

# THE INCREDIBLE INVISIBLE WOMAN

Women in the UK are more likely to experience poverty than men but from looking at government statistics, reports and ultimately policies you'd be excused for thinking that children and families live in a gender vacuum. Reports talk of working adults, one-parent families and pensioners and policies are geared towards addressing child poverty or moving adults from welfare to work. Rarely is it acknowledged that women and their children are living in poverty because of wage pay inequalities, poverty triggers such as divorce and separation, the need for part-time working to facilitate women's caring roles and the low status and therefore low pay accorded to largely female, flexible and caring occupations. In other words, social factors that disproportionately affect women's income.

Given this background the current Joseph Rowntree Foundation research project 'Voices of Experience: eradicating women's poverty through policy' by the Women's Budget Group is very welcome. The project recognises that tackling women's poverty is key to achieving government targets such as child poverty and social inclusion. This participatory research will gather the real experience of women claiming state financial support and work with them to understand

the policy debates that go on around them and about them. The women participants will then be invited to meet with policy makers directly to engage in discussion on policy and practice, identify alternatives and inform government initiatives to enhance service delivery and implementation.

With women making up most lone parent and older single person households many of which are likely to be defined as poor, it's time that government policy makers look beyond generic statistics, gender their poverty analysis and acknowledge the gender inequality that disproportionately increases women's vulnerability to hazzard , poverty and the need for state financial support .

Let us hope that making these women visable to policy makers will break the trend in hiding women's disadvantage in non gendered statistics.

This research is due for completion in November and details can be found at <http://www.jrf.org.uk/research-and-policy/poverty-and-disadvantage>

## What's on...

### Autumn 2007

Women walking and other events  
Fran Loots, Breathing Space Outdoors, Tel: 01764 670541  
Email: [fran@breathingpsceoutdoors.com](mailto:fran@breathingpsceoutdoors.com)

### 21 September 2007

Women in Film  
Several short films about/made by women  
Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre  
Info: [www.dca.org.uk](http://www.dca.org.uk)

### 26 September – 1 October 2007

Big Blockade, Faslane 365  
Events around the end of the 365 day blockade  
For women's activities, contact Sue 07944877813 or [women@faslane365.org](mailto:women@faslane365.org)

### 6 October 2007

Engender AGM  
Henry Irving room, Lyceum Theatre, Grindlay Street, Edinburgh. 1pm-3pm. Buffet lunch at available from 1pm. Tel: 0131 558 9596

### 9/10 October 2007

Scottish Women's Convention Roadshow  
SWC is meting with women to discuss issues that are important to them.

October 9 – Perth, October 10 – Dundee  
Info and register for these free events Tel: 0131 557 8950  
or Email [mary@scottishwomensconvention.org](mailto:mary@scottishwomensconvention.org)

### 13 October 2007

Women's History Scotland Autumn conference  
'Gender She Wrote: Women's Writing from a Historical Perspective' at the Smith Art Gallery and Museum, Stirling  
[www.swhn.org](http://www.swhn.org)

### 24-28 October 2007

11th Edinburgh Independent & Radical Book Fair  
Nawal El Saadawi opens the Fair, 24 October at 7pm  
Out of the Blue Drill hall, 20-38 Dalmeny Street, Edinburgh, EH6 8RG. Word Power Books, Tel 0131 662 9112  
[www.work-power.co.uk](http://www.work-power.co.uk)

### 30 October 2007

Researchers in families and relationships conference  
The University of Edinburgh, Salisbury Green, Pollock Halls  
£45.00 includes buffet lunch and light refreshments.  
An opportunity to discuss research issues and present papers in a supportive environment  
Information and Registration: Laura Marshall, Tel: 0131 651 3001 [cfrf@ed.ac.uk](mailto:cfrf@ed.ac.uk)

All info correct at time of going to press. If you have an event you'd like listed, contact [kathdavies@ednet.co.uk](mailto:kathdavies@ednet.co.uk)

Become an **engender** member

## Join us!

- Make sure that women are kept on the agenda
- Be part of the challenge to gender inequality.
- Receive a quarterly printed newsletter on women's issues and keep up to date on current events with regular e-bulletins.
- Meet like-minded women at our events and take part in discussions on our members forum.
- Most of all get in touch and let us know what you think...

### SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Individual:

Waged £24 pa/£2 pm  
Low/Unwaged £12pa /£1 pm  
Organization:

Small (annual turnover under £5,000) £15pa  
Medium (annual turnover £5,000 - £50,000) £30pa  
Large (annual turnover over £55,000) £50pa

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**engender**  
making equality a reality...

Engender Newsletter - September 2007

## EQUAL PAY STILL KEY TO ENDING WOMEN'S POVERTY

*Lorna Ahlquist leads us through a range of new equality legislation and asks if it's really up to the task.*

There seems to be a frenzy of legislation on equality issues. The Equality Act is passed (2006). The CEHR is a - coming around the Munros. The Single Equality Act is a twinkle in everyone's eye, or perhaps bringing tears to those reading the consultation document (Discrimination Law Review 'A Framework for Fairness') which aims to rationalise discrimination law. It's sister document, the Equalities Review analysed the causes of discrimination and inequalities. It did bring forth tears because of its proposals for defining equality. Blowing in from across the North Sea, to be implemented in 2008 is an EU Directive consolidating the 7 existing Directives dealing with equality between women and men in employment.

What will all this do for women in Scotland who live in poverty? The thrust of this new legislation seems to be, if they can get us all working, it will be ok. Poverty will be history and business more efficient. The pay gap accounts for about half of the massive 40% difference in income between women and men in Scotland so it is not the whole story and that must not be lost sight of. We also have questions to ask about how the economy is run and how power is used. However, it is a chance to put in place new mechanisms to ensure 'outcomes' for reducing women's poverty, not just outcomes for business.

The Equal Pay Act has not delivered in over 30 years, will this new legislation? It pretends to make a difference but seems weak. For instance, how you are compared to other workers in equal pay claims (comparators) could do with sorting but the new legislation is not an improvement. The Gender Equality Duty (Equality Act 2006 ) includes the duty to consider having an objective to address the causes of the gender pay gap, a ridiculous statement. Why not a duty to do an equal pay audit and implement it within specific timescales? Why not extend that to the private sector? The evidence base is there – change has been too little and too

slow, so the legislation needs to be more proactive, prescriptive and dynamic.

A lot of equal pay issues should already have been sorted, leaving the private sector to tackle. The Single Status for Local Government pay fiasco started in 1997. Local authorities avoided it for years so it is still not finished 10 years later. Pay and grading reviews were meant to deliver pay that was fairer for all, and equal pay for women. The NHS Agenda for Change did the same exercise in the NHS and women's pay benefited greatly. Central Government funded the extra costs for the NHS, but not for local government, where the bill has been estimated at £500m. Hence women are caught in a political battle ground between various branches of government and trade unions, as councils say they have not enough money to put their houses in order and women are actually blamed at times for causing problems.



Whatever the politics of that battle ground, the bottom line is that a major mechanism for reducing poverty is not being systematically strengthened by all this legislative activity. We have an opportunity, can the government learn from the evidence and take it?

**engender** Make equality a reality

Engender is a membership organisation working on an anti-sexist agenda in Scotland and Europe to increase women's power and influence and make visible the impact of sexism on women, men and society. We provide information, analysis, training advice and networking to individuals, organisations and institutions who seek to achieve equality and justice.

[www.engender.org.uk](http://www.engender.org.uk)  
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# EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first edition of the new-look Engender newsletter! Changes in the newsletter reflect the exciting things happening at Engender, including a fresh focus on our three priorities: women's poverty, women's participation in public life, and violence against women. Along with other restructuring, we have established three new working groups to take forward these three priorities (they join our established European and international group). Each group has invited members and interested colleagues out-with Engender to meet and discuss what Engender's priorities for action should be in each of the areas, and a number of activities are underway as a result (see Director's column).

