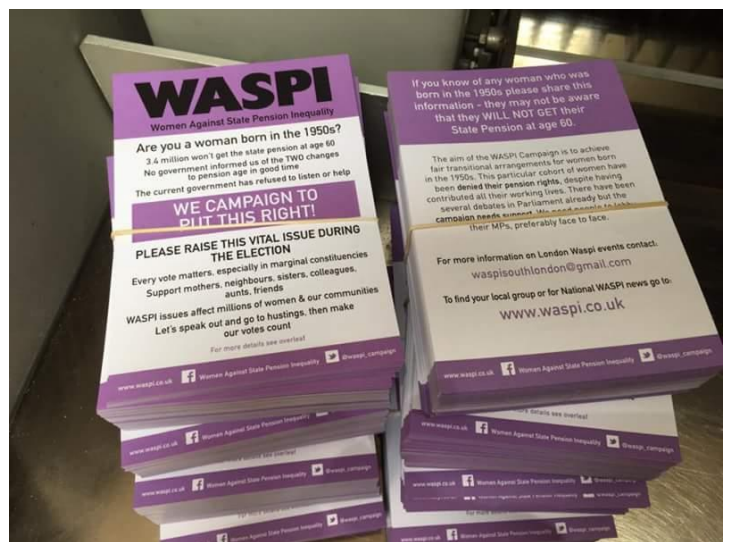
It needs to continue to build a presence in the community through informed awareness and active commitment to the campaign. Plus, it needs to build paid membership to help run the campaign and support the legal challenge. Annual membership is £25 and can be paid in installments. All of this will be the life blood of the campaign as it moves forward.

Please do what you can to support us. We need your help.

Visit the website www.waspi.co.uk and see how you can help the campaign - there are many different ways.

Tell people about the campaign; help them understand the value of the campaign, join a local group, join and encourage others to join as a paid member, set up a branch group, lobby, fundraise, sign the latest petition for another debate in Parliament.

Please help us succeed.



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Driving Bureau

Cathrine Jones

About three and a half years ago I had an accident; I was knocked down by a car in Flitwick, Bedfordshire.

During my usual evening walk around Flitwick to keep fit it (something I have done for many years) I walked down Windmill Road, a quiet part of town, and slowly went down the road. I began to cross the road but only got three quarters of the way across when a car hit me. I was thrown up into the air and landed on my left side.

A young lad and a lady were walking down the road and came to help me. The driver got out, said he was going to park the car, but left the scene. The young man, Paul, gave me first-aid and took me to Flitwick Leisure Centre where the staff gave me first-aid until the ambulance and police arrived.

My injuries were; a head injury, triple whiplash and a cut to my head which if you saw me I was all ready for October 31 as I was covered in blood.

I was lucky I had no broken bones but since then I've had a lot of problems with my lower back, particularly the sciatic nerve which is the largest nerve in the body

The police were not able to trace the driver, so through the Motor Insurers Bureau (MIB) I was

able to claim compensation. MIB works with the government to compensate the victims of negligent and untraceable motorists.

I am very dyslexic and the amount of paperwork you need to read and fill in is huge. So, through my union, the GMB, I contacted Union Line and got a solicitor who helped me all the way through to actually getting compensation. Without that help, I would not have been able to do it.

I had a wonderful solicitor called Nicola who understood that my dyslexia makes it hard for me to understand things on the phone. So she asked her colleague Francis to assist me, by meeting me, and going through all the notes from the specialists that I've seen.

The compensation helped me so much - I can have physiotherapy and I am now a member of Flitwick Leisure Centre where I go to pilates, yoga and use the gym.

Recently, after five years, I went on a riding holiday again and rode a horse in Sicily - the first time I have had a four and a half hour ride since the accident.

The compensation helps me with support to learn to use Dragon to write letters, documents and my union work so now I don't feel isolated; I can communicate with the world.

I would recommend that people in my situation should go through the MIB and the union because they helped me to get my life back again.



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Saturday 17th March, 2018 UN Anti-Racism Day

The GMB invites its members to join GMB RACE activists in standing against everything that the far-right stands for. Further details will be announced nearer the time but for now keep this date free in your diary.

The rise of the far-right both here post-Brexit, in Europe and across the Atlantic is a huge concern for the trade union movement and we have a duty to fight racism and fascism wherever it rears its ugly head.

For more info contact GMB Race:

Twitter @gmbrace

Facebook: GMB RACE



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then simply write FREEPOST GMB LONDON REGION on an envelope and post it to us—you don't need a stamp or any other address details. If you have any questions contact GMB London: email london.membership@gmb.org.uk or visit our website www.gmblondon.org.uk

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GMB membership application form PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS

1 TELL US ABOUT YOU

Surname <input type="text"/>	First name <input type="text"/>	Title <input type="text"/>	Mrs/Miss/Ms/Mr	Date of birth <input type="text"/>
Home address <input type="text"/>	Postcode <input type="text"/>	Home phone number <input type="text"/>	Mobile number <input type="text"/>	Email <input type="text"/>
We ask for your ethnic origins as part of our equal opportunities policy of improving services to all members				Tick here if you do not wish to contribute to the GMB collective affiliation to the Labour Party <input type="checkbox"/>
Bangladeshi <input type="checkbox"/> / Black African <input type="checkbox"/> / Black Caribbean <input type="checkbox"/> / Black British <input type="checkbox"/> / Chinese <input type="checkbox"/> / Indian <input type="checkbox"/> / Irish <input type="checkbox"/> / Pakistani <input type="checkbox"/> / White <input type="checkbox"/> / Other: <input type="text"/>				
National Insurance number <input type="text"/>	I agree to abide by GMB rules Signed <input type="text"/>		Date <input type="text"/>	

2 TELL US ABOUT YOUR JOB

Employer <input type="text"/>	Your job <input type="text"/>
Address where you work <input type="text"/>	Postcode <input type="text"/>
How many hours a week do you work? <input type="text"/>	Pay number <input type="text"/>
I give my employer permission to notify GMB of any future change of address <input type="checkbox"/>	
I authorise my employer to pass my bank details on to GMB to activate my union membership — Signed <input type="text"/>	

3 PLEASE SELECT WHEN YOU WOULD LIKE THE DIRECT DEBIT TO BE DEDUCTED FROM YOUR ACCOUNT

If you are paid monthly	<input type="text"/> 1st day of the month*	<input type="text"/> 8th day of the month*	<input type="text"/> 16th day of the month*	<input type="text"/> 23rd day of the month*	<input type="text"/> Last day of the month*	* or next working day
OR if you are paid 4 weekly	<input type="text"/> 1st Friday	<input type="text"/> 2nd Friday	<input type="text"/> 3rd Friday	<input type="text"/> 4th Friday		

4 INSTRUCTION TO YOUR BANK OR BUILDING SOCIETY TO PAY BY DIRECT DEBIT



Please fill in the form below and send to: GMB, John Cope House, 152 Brent St, Hendon, London NW4 2DP

Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society branch

To the Manager of <input type="text"/>	Bank/Building Society <input type="text"/>
Address <input type="text"/>	
Postcode <input type="text"/>	

Name(s) of account holder(s)

Bank/Building Society account number

Bank/Building Society Sort Code

Banks or Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions for some types of account

Service User Number

Instructions to your Bank or Building Society: Please pay GMB Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with GMB and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

Signature(s) <input type="text"/>	Date <input type="text"/>
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For GMB official use only. This is not part of the instruction to your Bank/Building Society. If your A/C number is not available fill in your address below.

Reference number (GMB use only)