

## **‘Empty Pockets: Women and Austerity’**

Proposer: Sue MacFarlane

Seconder: Jo O'Sullivan

FROM THE UNITARIAN WOMEN'S GROUP

That this General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, deeply concerned by the way that the negative effects of the government austerity measures implemented over the last few years have fallen disproportionately on women, calls upon all Unitarians and Free Christians to respond by:

- 1) acquainting themselves and their congregations with the relevant information regarding this subject;
- 2) initiating and supporting actions at congregational level to support women in their community affected by these measures through involvement where possible in local community projects and/or raising funds for the same, seeking advice from the Unitarian's Women's Group if required;
- 3) asking our chief officer to lobby parliament if and when possible for an end to the current austerity measures that are causing misery and hardship for so many people;
- 4) taking specific collective action, in coalition with other organisations and concerned citizens, to support the above.

\* Definition of 'austerity measures': a deficit reduction programme consisting of sustained reductions in public spending and tax rises, intended to reduce the government budget deficit and the role of the welfare state in the United Kingdom.

## **‘Empty Pockets: Women and austerity’ – Background Paper**

As Unitarians, we are committed to the service of all humanity and respect for all. Since they have been in place in recent years, the effects of the government’s austerity measures have fallen predominantly on women. With this in mind, the Unitarian Women’s Group is asking for the backing of the General Assembly to lobby and work for change in this area. Support for women affected can come happen at local and governmental level, and Unitarians can make a real difference.

Unitarians have a long and proud history of supporting equality and, in 2006, the General Assembly passed a motion about equality for all. Women are bearing a bigger share of the burden of the austerity measures than men, and this is unfair. We are asking that Unitarians support women at a local and national level.

The Women’s Budget Group (WBG) is an organisation that scrutinises government policy from a gender perspective. In their gender impact assessment of the Spring 2017 budget, the WBG concluded that ‘Women and those on low incomes continue to shoulder by far the greatest burden of tax and benefit changes and cuts to public spending since 2010, with black and Asian women facing a triple disadvantage.’ In June 2017, Dr Mary-Anne Stephenson, Co-Director of WBG said “Rethinking austerity is long overdue. Women, and BME women in particular, have borne the brunt of seven years of cuts to public services and social security. These cuts have had a devastating impact on individuals and communities across the country, have increased inequality, and have undermined the social infrastructure on which the economy depends.”

Analysis carried out by WBG found has that

- Women are hit harder than men across all income groups, with Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) women particularly hard hit. Asian women in poorest third of households will be £2,247 worse off by 2020 (in contrast to 2010) – almost twice the loss faced by white men in the poorest third of households.
- White men in the richest third of households, by contrast, lose only £410. Black and Asian lone mothers stand to lose £3,996 and £4,214, respectively, from the changes.

We suggest that:

- Actions can be taken at a national level, to include lobbying parliament to highlight the inequality and joining with other organisations where appropriate to lobby for an end to these austerity measures.
- Actions can be taken at a congregational level, to include getting involved in initiatives that support women affected by austerity. For example, congregations could host an event informing people of the facts of the inequality and raising money for their local food bank or Women’s Centre.
- Actions can be taken on a personal level, to include writing to local MPs, outlining the facts, and asking them to work towards a more equal bearing of the load – or, even better, an end to the current austerity measures. Volunteering at a Women’s Centre or Citizen’s advice is another way of offering help and support to women negatively affected by the current austerity measures.

We hope all Unitarians will join us in taking action.

For more information related to this project, visit us at [www.ukunitarians.org.uk/womensgroup](http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/womensgroup)