We will produce the newsletter approximately every three months and the new format is intended to deliver feminist analysis of current and historical issues in a user-friendly way. We have adopted a poster-like size to allow easy filing for future reference (in my life that means a thumb tack and a bulletin board!). Please—let us know what you think of this new format and what you would like to see included and/or excluded from the newsletters. Each newsletter will focus on aspects of Engender's main interest areas; this issue focuses on poverty and is just a sample of the interesting projects planned or underway, including work on women and poverty over the lifespan, examination of current writing on poverty and campaigning work to support current work on poverty with a gendered focus.

The changes at Engender emerge from our strategic plan for delivering what we do best: feminist analysis, networking, information and research dissemination, and training and consultancy. Our commitment is to offer women and their organisations in Scotland the tools and the support we all need to change the world, or at least our part of it. Several years ago we added a new mission for the Board and staff of the organisation: to reclaim—perhaps re-proclaim might be a better expression of it—feminism in Scotland and make space (again) for our voices in public discourse and policy making. This newsletter is one more step on that road.

Of course the biggest change at Engender is the addition of

our new Executive Director, Niki Kandirikirira. Niki has worked for ACCORD (African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes) in Africa and then in London as well as for Scottish Human Services in Edinburgh. Niki's creativity, passion, and incisive analysis have already improved our practice and profile, and we are in no doubt that her role in Engender heralds a new era of innovation and productivity for the organisation.

Finally, the new political context bears some mentioning. The advent of a new government offers the usual upheaval and uncertainty—those challenges we often re-name as opportunities to the outside world! Like other public and voluntary sector organisations involved in policy making and delivery, Engender has been watching and listening carefully to the new leadership in Parliament and in the Scottish Executive. We are preparing briefs for key ministers (supported by the new Gender Audit) and look forward to developing relationships with new partners. It is early days of course, but preliminary messages seem to indicate that the new administration's commitment to promoting women's equality is strong. However, as the end of funding in March 2008 for most Executive-supported budgets looms, widespread uncertainty about the results of the upcoming spending review is contributing to instability in planning, staffing and delivery for many organisations. The advent of the CEHR (Commission on Equality and Human Rights) offers additional challenges, oops I mean opportunities, for the equalities sector, although we are encouraged to find ourselves working with a number of equalities organisations in a joint response to the recently published Discrimination Law Review. Our resolution is to build on that work to produce a sustained and mutually beneficial collaboration over the near future.

This is indeed an exciting time to be a member of Engender. Invite your sisters, daughters, mothers, partners; cajole your friends and colleagues; promise your MSP and local councillor. Spread the word—feminists in Scotland are on the move. (And if anyone needs an Engender membership form . . .)

Marsha Scott, Convener



## NEWS

Inside Engender we have been focussing on restructuring, developing our programme, funding and revamping our profile.

You may have noticed our new look logo and newsletter and will soon be able to access our new website which will be your portal to interacting with Engender. There will be access to:

**Thematic Groups – On Poverty, Violence Against Women, and Power and Participation.** These groups meet regularly to reflect on their theme to inform our work.

- The poverty group is developing a web based project that will enable people to explore the hazards and vulnerabilities of women in relation to poverty using women's stories, research and gendered statistics.

- The violence group is developing a narrative on the relationship between gender power relations and violence against women.

- The power and participation group is working on arts, community action and research ideas to celebrate 100 years of suffrage and women's participation in politics since devolution.

**Engender's Associates – Women who work for us to deliver research, training and development consultancies on gen-**

der and equalities.

