

# Policy Watch

**Mothers' UNION**  
Christian care for families



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

Produced by the Faith & Policy Unit of Mothers' Union and Sue Burridge from the Mission and Public Affairs Division at the Church of England

Welcome to online monthly **Policy Watch**, available on Mothers' Union website at the beginning of each month at <http://www.themothersunion.org/policy.aspx>

## Tracking issues in Social Policy

July 2009

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Have you ever wondered how to “do” Social Policy? Have you been asked “why does Mothers' Union care about issues of social justice, legislation and the common good”?

Help is at hand! *“Making a Difference: Social Policy Toolkit”* is a brand new resource for both Social Policy novices and experts. It gives clear explanations of why Mothers' Union wants to make a difference through social policy, how we do this and a concise guide to the UK

Parliaments/Assemblies as well as the European Union and the United Nations.



This handbag-sized, updated version of the Social Policy Toolkit (“Straight Talking” – which is still available to download from the Policy pages on the Mothers' Union website) is priced at just £3 and available to buy from Mary Sumner House. To order copies please contact Central Services on 0207 222 5533 or email [policy@themothersunion.org](mailto:policy@themothersunion.org)

## Child Poverty Bill

The Child Poverty Bill was presented to Parliament on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2009 and received its Second Reading on 29<sup>th</sup> June. The Bill, once an Act, will require the Government to eliminate child poverty in the United Kingdom by 2020.

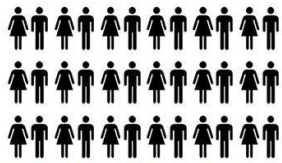
Measures to achieve this include:

- ➔ Creating a legal duty requiring government bodies to form action plans to reduce child poverty;
- ➔ Reducing the number of children living in households with less than 60% of the national average income to 10% and those with less than 70% to 5% of children in those households;
- ➔ Investing an extra £5 billion in unemployment relief.

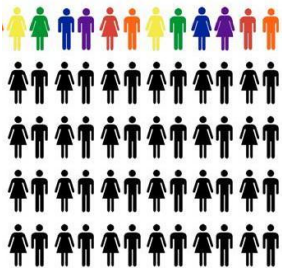


Speaking on BBC Radio Wiltshire, Mothers' Union welcomed the Bill, but added that it needs to address the root causes of child poverty, including family breakdown, and target all children in poverty from all family and household backgrounds.

## Equality Bill



During June 2009, the Equality Bill was discussed in detail by a Committee made up of 18 MPs. They met 14 times and as well as inviting witnesses to give opinions and evidence, received briefings from several organisations, including Mothers' Union.



The Committee devoted considerable time to discussing the elimination of the gender pay gap: requiring employers to assess and publish details of how much they pay men and women for carrying out the same work. Some business and employer groups have made clear they are not in favour of publishing such details. An amendment was also put forward to strengthen protection for pregnant workers against discrimination by employers. To read Mothers' Union's memorandum on the Bill, please go to:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmpublic/equality/memos/ucm4102.htm>

## UK Pension Changes

At present, women can receive their State Pension at 60 and men at 65. However, between 6<sup>th</sup> April 2010 and 2020, the State Pension age for women will gradually start to rise from 60 to 65 and will then gradually rise for both men and women from 65 to 68 between 2024 and 2046. This will not affect women who are due to reach 60 before 6th April next year.



From April 2010, both men and women will only need 30 qualifying years of NI contributions to build up a full basic State Pension, instead of 44 and 39 respectively. From 6<sup>th</sup> April 2010 there will also be a new National Insurance Credit for those looking after children or caring for others, to make sure caring counts towards a full basic State Pension. For further information please contact the Future Pension Centre on 0845 3000 168 or go to [www.pensionservice.gov.uk](http://www.pensionservice.gov.uk)

## European Union: Pregnant Workers Directive



Mothers' Union responded to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform's (now known as the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills) consultation on the European Commission's proposals to amend current legislation on the rights and treatment of pregnant workers and women on maternity leave. The Faith & Policy Unit received a fantastic response from members to the consultation distributed by Social Policy Contacts, and Mothers' Union's coordinated response has been submitted to the Department.

Overall, members felt that:

- ➔ Compulsory maternity leave should be extended from two to six weeks, to ensure mother-baby bonding;
- ➔ Employers should not be permitted to make plans to, as well as actually, sack a worker who is pregnant or on maternity leave, unless under exceptional circumstances, as this would create greater stability and security for the worker and her family;
- ➔ Employers would, however, face additional costs through these proposals and would need some recompense;
- ➔ Nowhere in the proposals is mention of the importance of the new child.



