

Women Liberal Democrats



Summer Newsletter 2006

Inside - find out more about our new campaigns

Why Iraq is More Democratic Than the UK!

Percentage of Women in Parliament		
Cuba - 36.0%		Iraq - 25.5%
Afghanistan - 27.3%	United Kingdom - 19.7%	Rwanda - 48.8%
Sweden - 45.3%		Mozambique - 34.8%

Can the UK really claim to be a leading democratic country when 49 Countries have greater representation of women in their main governing body than we do here in the UK?

As a result of the war in Iraq, the new democratic system set up there gives women 25.5% representation, which is over 5% more than we enjoy at home. Perhaps next time, before the UK government seeks to impose democracy on other states it should look at what improvements are needed closer to home first.

WLD think this is an important issue that needs to be addressed. Women deserve greater representation in government. Indeed, it is to be hoped that with more women Members of Parliament we would see a greater focus in national politics on womens issues.

In order to do our bit to improve the situation we need to get more women to stand as liberal democrats. Currently only 16% of our MP's are women. Careful thought needs to go into what policies to follow to increase the number of women in our party.

Sir Menzies Campbell MP has promised WLD he will tackle this issue and we will continue to promote further action and provide advice on this issue.

(figures provided by the Inter Parliamentary Union, taking account of data up until the 30th of April 2006, see: www.ipu.org)

We will be discussing this topic at our fringe conference in September, for details see inside.



Welcome to our Summer Newsletter!

Welcome to the latest newsletter from Women Liberal Democrats. We hope you enjoy reading it, and if you have any comments, please let us know. To keep you up to date on what's been going on at the WLD recently, Liz Wheeler gives you the View from the Chair...



View from the Chair

It feels like a really exciting time for women's equality at the moment with encouraging signs from the party that they are taking the issue of women's under representation seriously. Ming's recent speech emphasised his commitment to increasing women parliamentarians, and the Federal Executive have established a Diversity and Equality Review Group to examine the ways in which we approach this important area when it comes to candidate recruitment and selection. It is the duty of WLD and all our members to make sure that we maintain the momentum of these initiatives and help encourage more women to consider getting on to the approved candidates list. If you have any ideas or suggestions or would like to be involved then please contact our office.

We are busy preparing WLD activities at Brighton Conference and I hope to see many of our members there, either at our Fringe meeting, AGM or at our stand (for further details see pg 11) Conference is an excellent opportunity for our members new and old to get to know one another and for old friends to catch up, part of WLD's function is to act as a network facilitator for women within the Party which is crucial when trying to make sure that women's voices are heard and taken on board in every part of the Party from local parties through to national executives. I am keen to encourage WLD to be an interactive organisation and believe that it's in building strong supportive links that women can make sure that their collective voices are heard when it comes to women's issues and representation.

Thank you for your continued support of WLD, I believe that it is a vital part of the Party and we couldn't continue without your generosity and energy.

In this Issue...

Sue Vincent and Sheonaidh Cumming focus on the international position of women as part of our theme for Conference... Lorely Burt sets out her vision for women's role in the Lib Dems... We celebrate Josephine Butler's Centenary... Marie Mannville introduces our new campaign about rape... plus all the details about our plans for Conference, and a taste of the coming celebrations for our 120th Anniversary!



Executive Update

Executive Committee 2006

President - Sue Doughty

Vice-Presidents - Sandra Gidley MP & Lorely Burt MP

Chair - Liz Wheeler

Vice-Chairs - Miranda Whitehead & Lizzie Jewkes

Treasurer - Vera Head

Executive Members - Voting

Poddy Clark, Emma Coakley, Sheonaidh Cumming, Thoraya El-Rayyes, Margaret Fairman, Claire Jackson, Pauline Jenkins, Brenda Smith & Sue Vincent.

Executive Members - Non-voting

Ruth Coleman - *International rep*

Ros Kissell - *WACUNA*

Monica Howes - *Womens National Commission*

WLD Pin Badges

As some of you may know, WLD launched a stylish black and yellow pin badge (pictured below) recently. We still have badges available, if you would like one please send £1.20 to the WLD (which includes postage and packing).