Discussion between yourselves - At the moment, in the real not virtual world, a group 'Thinking Women' come together to reflect on current issues [it's open house, join them...] They are currently reflecting on the Equalities Review, the Discrimination Law Review and the evolution of the CEHR. The two reviews lack gendered analysis and hardly acknowledge institutional sexism but there is hope with the appointment of Morag Alexander and Ros Mikelum as the Commissioner and Director of the CEHR Scotland respectively.

Gendered news which would at this time have included the reduction in women MSP's [we cannot afford to take our eye of the ball]; and the introduction of the Gender Equality Duty that puts the onus on institutions to prove they are fair rather than the 'victim' to prove they have been discriminated against.

and more ...

Finally, fingers crossed as we await the outcome of two funding submissions; One to the Big Lottery for our overall programme and one to Lloyds TSB for a project with young people to explore sexism through forum theatre.

Niki Kandirikirira  
Executive Director



We have a team of dedicated, dynamic, professional consultants with a passion for equality and a wealth of experience in gender.

If your organisation has work to do on gender equality, or you are a public body that needs support to help you meet your obligations under the new Gender Equality Duty our consultants can meet with you to discuss your needs and tailor a training, research or development consultancy to meet your exact requirements.

Contact the office for further details.

### The Sue Innes Woman of the Year Award

Have you been amazed, inspired or impressed by a woman's work this year?

If so, why don't you nominate her for Engender's 'Woman of the Year' Award?

In memory of Sue Innes, a founder of Engender and passionate advocate of women's rights, Engender are now looking for nominations for this award. We want to recognise a piece of work - be it from the arts, education, health or political sphere - and celebrate the contribution it has made to the equality debate in Scotland.

Please call the office with your nomination or email [info@engender.org.uk](mailto:info@engender.org.uk)



## EUROPEAN & INTERNATIONAL GROUP (E&I)

Engender E&I Group works on European issues, international/United Nations' issues, and links with the UK Women's National Commission (WNC). We are working on developing regular contact with MSPs, MPs, MEPs, the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament and the European Commission representatives in Scotland. The Group aims to:

- focus on Engender's priority areas: poverty, violence against women and access to decision making
- improve links between International/European issues and Engender's work, including past and present transnational work
- involve other organisations working on our priority areas.

E&I members contribute to the WNC's Violence Against Women Working Group, and their International Network. We are members of the United Kingdom Joint Committee of Women (UKJCW), and the European Women's Lobby (EWL). The UKJCW links the four nations of the UK and informs the European Women's Lobby (EWL). From October 2006, Engender has been the UK representative on the EWL. We are in touch with European initiatives on violence against women. We are also involved in the Gradus transnational partnership, including looking at funding for women's groups.

**On the international front**, the UK has to report to the UN in 2008 on its progress towards gender equality. We are contributing to the 'Shadow' report on UK progress, compiled by the Women's National Commission from non-governmental organisations contributions. The Shadow report gives our own view on UK progress - interesting reading!

#### Membership

The E&I Group is currently encouraging more organisations to join and to benefit from the links to the EWL where we have voting rights in this influential lobby group. As an incentive, the first year of membership, which is also for the whole of Engender, is free!

We are now working on identifying and establishing an e-group of organisational members to improve communication and consultation on European matters. If you're interested in joining the E&I group, contact Engender of office.

0131 558 9596, [info@engender.org.uk](mailto:info@engender.org.uk)  
[www.engender.org.uk](http://www.engender.org.uk)

**Engender is setting up a new e-bulletin to update members, particularly on the work of the EWL. Look out for this in September.**

## THE PENSIONER POVERTY TRAP

*With less than 12% of women receiving the full basic state pension and a woman's average retirement income 53% of a man's, many women find themselves in poverty in old age. Engender supports calls for a Citizens Pension – here Lindsay Scott from Help the Aged explains how it works.*

Too many UK pensioners, particularly women, are suffering financially because successive governments appear to value National Insurance contributions more than the contributions, societal and economic, made by those women through raising children properly and caring for elderly relatives amongst other things.

