

Gender Institute and Department of Sociology discussion

Budgeting for Gender Equality: is government economic policy fair to women?

Dr Claire Annesley

Lecturer in European politics, University of Manchester

Beatrix Campbell

Journalist, author, playwright, broadcaster

Professor Diane Elson

Professor in the Department of Sociology, University of Essex

Professor Susan Himmelweit

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Professor Judy Wajcman

Chair, LSE



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University of Manchester/Women's Budget Group

claire.annesley@manchester.ac.uk

Foundations for Gender Equality

- Equal opportunities for **quality paid employment**
- Access to adequate **independent income** for all women and men
- Coalition's measures in June 2010 Budget and October 2010 Spending Review chip away at these (see: wbg.org.uk)
- Measures and proposals announced so far in 2011 appear to mark a trend towards economic dependence for women and the return of the Male Breadwinner Model.
- But there is also potentially some better news.

Welfare Reform Bill (February)

- Sets out proposals for **Universal Credit**: means-tested, single monthly payment to household intended to increase incentives to get one adult into work and to 'mimic wages'.
- Strengthens work incentive for one working adult; but benefit withdrawal rate will be faster for second earners.
- Maximum subsidy for childcare costs down from 80 to 70%.
- Single household payment. Couples can nominate who the payment should go to; it will only be split in emergencies.
- Women manage budgets and day to day spending; a single monthly payment makes it harder to budget on low incomes.

The Budget (March)

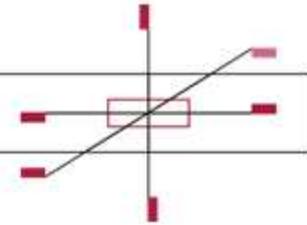
- Commitments to tax breaks, promoting enterprise and improving skills. But nothing for women's employment.
- Proposed rise of personal allowance to £8,105 in 2012/13 will lift 260,000 people out of tax, 56% of whom are women.
- But will not benefit those earning below this threshold, 73% of whom are women (LFS 2009-10).
- Desired job growth in the private sector will not necessarily benefit women: gender pay gap; less compatible with caring responsibilities; attack on regulations.
- Investment in 50,000 new apprenticeships but no commitment to gender equality in allocation or quality. Budget's emphasis strongly on science.

Pension Green Paper (April)

- ‘A State Pension for the 21st Century’ (2011 DWP) sets out plans for reforming current pensions system.
- One option is for single-tier state pension, combining BSP and S2P. Set at ‘around £140’ per week; gets rid of means-tested Pensions Credit.
- Explicit aim to reduce gender inequalities in pensions (DWP 2011, 22).
- But: future pensioners only; still based on contributory principle (rather than citizenship); does not compensate for loss of public services.

So Far in 2011...

- No support for women in the shift from public to private employment opportunities.
- An explicit acceptance that the Male Breadwinner Model is 'justified' (DWP 2011, 19).
- Nothing to help people on the lowest incomes, many of whom are women.
- Nothing to compensate lone parents and single pensioners for the loss of services due to October's public sector spending cuts.



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