Executive Meetings

Exec meetings are usually held in the Board Room in Cowley Street, starting at 1pm. All members are welcome to attend. Upcoming meetings are scheduled for: 12th August and 18th November.

To get in touch with members of the exec, please contact the office (details below)

WLD Office

From July 2006 WLD's Head of Office is Rebecca Crosier. You can contact Rebecca at -

WLD,

4 Cowley Street, London, SW1P 3NB

Phone : 020 7227 1208

Email : women@libdems.org.uk



The office is staffed on a part-time basis but days can change from week to week. If we are not in, please leave a message and we will get back to you!

Babies? Nein, danke

Sue Vincent, WLD Exec, explains the fundamental choice still being inflicted on German women

When I moved to Cologne, Germany, I assumed that regarding women's equality,



doctor who had just had her first child. She had been advised by other mothers to put her child's name down for kindergarten whilst she was still pregnant in order to secure a place for 2 or 3 years' time.

Germany was similar to the UK and in many ways it is. The exception is in equal opportunities for women with children, where Germany lags far behind many other European countries.

The German government has just realised that Germany now has the lowest birth-rate in Europe – one child is born for every 4 adults - and they have started to panic. The fact that 40% of the most qualified women are choosing to remain childfree is considered very worrying.

The main reason for the low birth rate is that it is virtually impossible for a woman to carry on with her career once she has children.

Most state systems are based on the model of a male breadwinner and a stay-at-home mother. The tax system offers large tax breaks and free health care for a parent who earns no salary. Although in theory this could apply to either parent, social pressures mean it is usually the woman that stays at home. For example, working women with children are often considered to be bad mothers and there is a word which is applied to them 'rabenmutter', meaning uncaring mother.

In a country where the word 'kindergarten' originates, places in kindergartens are difficult to find and expensive. I recently met a hospital

The situation does not improve when the children reach the school age of 6. Schools in Germany only operate between 8 am and 1 pm. They do not provide lunch and any extra curricular activities do not take place at school so children have to go home for lunch and then out to another destination for any sporting or other opportunities.

However, since the new government of Chancellor Angela Merkel has come in some measures are being put in place to make it easier for women to have children and a job. For example, the Family Minister, Ursula von der Leyen, who has 7 children herself, has piloted through Parliament a law that will compensate professional women who take a year's leave to have children and then return to work. The Ministry for Family Affairs has launched a competition to find the nation's best employers for parents. There is also a movement towards "all day school" although this is by no means universal and often the afternoon part of the school day does not involve schoolwork but supervised play or homework.

The new measures, and other reforms which will be brought in, should improve the situation eventually, but until they do the birth rate will continue to drop as young, educated women become increasingly reluctant to give up all hope of a career for the entire time their children are growing up.

Women's Equality - It's Not Rocket Science!

Loirely Burt MP tells us about being spokesperson on Women and Equality

I cannot think of a job in our party that is more important and exciting than speaking for women and equalities. It cuts across every area of policy and it gets right to the heart of what we are about as Liberal Democrats: fairness and equality.

So when any issue affecting women comes up for discussion – from pay to trafficking – I'm interested and I'm ready to weigh in to make sure our corner is fought.

It is shameful to me that we have only 16% women and no ethnic minority MPs in our party: if we don't look like the society we represent why should anyone vote for us?

But the lack of women and ethnic minority MPs cuts even deeper, to the heart of policy making in our society. In a Norwegian study they found a direct correlation between the proportion of women MPs and the number of family friendly policies introduced in their parliament.

And it's not rocket science to see that better childcare enables more women to break through the so-called 'glass ceiling' which holds us back from the best, and best paid, jobs in society.

Imagine the sight of Labour MP Kitty Usher recently bringing her baby into the Committee Room when she had to vote during the course of the committee stage of the Company Law Reform Bill. When there's not even a crèche in Parliament what can you expect from policies that emanate from it?

You won't see that sort of thing happening to women Liberal Democrat MPs in the near future, however. We're all either middle aged (like me) with grown up(ish) kids or childless. I think I'll stop short of suggesting Julia, Sarah or Jo go and get pregnant for the good of the party's image, but you can see what I mean!



