

Where next for equality: A View from the TUC

Sally Brett,
Senior Equality Policy Officer, TUC

From the Mayor of the most unequal city in Britain:

“...some measure of inequality is essential for the spirit of envy and keeping up with the Joneses that is... a valuable spur to economic activity.”



Equality under attack

- **Growing economic inequality**
 - Tax cuts for super-rich, hefty pay rises for City bankers, rapid house price gains in London
 - Women hit by public sector job losses, tax and benefit changes, cuts to public services
 - Disabled peoples' lives destroyed by welfare reform
- **Political hostility**
 - hysteria about immigration
 - disabled portrayed as work-shy scroungers
 - means of tackling systemic discrimination is red tape destroying business and wasting taxpayers' money

Equality under attack

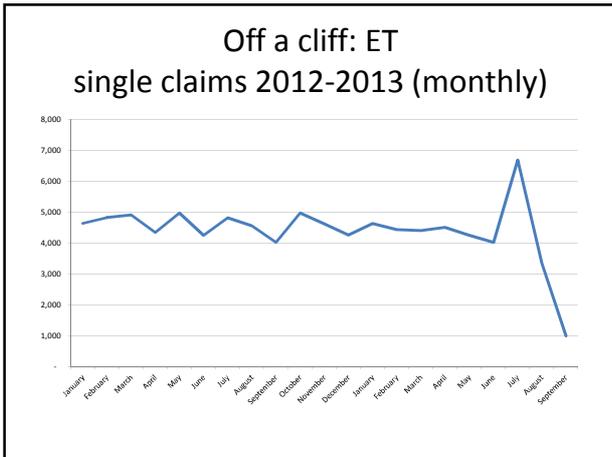
- **Legal rights weakened** – repeals to the Equality Act 2010 and barriers to justice
- **Statutory equality body under attack** – massive cuts to resources and undermining of EHRC, plans to introduce growth duty
- **Harder to fight systemic discrimination** – funding cuts for VCS, attacks on trade union facility time, attempts to weaken PSED etc

Impact on workplace equality

- “...it has become significantly more difficult to get employers to address equality issues.” (NASUWT)
- “Employers feel more supported with the coalition government to attack workers’ rights.” (Unite)
- “...the coalition policies and attack on employment rights... is undermining fairness, equality and rights of workers, their families and protected groups”(Unison)

Impact on workplace equality

- 4:1 unions said harder to bargain on equality (TUC Equality Audit 2012)
- 40% had examples of equality policies being diluted
- 3:1 said harder to access flexible working
- Disabled people being managed out rather than reasonable adjustments made



- ### Government equality policies
- **Introduction of Shared Parental Leave from 2015**
 - But who can afford it at £137 a week and with statutory pay rates capped?
 - Only 0.6% of eligible dads took Additional Paternity Leave
 - **Extension of right to request flexible working**
 - But impact in current climate and with repeal of statutory procedure?
 - **Equal pay audit tribunal orders**
 - But only if you can prove discrimination
 - Government estimates will result in **two** orders a year!
 - **Equal marriage**
 - But outstanding inequality in LGBT pensions

- ### Successes at policy level
- EHRC's general duty successfully defended in Lords
 - Secured changes to shared parental leave scheme and £1m funding for EHRC to research into pregnancy/maternity discrimination
 - PSED and specific duties still on statute books (but threats to enforcement and further review in 2016)
 - Plans to close Independent Living Fund declared unlawful as a result of successful JR by disabled people
 - Equal marriage – secured DWP review of LGBT pensions
 - TU input into Acas guidance to replace discrimination questionnaires and right to request flexible working
 - Unison challenge to fees??

Unions making a difference in the workplace

- Even in a harsh climate unions are achieving equality bargaining successes
- Unions using the PSED to push for better equality outcomes
- If union consulted or bargaining on equality:
 - equality policies less likely to be ‘empty shells’
 - More support for working parents and carers
- Union equality reps need time to be effective

The way forward

- **Challenge austerity and hostile political climate**
 - E.g. Working with disabled people to fight austerity and challenge attitudes to welfare
 - Reframe migration debate, focus on worker exploitation, living standards and access to services
- **Reinstate legal rights and access to justice**
 - Seek Labour Party commitments on repairing Equality Act and abolishing fees
 - Funding of EHRC and parliamentary accountability
- **Better and more inclusive public services**
 - E.g. Impact of free schools and academies on equality
- **Support unions to organise and bargain effectively on equality**
 - Campaign for statutory time off for equality reps
 - Use TUC Equality Audit 2014 to highlight union advantage on equality at work
