

March 2017 Three Campaigns that MPs in Parliament are championing

March 7th 2017

Helen Jones MP how High Heels and dress codes are hurting women

Helen Jones the Labour MP for Warrington North, got elected in the Labour landslide of 1997 that saw a record 101 labour women elected to parliament.

Helen, who now sits on the new Petitions Committee, has witnessed much change in parliament and this week led a debate on dress codes at work and why women shouldn't be forced to wear high heels that can lead to injury.

The debate resulted from a petition that Nicola Thorp started after she was sent by an agency to work at the HQ of PricewaterhouseCoopers in London and told that a dress code specified that she would have to swap her flat shoes for high heels. She refused and was sent home without pay. 152,420 people signed Nicola's petition to parliament which triggered this week's debate.

As a member of the Petitions Committee Helen has been part of an investigation into dress codes and working with the Equalities Committee they have produced a joint report. Taking a case to an employment tribunal is now too expensive for some people, she said.

Helen told Boni Sones, Executive Producer of www.parliamentaryradio.com that their investigation found that women, particularly in insecure employment, were experiencing pain at work and were wearing clothes unsuitable for what they were being asked to do.

She said: "Women were expected to sexualise their appearance for the sake of the business and few were aware of their rights and how to enforce them".

Helen continued: "It is very clear that if women are forced to wear high heels for long periods it damages their balance it reduces their ankle flexation, it puts them more at risk of other injuries later like stress fractures and it can put you more at risk of falls in old age. While women do choose to wear high heels very few of us would want to stand on our feet all day in 2 or 4 inch high heels. I think we are changing the terms of the debate so that issues from all sections of society are now being considered, there is a way to go but we are getting there."

Helen said that the Labour landslide of 97 had led to parliamentary change: "There is still a need to get women into seats that their parties are likely to hold. A lot of women who came in in 1997 were in marginal seats and when the tide turned they lost their seats. Labour's All-Women Shortlists are helping and so is the Conservative Parties Women2Win campaign. There is a need to understand that a parliament needs to represent the whole country and it needs to have diversity; if you bring different experiences to law making you are likely to get better law making. When we first came in only the Labour women wore trousers and then the Conservative women did too."

Helen spoke of the work of the petitions committee and the changes it had brought about: "The public are learning how to use the petitions systems, it has raised a whole load of issues that would not have been debated and they are some of the most watched debates. It is helping to connect parliament better with the people. "

February 22nd 2017

Caroline Flint MP launches a Charter to help the children of alcoholics

Caroline Flint the Labour MP for Don Valley today got support from the Prime Minister Theresa May MP to give more help to the children of alcoholics a previous neglected area of public policy making.

Caroline, has joined with other MPs who are members of the APPG on children of alcoholics to tell her personal story of growing up with a mother who was an alcoholic and who died at the age of just 45. Her colleagues Liam Byrne MP and Jonathan Ashworth MP, have also spoken of the problems this presents. Together MPs and Peers have now launched a manifesto in support of children of alcoholic parents.

Caroline has spoken of the "secrecy and shame" of having an alcoholic parent and in this interview she says why it has taken her so long to talk about it.

It is estimated 2.5 million children have parents who misuse alcohol. One charity tells the story of how they were asked to read a night time story to a child whose parent was too drunk to do it.

The charter is supported by the Archbishop of Canterbury. It has issued ten demands for government action including better education for children and professionals, improved support for families and measures to tackle how alcohol is marketed and sold.

She said: "We would like to see a new government strategy. The last Labour government I served in I was a public health minister at the time, and we did a lot around addiction problems but I think in the mix of all that the voice of children in families where there is an alcohol problem hasn't really been heard at all.

"When we did a freedom of information request on local authorities something like 138 had no plan to support children of alcoholics so we want a new strategy, and for the existing strategy to ensure children's voices are heard. We want more support for charities like the National Association of Children of Alcoholics to run a helpline. Children often worry about being taken away from the family home. There has to be something done about the pricing of alcohol. White cider duties need looking at.

"The example of the children who ring up the helpline to say 'can you tell me a story', there is a loneliness that comes with this when the parent has passed out drunk.

"It was as I entered my teens that alcohol was a problem in my family. When I got to University I joined the night line counselling service partly to help other students but it had a landline phone so I would arrange with my brother and sister to let them know when I was doing my duty so they could ring me up so I could stay in touch about things happening there. I realised my brother and sister were living at home with an alcoholic mother. Lots of children of alcoholics go through waves of guilt. There are different types of guilt and sometimes sadly the parents lash out at the children and these can be hard to dismiss and not feel hurt by.

"It has been difficult. I was 'outed' on this to some respect. I didn't want to be defined by being a child of an alcoholic and I was worried about being judged. Over the years bits and pieces came out. A journalist discovered through getting my Mother's death certificate and quoted what she died from.

Later on another journalist referred to it in an interview. Starting out I felt ashamed and embarrassed about it but later on I thought I wanted to talk about it on my own terms, although the intervention by the journalists made me want to shut down, but having the APPG has been helpful. We have spent a year putting together this Manifesto for Change. Being able to talk about it and what we want to do about it makes us cope with talking about these very personal issues. It is not all about me but about the children who are out there, and that is what I am in politics for about how we can use the influence we have got to make a difference and this last week has been a start."

Nicola Blackwood, the government's public health minister, said she would produce a new strategy after she was moved to tears hearing Ashworth talk about his father's drinking during a debate.

Caroline adds that in May it will be 20 years since those 101 Labour women got elected in 1997 of which she was one. She said she set about setting up a child care group, and at the time, there was a shooting range and no crèche. She did visit the shooting range!

March 8th 2017

[#WASPI](#) brings its case to parliament again on [#IWD2017](#)

The Women Against State Pension Inequality took their case to the heart of Westminster again on March 8th International Women's Day.

It follows a number of protests and debates in the past 18 months, the presentation of petitions to parliament and the setting up of an All-party parliamentary group on the [#WASPI](#) which has over 120 members, but still ministers are not minded to help.

In particular ministers often repeat that no women will have to wait more than 18 months for her pension, when [#WASPI](#) campaigners point out that they are personally having to wait for 6 years or more when you take into account the measures to increase women's state pension age announced back in 1995 and then again more recently in 2011. They see themselves as victims of "austerity" and not a genuine well thought through public policy change to equalise the state pension age for men and women.

The Prime Minister Theresa May, and her Chancellor Philip Hammond did announce in today's budget new funding for some causes specifically £20 million for more Domestic Violence support, £5 million to help women return to work and another £5 million to help celebrate in 2018 100 years of women and the vote and the Great Reform Act of 1918. However, there was no olive leaf for the [#WASPI](#) 2.5 million women impacted by these changes.

Here Boni Sones, Executive Producer of www.parliamentaryradio.com spoke to a delegation from Northern Ireland Angela, Shirley, Bernadette, Maureen and Marion and the MP Alasdair McDonnell the SD and Labour MP for South Belfast. Last year there was just one of them but today there were 8.

Marion told us: "We feel we have had two increases imposed on us with little or no notice giving us no time at all to make alternative arrangements. They have literally destroyed our retirement plans."

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