Isn't it time we had a radical rethink about what we want to look like as a party? If we are serious about rectifying the inequalities in society we have to be radical in the way we tackle them. And that means thinking the unthinkable: nothing less will ever tackle the inequalities in our own party, let alone in the society we seek to serve and represent.

Meanwhile, of the first 12 seats selected for the next election, only three have gone to women: while we talk about making things more equal the boys are getting out there winning the best seats.

So rather than rehearse the arguments, let's get our finest troops trained and marshalled now. We have some brilliant women in this party, but most of them just don't realise what potential they have.

We need women to take the party forward at all levels. If you aspire to making this world and our society a fairer and more equal place why not take that first step today and drop me a line at burtl@parliament.uk. I'll do all I can to get you on the road to achieving your true potential and destiny.

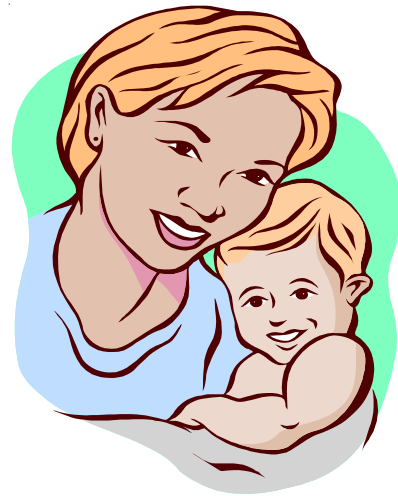
The Human Cost of “Health Tourism”

Sheonaidh Cumming of the WLD Exec, on the plight of female asylum seekers needing medical care under the NHS

A headline in the Evening Standard on 3 July 2006 warned that foreign women were ‘flocking’ to the UK for NHS births. According to the article, ‘health tourists’ are taking advantage of the NHS and costing millions of pounds. The article mentions ‘wealthy businessmen’ flying their spouses to the UK just to give birth. From the article you would think every foreign national going to the NHS in the UK was a scheming con artist, wanting to get their free care and run off home.

Charging overseas visitors for NHS treatment has been around since 1982. In 2004 the regulation was extended to include failed asylum seekers in the rules. Treatment given in Accident and Emergency is free, but emergency treatment given elsewhere is not. Where treatment is deemed immediately necessary it can be given but the cost should be recovered afterwards. The Government wanted to stop what it calls ‘health tourism’, where an individual travels to the UK for the express purpose of receiving free NHS care. There is no evidence that ‘health tourism’ takes place on a large scale. Many of the people affected by the regulations are not people who have come here for a short time to receive treatment, they have come to the UK to live but do not have legal residency status. In the case of failed asylum seekers they may be unable to return home.

A few days before the article in the Evening Standard, the Refugee Council produced a



report called First do no harm: denying healthcare to people whose asylum claims have failed. The report gives the other side of the story to the Evening Standard’s scaremongering.

Antenatal care is one of the areas that is covered by the charging regulations. The report gives some examples of the foreign women who have been ‘flocking’ to the UK to give birth. One is a 15 year old girl from Vietnam who had been told she had to pay the £2,300 cost of her maternity care within five days or have her debt passed to a collection agency. One is a woman from China, who gave birth at home with no medical care after her NHS trust refused to treat her unless she paid her fees upfront. After the birth she and her baby then had to be admitted to hospital with serious health problems. The hospital sent her bills for her treatment and she became so frightened she fled her home, her whereabouts are now unknown.¹

Treatment for HIV is also covered by the charging regulations. Under these rules people can be, and are being, refused treatment for this disease. There is no evidence that people come to the UK solely

to receive HIV treatment. In fact, most people from other countries are not diagnosed with HIV when they arrive and do not discover this for several months. Not only do the regulations cover treatment for those living with HIV, they also require charging for the treatment given to a pregnant woman to stop her baby being born HIV positive. How can the Government parade its commitment to tackling HIV in Africa when it is condemning children to the disease in the UK?

It should be noted that healthcare workers are also unhappy with the charging system and that the 2004 amendment to the regulations was opposed by the medical profession on ethical grounds.