It is an unfortunate fact that at present, career breaks, low pay or caring responsibilities mean that over 4.3 million women pensioners across the UK have failed to build up sufficient NI contributions to qualify for the full basic state pension. They would most certainly benefit if everyone above retirement age was eligible for a citizen's pension, similar to that in place in New Zealand for the past three decades.

The UK government has pledged to reduce the minimum NI contribution requirement, which will help women pensioners in the future. However, this won't help current ones. A universal pension linked to average income and not inflation would help those women receive the justice they deserve in this regard, but it would have to be a substantial improvement on the 17% of average earnings the basic state pension currently equates to.

New Zealand provides a flat-rate universal state pension, set at present at 65% of the average after-tax weekly wage,

payable to people aged over 65 who are resident, and have lived in the country for ten years since the age of 20, five of which must be since the age of 50. It is neither income nor asset-tested, and all people who meet the qualifying age of 65 and the residential requirement are eligible.

New Zealand Superannuation, as it is known, is fully funded from general taxation on a "pay as you go basis". The population of New Zealand over the age of 65 is expected to increase from 12% to 27% over the next 50 years and consequently expenditure on the basic state pension is expected to double from around four per cent of GDP to over nine per cent by 2050. By contrast, in a damning indictment of the UK government's sense of priorities, expenditure on the basic state pension over the same period is expected to fall from 4.3% to 3.6% of GDP – food for thought.

## OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND?

*Women are underrepresented in all walks of public life. Ailsa McKay and Morag Gillespie from Glasgow Caledonian University ask if poverty contributes to the lack of women candidates to public office.*

In May 2007 43 women were elected to the Scottish Parliament and although a significant figure in terms of women's overall political representation, the number is less than in the 2003-07 session. Women MSPs now make up 33% of the total. Thus, the current figures indicate a backward step and women are far from securing equality in terms of representation at a Parliamentary level in Scotland.

The picture is similar when considering the presence of women across political and public life in Scotland. For instance, 18% of local authority council leaders are women and just over one third of all public appointments go to women. With reference to an overall objective of 50/50 representation, figures such as these lead the EOC, Scotland to claim that '338 women are missing from Scotland's positions of power in public and political life'.

Whilst the reasons for this gap are varied and complex, a key issue that merits further investigation relates to poverty and disadvantage. Poverty presents as a barrier to participation in a range of social, political and community activities. We know from the literature that women are at greater risk of poverty throughout the lifecycle, with lone parents and older women being particularly vulnerable.

The association between women's low income and their lower participation in political and public life is not a new idea, but one that merits further consideration in policy

responses in relation to both participation and poverty. The lack of financial resources, which acts as a barrier to participation, is often exacerbated by women's disproportionate responsibilities for unpaid domestic labour. Thus, many women are not only income poor but also time poor and therefore are lacking in a whole range of resources that would afford them the opportunity to participate more effectively.

We would argue that promoting more equal political representation necessitates a better understanding of the role poverty plays in limiting the capacity of women to participate fully in Scottish public life. Furthermore, accepting that poverty remains a significant barrier for many women requires that policy makers, intent on promoting gender equality, must promote measures specifically aimed at addressing the particular causes of women's poverty. At the same time they need to take steps to ensure that women on low incomes are afforded the opportunity to access, and to achieve, adequate levels of participation in public life.

## THE GENDER AGENDA

The Equal Opportunities Commission Scotland has launched its last ever campaign before becoming part of the new CEHR in October with a warning that sex equality is still generations away. The 'Gender Agenda' campaign calls for urgent action to close the stubborn gaps that persist in pay, family life, public services, justice, safety and power.

The way we live our lives has transformed dramatically in the last 30 years, but we are living with the consequences of an unfinished social revolution. The roles of men and women have changed at a fast pace: new mothers and fathers expect to share the upbringing of their children and both women and men want to work more flexibly and provide more support for older relatives.

But life around us has not caught up. We are still faced with many workplaces, institutions and services designed for an

age when women stayed at home, creating barriers to equality.

