

Sisters, Friends, Conference

I am somewhat overwhelmed with the privilege of welcoming you all, to this 82nd STUC Women's Conference, and particularly so in my own hometown of Dundee.

And when I began to take time to consider my address, I found it difficult to believe that it was 13 years ago, when I attended as a first time delegate, to this Conference in Perth, along with my sisters from the CWU.

In 1996 the Conference was held in Perth, I remember the weather was freezing, our delegation were seated, right at the back of the hall, subjected to a cold draught, every time the back doors were opened by delegates popping out for a "cuppa and a chat"....or in male quarters what would be known as "networking!"

But for whatever reason the CWU must be doing something right, because I'm pleased to see their faces moving ever nearer to the front of the platform!!!!

Jane McKay was the Chair, presiding over Conference that first year, and I remember being struck by her commitment, determination and conviction in moving forward the equality Agenda for Trade Union Women, throughout Scotland.

In 2003 I was successful in being elected onto the Women's Committee, where I continued to be influenced, encouraged and supported by a diverse group of women, enjoying working together collectively on our annual work plans.

It was important to me, for this years Conference to be held in Dundee, a city with a reputation of "Strong Women", and I would encourage you all to take part in the Dundee Women's Trial, celebrating 25 amazing women, whose lives have touched the city over the centuries.

And the men of Dundee were often referred to as the "kettle boilers", while the women worked in the factories and mills.....and in my house, because I'm away so often, my partner Neil is still the "kettle bolliier"I just wish he would wipe a surface behind him occasionally!!!

But Sisters, on a more serious note the past twelve months has seen this Committee setting out our priorities and workplan, following the decisions of last years Conference. With much focus being placed on the impact the recession is having on women & families throughout Scotland. In the last 2 decades women workers have significantly increased in the labour market, and as employment rates have risen, so have women's contributions to the family income.

However, we cannot ignore that women remain predominately in low paid, and often part-time jobs, often on reduced terms and conditions, struggling to make ends meet.

Lone parents now make up a quarter of all families and **90% of lone parents are Women!!!**

We need only reflect on last weeks announcement of the proposed sell off for Royal Bank of Scotland & Lloyds, to consider the impact this will have on job security, with Finance and the Retail sector dominated by female employees!

And on the 30th October, equal payday, it was revealed there still remains a 17.1% pay gap between men & women. This is Unacceptable and it is the role of Trade Unions to work together collectively to bridge the pay divide.

And I believe, that is why it is so important for the STUC and the Women's Committee to work together with Close the Gap, who held a successful one-day seminar on 5th November, providing a legal update for trade union activists, on Equal Pay & Job Evaluations.

Women's Representation in Public & Political life has been a key priority for the Committee, and while women are joining unions more than ever before, they are clearly, under-represented in decision-making structures!

To address this issue, and to encourage development and participation of female affiliates, the Committee held a very successful weekend school, in Glasgow last month.

With the aim, to encourage women's voices to be heard, to recognise their skills & strengths, identify any barriers...and to encourage a personal strategy plan for the future!

To say I found this event inspiring would be an understatement... the women in attendance were enthusiastic and determined to play their part in various roles and organisations throughout society, enforcing the need to make Equality between men and women a Reality!

Promoting good health and well-being for women, is a further key priority, and the Committee recognise the current economic climate has created many pressures, and are concerned that additional stress and anxiety may often culminate in mental health difficulties.

And it is essential, that occupational health services are provided by employers, and with the support of Trade Unions, people receive the support they require and remain in appropriate lines of business.

Employers must also recognise the gender differences in health-issues and ensure suitable services are provided.

The Committee welcome the Scottish Government's policy & action plan- "Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland" and look forward to the contribution from Nicola Sturgeon, MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Health & Wellbeing, to be heard at Conference tomorrow morning.

The Committee will also look forward to feedback following this afternoon's workshop around Mental Health & Women in the Workplace and I am confident affiliates will find this a very useful and worthwhile session.

Sisters, Domestic Abuse, remains an ongoing priority for the Committee, we have engaged our male affiliates in tackling this issue, welcoming the White Ribbon day initiative. We also note the Scottish Government's investment of £44 million pounds to drive forward tackling what continues to be a Scourge on Our Society!

As a Committee we have developed links internationally, and earlier this year met with representatives from the Cuban Federation of Women & the Trade Union Centre. It is also our intention to work closely with our sisters in Palestine.

Closer to home we continue to forge links with our Sisters in Wales, Ireland and England, and only 2 weeks ago members of the Committee and myself attended a meeting at the TUC in London where we shared practices, updates and campaigns.

And I am proud to report to Conference that this Scottish Women's Committee is at the forefront... raising issues being faced by women in the workplace TODAY! And our Sisters in Ireland congratulated us on our "progressive" Agenda.

We were also proud to report on the excellent Gude Cause event, held in Edinburgh on the 10th October...a fantastic example of women coming together, celebrating 100 years since the Suffragettes campaigned on a women's right to vote!

And while it's history and our families who shape us, it is our values that drive us!

Our values and belief in Social Justice, the eradication of Discrimination and the delivery of Equality and Diversity!

Conference, I have a number of people to thank today, including my own Union the CWU, who have provided assistance and support over a difficult industrial period, this includes Grace Mitchell who unfortunately cannot attend today but was instrumental in me going forward onto this Women's Committee.

My friends, both male and female in the Trade Union and Labour movement....

My partner Neil, my own family and close friends whom I know, often wonder WHAT I'm doing, but I hope always know WHY!!!

The STUC Equality Committees and Chairs.

The STUC admin staff, particularly Helen Carson, who does so much work on our behalf and is invaluable.

Ann Henderson, STUC Assistant Secretary, who has worked tirelessly to support me in this role.

A special thanks to the entire Women's Committee, to Elaine Dougall and Natasha Gerson my Vice-Chairs, who have supported me throughout the past twelve months making this a rewarding experience....

Sisters, I opened my address by stating how privileged I felt to be holding the position of Chair, and if I have one reservation it is...that there has been too little time to fully appreciate the events and meetings I have been involved in, and so I look forward to the next 2 days, listening to your debates, welcoming your

Participation and willing every delegate to play their part in delivering THIS Women's Agenda for Scotland!!!!

Have a wonderful Conference.