The Refugee Council calls for failed asylum seekers to be exempt from the NHS charges. A group of other organisations, including HIV charities, the Royal College of Nursing and immigration charities are calling for HIV treatment to be completely exempted from the charging rules on public

“...they also require charging for the treatment given to a pregnant woman to stop her baby being born HIV positive. How can the Government parade its commitment to tackling HIV in Africa when it is condemning children to the disease in the UK?”

health grounds. Both these things should be done as a priority and as Liberal Democrats we ought to support them. It seems to be becoming harder to have a rational discussion about any subject involving immigration or asylum seekers, but we owe it to the vulnerable women whose stories are told in the Refugee Council report to try. The NHS was created to ensure the poor and disenfranchised received healthcare. It is time we went back to that ideal

(Footnotes)

¹ 'First do no harm: denying healthcare to people whose asylum claims have failed. Nancy Kelley and Juliette Stevenson, Refugee Council, June 2006, p.11, 12



The Membership Challenge!



A reminder about Sir Menzies Campbell's challenge to double our membership to 1000 members by the end of the year - we still have a few months to go so keep recruiting!!

All new members (those joined since January 2006) will be put in a prize draw to win Tea for Two on the Terrace. This way they can bring the member who signed them up! Prize will be drawn at the end of the year. Happy recruiting....



WLD focus on Rape

Marie Mannveille, WLD intern, introduces the new WLD campaign to raise awareness about the difficulties facing victims of this devastating crime

WLD are starting a campaign about rape. Campaign packs will soon be available on this topic. Here is an introduction to the issues involved.

It is estimated that around 47,000 women suffer a rape or attempted rape every year. Of all these only around 12,800 are reported and recorded as a rape offence. Although the reporting of rape has more than doubled over the past ten years, the percentage that result in a conviction has declined. In 2004 the conviction rate was as low as 5.6%. Part of the problem with rape is the way it is conceived. So called 'stranger rape' only accounts for around 12% of reported incidents. People known to the victim perpetrate the majority of rapes. There seems to be an attitude that rape in these circumstances is not really rape. The view society takes on this matter is evidenced by the fact that it only became illegal as recently as 1994 for a husband to rape his wife.

The law relating to sexual offences has recently been overhauled, resulting in the Sexual Offences Act 2003. This was a much-needed revision of the law, as previously the most up to date legislation was from nearly 50 years ago (the Sexual Offences Act 1956). It is important that in the coming years the focus remains on this issue in order to ascertain whether the new laws have had a beneficial effect.

The difficulty with successfully prosecuting a rapist mainly revolves around the issue of consent. In a rape case, a perpetrator (A) is guilty

of an offence against the complainant (B) if A acts intentionally, B does not consent to the act, and A does not reasonably believe that B consents. The problem is that in order to convict A, the prosecution have to show 'beyond reasonable doubt' that B did not consent and that A was aware that they did not consent. In these situations there are unlikely to be witnesses, so it is a case of one person's word against another. Once alcohol is involved, and the fact that the two people in question knew each other, it becomes very difficult to prove that a rape took place. The burden of proof is on the complainant to prove that they did not consent. In these cases it is common for the accuser's sexual history to

be aired in court as evidence of whether it is likely that they would or would not have consented to sex in the given scenario. This can make the claimant feel as though it is them that is on trial.

**Want to get involved?
Contact the WLD Office for
more information and a
Campaign Pack!**

Another problem in this area is the issue of false allegations of rape. Many people (mainly men) are of the opinion that a large number of rape allegations are false. Not enough research has been done on this aspect to know how true this is. However this view is damaging to women who are raped, as they fear that they will not be believed if they report it. If it is true then it is particularly worrying, as the women who make false claims make the situation so much harder for women who are genuinely raped.

Society needs a greater understanding of the broader concept of rape (that rape is not just confined to 'stranger rape') and to place greater disapproval/punishment on false rape allegations, as well as to reinforce the message to men that rape is not acceptable, and that sex without consent with an ex-partner or friend is just as much rape as 'stranger rape'.

Winners and Losers in the Benefit Race!