At the moment the "part-time pay gap" will take 30 years to close, and the "full time pay gap" 20 years. Women working part-time earn 34% percent less per hour than men working full time. Full time female employees earn on average 14% less per hour than men. The "flexible working gap" is unlikely ever to change unless further action is taken. Men are currently over half as likely (60 percent) to work flexibly as women, even though half of working men say they would like to work more flexibly.

As well as a new series of posters and postcards the EOC has developed an interactive Gender Agenda website you can measure whether sex inequality affects the quality of your life. Find out more at [www.gender-agenda.co.uk](http://www.gender-agenda.co.uk)

Alyson Thomson, EOC

## WOMEN MORE OR LESS?

**Less Income:** On average women's total individual incomes from all sources are 60% that of men's.

**Less Equality:** 51% of households where a male is the highest income earner have an income over £20,000, compared to 22% of households where a female is the highest income earner.

**Less Pay:** Women full-time workers in Scotland earn 86% of male full-time workers average hourly pay. The 'Five C' sectors where women dominate are poorly paid - cooking, cleaning, clerical, caring and cashing.

**Less Savings:** 66% of lone parents have no savings; 95% of people accessing benefits as lone parents are women.

**Less Pension:** Of all women workers 44% have no pension provision [and 60% of part-time women workers]. Less than 12% of women receive the full basic state pension based on their own contributions, compared with 91% of men.

**Less secure:** Financial dependency can lead to women staying in violent relationships. Of

45,796 cases of domestic violence recorded by the police in 2005-06, 41% involved co-habitees or spouses, 34% ex-partners or ex-spouses and 16% involved current non-cohabiting partners. 90% of all recorded incidents took place in the home.

**More caring responsibility:** Women make up 66% of Scotland's 650,000 unpaid carers; 41% of all women workers work part-time.

**More dependent on the state:** Women make up 53% of benefit claimants, 61% of people on income support, and 64% of those dependent on State Pensions and Pension Credits.

**More vulnerable:** 90% of lone parents are women and are twice as likely to be poor compared with couples with children. Almost half of all lone parents in Scotland are in income poverty, three times the rate for couples with children.

**More discriminated:** Half of all part-time workers in Scotland earn less than £6.50 per hour, most of them are women. Women tend to have greater caring roles than men so opt for part time work to balance their responsibilities.

## MENTAL HEALTH - AN EQUALITY ISSUE TOO

In Scotland, as in the rest of the UK, mental health problems affect more women than men, with clear implications for the way public services are used and provided. Studies have found that girls score significantly lower on measures of life satisfaction than boys.

There are also significant differences in the gender distribution of the 'risk factors' associated with poorer mental health. 'Risk factors' are the personal or social factors that increase the likelihood of experiencing poorer mental health or are associated with poorer outcomes for people who experience mental health problems. These risk factors include structural factors such as poverty and deprivation, social isolation and exclusion and negative life events such as physical or sexual abuse.

Statistics reveal how women are particularly exposed to these risk factors. For example across the UK and in Scotland, women are more likely than men to be living in poverty and across Britain, on five out of seven indicators, women experienced higher levels of social exclusion than men. Women are also at much greater risk of experiencing domestic abuse than men.

Tackling economic and social inequalities and injustice, is therefore also about tackling the impacts of these inequalities on the mental health and well-being of women, men and future generations.

Fiona Myers & Julia White  
Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health



[www.engender.org](http://www.engender.org) Tel. 0131 558 9596

All references can be found on our website [www.engender.org](http://www.engender.org) or call the office

## POVERTY TRAPS WOMEN IN VIOLENT RELATIONSHIPS

*Domestic violence is just one area where financial inequality determines how women are able to respond, as Scottish Women's Aid report.*

The recent EOC report, claiming that women could wait 200 years for equality with men carried many implications. Amongst other things, it warned that women remain financially worse off than men – there are 5.6 million part-time workers, "many of whom are women, working in jobs below their potential" it said.