To read Mothers' Union's full response, please contact the Faith & Policy Unit on 020 7222 5533 or [policy@themothersunion.org](mailto:policy@themothersunion.org) go to [http://www.themothersunion.org/policy\\_current\\_issues.aspx](http://www.themothersunion.org/policy_current_issues.aspx)

European Social Partners (a collection of employers organisations and trade unions) have also agreed that parental leave should be increased under the current Framework Agreement on Parental Leave from three to four months, for both men and women, with one month being transferable between them. The agreement will now go to the European Commission for examination before it is passed to the European Council for approval.

## **Faith reflection: Summary of the Parliamentary Year**

The 2008/09 Parliamentary session political agenda has been somewhat hijacked by the global economic crisis as national budgets have been readjusted and spending plans changed in light of the recession. Despite the crisis in our economic system, the extension of the right to request flexible working went ahead in the UK, meaning 4.5 million more parents and carers can now ask their employers for working patterns which help them balance work and family priorities. Whilst recognising that targets to abolish child poverty will not be met in 2010, the UK Government pushed ahead with "social" Bills including the Equality Bill and the Welfare Reform Bill. A Scottish Parliament committee responded to calls for more research into the sexualisation of childhood.

However, the scandal over MPs' expenses overshadowed the local and European Elections and with a lower overall turnout the BNP gained a seat in the European Parliament for the first time. Several Ministers resigned and Gordon Brown's leadership was questioned. Through all of this the nation's faith in politics was tested: the media leading, as so many MPs' conduct was criticised in minute detail. Michael Martin MP was forced to resign his position as speaker of the House of Commons and John Bercow MP succeeding him on 22<sup>nd</sup> June.

Do we as Christians still have faith in politics? In Mothers' Union our vision is of a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships. Our objectives help shape the way we "test" legislation as a means to achieving this. Of all the Bills we have monitored, consultations we have responded to and campaigns we have supported, we can ask:

- ➔ Have they promoted and supported married life?
- ➔ Have they made conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children?
- ➔ Have they helped those whose family lives have been met with adversity?

And so as we anticipate the next Parliamentary session in national assemblies and parliaments across Britain and Ireland we can pray that these objectives will be met through measures taken and debates held. We can pray that faith will be restored in the political process and pray simply that God's Kingdom will come, here on earth as it is in Heaven.

## Social Policy in Action

Mothers' Union members in Scotland joined other organisations in an effort to highlight the impact of climate change on the world's poor. Provincial President, Sheila Redwood; Edinburgh Diocesan President, Susan Crosfield; her husband Philip and Hilary Moran added their voices to the 500 strong rally lobbying MSPs to deliver a strong Climate Change Bill. For more information on the *Stop Climate Chaos* coalition, made up of faith, environmental and international development charities, please visit [www.stopclimatechaos.org](http://www.stopclimatechaos.org).



Susan, Hilary and Sheila at the rally in Edinburgh

The 2009 Faith & Policy Unit Conference was held this year at High Leigh from 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> June. Focussing on this year's theme, "Cost of Relationship", Faith & Policy Coordinators and Social Policy Contacts joined together to reflect on highs and lows of the past year. Here's a snapshot of what some of them said:

What have you enjoyed about your role?

*"Sharing our faith and ideas in a variety of ways, and meeting people and situations which have deepened my faith. Also the practical way in with Mothers' Union can help families by making members aware of current issues brought out by Policy Watch. This is a valuable tool with its accuracy and summarising of main points, and to focus our concerns."*

*"Visiting some of our IMs at home - I'm now able to put "a face to a name" when I write to them 5 times each year and send them cards for Christmas, Easter, and birthdays."*

*"Diocesan members and others wrote letters to MPs about the HFE Bill. We continue to remind members and wider community that the Millennium Development Goals are not being met!"*

*"We have set up a "Fast Track" team to respond to consultation papers sent by Mary Sumner House. We have responded to papers on Flexible Families, Commercialisation of Childhood, HFE Bill, EU Pregnant Women [Workers] Directive."*

### Discussion and Briefing Papers – How do you use yours?

There is a selection of discussion and briefing papers available to download and print from the policy pages of the Mothers' Union website. You could use them in branches, during away days and retreats, during Diocesan days and Trustee meetings.

We welcome any feedback on the content and how you use them so that we can tell other Policy Watch readers. Please contact Rachel Aston, Social Policy Officer, at [policy@themothersunion.org](mailto:policy@themothersunion.org) with your thoughts and comments.