Miranda Whitehead, WLD Exec, on new Government measures to help with escaping from the benefit trap.

In a country where there is free health care and where the health of the population has improved over the last twenty five years, incapacity benefit (IB); which is provided for people who are unable to do any work because of a long term health condition, has rocketed. At the last count 2.7 million people of working age claimed IB. Once people have claimed this benefit for more than 2 years they are more likely to retire on the benefit, or die, than get a job.

Why has this happened?

In the past Government encouraged the Job Centres to actively place people on IB because this improved the unemployment figures. In areas where large industries had closed, it was thought better to encourage an ex miner to effectively retire at 50 on IB, rather than retrain for a job in an area of high unemployment. A culture of claiming IB grew up in some areas, with an increased status conferred on those who were entitled to the benefit over those on Job Seekers allowance

As full time work has become a greater part of women's lives, women have become clients of the incapacity benefit system, an outdated structure which has often actively prevented rehabilitation back into work. The very name forces those that claim it to continually prove their incapacity to do work of any kind, which often prevents steps towards rehabilitation. This cannot help the stress and anxiety/depression suffered by many IB claimants; these are the diagnoses rapidly becoming the most common reason why people are off work for long periods, or permanently,

I have been working with the health service and Job Centres to help the long term sick on a return to work project in Portsmouth. People who had been claiming benefit for an average of four years each were retrained, and remotivated, and,

encouragingly, over 25% returned to full time work and about the same number were retraining after two years. These projects prove that change is possible for people who have been effectively scrapped by society, and the changes made to their lives as the result of returning to work were astonishing. Projects run by other providers, such as Tomorrow's People who work out of the James Wigg general practice in Camden have had similar, if not better, results as they manage to catch people as they are put on IB, rather than trying to change things when they have been claiming for years.

The Government's new Employment and Support Allowance has taken some notice of our work, and will operate on the premise that people will receive benefit if they have a long term incapacity. The more disabled will receive a higher rate and have no obligation to look for work, but claimants assessed as able to work would have to take part in initiatives designed to help them back into jobs. These would include advice, counselling and retraining. People who refuse to take part in these schemes could lose part of their benefit in slices so that eventually they could end up simply receiving the same money as if they were claiming Job Seekers allowance.

The scheme will be for new claimants initially and will only work if well funded, and Liberal Democrats have some anxiety on that subject, and also on behalf of those who are currently trapped on the benefit. Having said that this is a good step forward, the next few years will be interesting ones.



CENTENARY OF JOSEPHINE BUTLER (died 1906)

Christian feminist, liberal, social reformer and campaigner

WLD Member Paddy Beck honours the memory of one of the earliest women's rights campaigners.

In the Victorian era taking dying prostitutes into your own home – then campaigning against the notorious Contagious Diseases Acts and other feminist causes was not the kind of behaviour expected of a gentlewoman. But this is just what Josephine Butler did. Born in 1828 in Northumberland, Josephine's father was John Grey – a cousin of Lord Grey the Liberal Prime Minister. The family were deeply religious. Her mother, Hannah, with a Moravian and Methodist background ensured all her children had a good education combined with a strong, moral sense which recognised and abhorred injustice.

In 1852 Josephine married George Butler- later an Anglican priest - who believed marriage should be “*a perfectly equal union with absolute freedom on both sides*”. They initially lived in Oxford where Josephine began helping “fallen women”. But it was after the tragic death of their only daughter, Eva, aged 5 and their move to Liverpool that Josephine wanted to help women who had endured even greater misfortune. Meanwhile, in an effort to halt the spread of venereal disease, 3 separate Contagious Diseases Acts were passed in the 1860s. These CD Acts applied in 18 “garrison” towns where soldiers bought sex. Any woman suspected of being a prostitute, even if she was pregnant or had recently had a baby, had a medical and internal examination to ensure she was disease free. Women could be labelled prostitutes just on the word of a policeman or magistrate and, if they refused examination, they could be detained in “lock” hospitals. If they were infected they were held in these same dreadful places for up to 9 months. The Home Secretary of the day justified the Acts saying that now “*men could sin with impunity*”. Josephine, outraged by the injustice of these laws, campaigned for years against them.