Financial inequality carries serious implications, not least when it comes to the subject of domestic abuse. A Home Office study published in 2004, claimed that, "vulnerability to some forms of inter-personal violence is associated with lack of access to economic resources".

The statement isn't as straightforward as it seems. Experience shows that domestic abuse isn't confined to one socio-economic group - any woman can become a victim of domestic abuse and, contrary to what some people like to believe, it isn't just poor men, or those with drug or alcohol problems who abuse women. Too often poverty and substance abuse is rolled out as an excuse for what is actually a far more complex problem.

Project workers pointed out that women from wealthier backgrounds were not necessarily less vulnerable to domestic violence – it was simply that the problem was more easily hidden behind the high walls of the large houses they lived in than it was in communities where families lived closely together in multiple occupancies.

The telling issue in relation to poverty, was the ability – or inability - of women to support themselves once they had taken the steps to extricate themselves from abusive situations, and that's where the Home Office data provides a clue to the real challenge posed by financial inequality. The report conceded that there was no financial data available for the women's situation prior to leaving their abusive situation, and that it could be possible that "the low household income found among some women who suffered domestic abuse [...] may be a consequence of their leaving a violent home".

Poverty can't be blamed for violence against women or domestic abuse, but it can be a factor preventing women leaving abusive situations. There are many reasons that women can't afford to wait 200 years for equality with men and why more needs to be done to close the equality gap now. Financial equality alone won't eradicate domestic abuse, but it would send a message that women are entitled to be treated with the same respect by men that they themselves would expect, and it would be a step on the ladder to giving women the means to remove themselves from abusive situations.

## FIGHTING POVERTY - PAST & PRESENT

*The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women details the lives of many amazing women. This entry celebrates the life and work of Mary Barbour, who fought against the opportunistic landlords of Glasgow during the first world war.*

**Mary Barbour (1875–1958)**

The third of seven children, Mary Rough began work aged 12 as a thread twister in Elderslie. In 1896, she married David Barbour, an engineer, settled in Govan and had two sons. She joined the Independent Labour Party and was involved in her local Cooperative Women's Guild. From 1914–15, she led effective resistance to a series of steep rent rises and evictions in Govan. She organised women's committees who met in kitchens and closes to gather information on impending evictions. By ringing hand-bells and 'ricketies' (rattles) they alerted other women, who came out on to the streets to drive off the sheriff's officers. The rent strike spread and, on 17 November 1915, culminated in a huge demonstration. Thousands of women, 'Mrs Barbour's Army', supported by engineers and shipyard workers, marched to the sheriff court in George Square. As a result, the Rent Restrictions Act 1915 came into force and Mary Barbour became a Govan legend.

In 1920, on the new women's vote, she became the first Labour woman councillor in Glasgow. She successfully

established municipal baths, wash-houses, laundries and crèches, play areas and free school milk for children, and helped found, in 1926, the first family planning clinic for married women in Glasgow, staffed by women doctors and nurses. She was one of Glasgow's first woman magistrates. A true pioneering leader on Clydeside, she was held in high regard by her local community. (**Audrey Canning**)

Adapted with permission from an entry in: Ewan, E., Innes, S., Reynolds S., Pipes, R. (2007) *The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*, Edinburgh University Press (RRP£24.99pbk, but cheaper via web)

**...and now?**

Nowadays, it is the lack of affordable rented homes as well as the quality of social housing that is challenging the poorest women in our society. Shelter estimates that we need to build 30,000 new affordable rented homes in the next 3 years if MSP's are to honour their pledge of a right to a home for all by 2012. Their summer campaign Home is... demands that the government commit the resources to do this in this years spending review.

With 69% of Scotland's social housing currently falling beneath the new Scottish Housing Quality Standard, it would seem that, as in Mary Barbour's day, the poorest in society are living in houses unfit for purpose.