Josephine's ardent speeches, often to working men, were renowned: “*these girls are no longer women but only bits of numbered, inspected and ticketed human flesh flung by Government into the public market*”. She also joined the campaign to combat child prostitution through raising the age of consent. This was effectively 12 as seducing a girl between 12 and 13 was only a misdemeanour. The case of Eliza Armstrong, a thirteen year-old daughter of a chimney-sweep, who was bought for £5 by a woman working for a London brothel, was cited. The low age of consent compared with Europe also led to trafficking girls for sex – especially to Belgium. Josephine despised the double sexual standards of the day. She felt any regulations should apply equally to both sexes which led to her setting up a European Federation against the state regulation of prostitution. Finally in the 1880s the Acts were repealed and the age of consent was raised.

Josephine's other projects included working with Anne Clough to provide more opportunities for women students. This led to arranging lectures for women and later the establishment of Newnham College. In 1867 concerned about the poor pay and lack of work opportunities for women she also wrote a book titled -*The Education and Employment of Women*. A truly amazing woman!

The issues she dealt with - trafficking for sex, child prostitution, sex equality, problems with education and employment still resonate today.

What an education I had under my noble father - an anti-slavery man, a Liberal, a true lover of Liberty, a free Churchman of wide sympathies, & called to constant crusades against tyranny.



Celebrations are in the air for 2007!



The 120th Anniversary of the foundation of the Women's Liberal Federation.

From 1887-1987 the W.L.F. was a strong voice for women in the former Liberal Party, and on becoming Social & Liberal Democrats in 1988 the title was changed to our current title of Women Liberal Democrats.

Plans are underway for a number of events in 2007, starting with...

120th Annual Dinner at the National Liberal Club on February 22nd

We can promise:

That leading personalities of the Party have promised to attend

The National Liberal Club will provide a superb 3 course meal

The ticket price of £45 will include wine with your meal

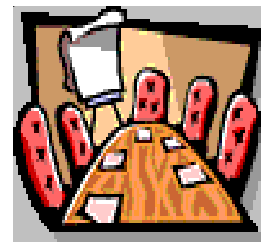


Conference 2006

WLD will be running two events at this Autumn's conference in Brighton, and we look forward to seeing as many of you there as possible!

AGM: Sunday 17th September, 4.30-6pm

Hilton Metropole Hotel, York Room



Fringe Event: "Iraq, Mozambique, Mexico - What Do These Women Have That We Don't?"

Tuesday 19th September, 8-9.15pm

Hilton Metropole Hotel, York Room

Speakers to include Mandana Hendessi, Mary Ann Stephenson (ex-Director of the Fawcett Society) and other leading women in public life.

WLD Events -

**Please contact the office for more details:
Autumn Conference:**

Sunday - AGM

Tuesday - Fringe Event

The Membership Challenge

Do help us recruit new members to make WLD a more effective campaigning organisation. See inside for more details.

Next WLD Executive

12th August 2006 1pm, Cowley Street

www.womenlibdems.org.uk

WLD MEMBERSHIP FORM

Title _____ Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Tel Nos _____

Email _____

Party Member No _____

Membership Fee (*Please tick the appropriate amount*)

£20.00 (recommended) £7.00 (minimum)

Other £

I would like to pay by Cheque/Cash (payable to:
Women Liberal Democrats)

I would like to pay by Standing Order (see box
across)

Please return this form to: Women Liberal
Democrats-4 Cowley St.- London-SW1P 3NB

BANKERS ORDER FORM

To The Manager _____ (Name of bank)

Acct No _____ Sort Code _____

Branch Address _____

Postcode _____

Please Pay: £ _____ Annually/Quarterly
starting on _____

Please make any missed payments immediately
and cancel any previous standing orders to WLD.

To: The Women Liberal Democrats-4 Cowley St.-
London-SW1P 3NB

Account No: 71574175 Sort Code 15 30 00
Royal Bank of Scotland - London Victoria A Branch
119/121 Victoria Street - London SW1E 6RA

Name of Account _____

Address of Account Holder _____

Postcode _____

Signature _____ Date _____