

I strongly urge those who blocked this UN Security Resolution to reconsider – Emily Thornberry

Emily Thornberry MP, Labour's Shadow Foreign Secretary, responding to the veto by Russia and China of a UN Security Council Resolution sanctioning the Syrian government for using chemical weapons, said:

"Under any circumstances, chemical weapons are barbaric, and their use must never be tolerated. This is a core principle of international humanitarian law, which the Syrian government itself accepted when it joined the Chemical Weapons Convention.

"There should be no impunity for those found responsible for using chemical weapons, and I strongly urge those who blocked this resolution to reconsider."

Sarah Champion speech at the London School of Economics

**Sarah Champion MP,
Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities**,
speaking at the London School of Economics today, said:

*****CHECK AGAINST
DELIVERY*****

It's such an honour to
be here at the LSE.

Founded by Beatrice
Webb, a visionary woman who paved the way for the Beveridge report, and who
arguably drew up the blueprint for what would later become the welfare state
and the birth of our NHS.

I would like to thank
the LSE Department for Economics as well as the Equality and Diversity
Taskforce, for hosting this important event here today ahead of the Spring
Budget next week.

It is great to see so
many senior female economists and academics here. Too often women's voices on

the economy are ignored or take a back seat.

Just over a year ago, the Fawcett society analysed newspaper coverage of the economy and found that over 80% of those quoted or referenced were men, and over 80% of articles were imbalanced in favour of men.

From that I take two things:

One, that the voices of women, like many of you here today, with relevant expertise and experience, are rarely given a platform – which reinforces the public perception that being an expert on the economy is a male role.

Secondly, the economy is an area where there have been significant negative impacts on women since 2010.

From cuts to tax credits to the crisis in social care budgets – it is women who have consistently been hit hardest, yet it is our voices that are continuously excluded.

This year, the Spring Budget is on the same day as International Women's Day – so the 8th March becomes a critical day both for women's rights and for the economy.

Labour are determined to ensure that we do not miss this opportunity to lay out our demands for women to be at the heart of economic decisions.

For women's voices, perspectives and interests to be properly understood, considered and heard.

As of the last autumn statement, 86% of the net gains to the Treasury through tax and benefit changes since 2010 had come from women.

That figure is up on the previous year's autumn statement, in which the figure was 81%.

That is why, today, Labour are calling for a Spring Budget that works for women.

A budget that invests in jobs for women.

A budget that recognises

and supports the services that women depend on.

A budget that advances
women's equality and economic independence

At its heart, we expect
a budget that works for women as it is a key opportunity for the advancement
of
gender equality.

This concept, often referred
to as gender budgeting, now takes place in more than 40 countries around the
world.

It was originally
inspired by the early experiences of countries such as Australia, and then
given further momentum by the United Nations commitment to gender budgeting
in
the Beijing platform for action.

The perceived assumption
is often that budgets are neutral, that they benefit and impact on everyone
equally, regardless of gender, ethnic background or disability.

We know this is not the
case.

Women are particularly
vulnerable to being hit harder by this Government policies, for a number of
reasons.

First, social security
payments make up a greater share of women's income than men's, as women still
earn less in the labour market.

Women make greater use
of public sector care services than men, because they have greater caring
responsibilities.

Women also pay less
direct tax than men, because they tend to earn less. Meaning that tax breaks
for top earners disproportionately benefit men.

Finally, women are hit
harder by this Government's policies, because a higher proportion of women
are
employed in the public sector, which is consistently under attack.

If we are to create a
budget that works for women, these factors must be properly taken into
account
during the formative stages of policy making and budget setting. It needs
to be done in a way that ensures that women are not disproportionately

penalised, and that gender economic equality is advanced.

However, Gender inequality will not simply be addressed through gender budgeting.

Children aren't born with expectations about what is, or is not, appropriate for their future careers, or beliefs about what their work is worth.

The stereotypes we see embedded from such a young age [ultimately contribute to the inequalities we see in adult life](#), in the workplace and in the economy more widely.

This must change.

Violence against women, maternity discrimination, unequal pay and lack of access to decently paid, secure employment: all take an economic toll.

Gender inequality is economically inefficient. Gender equality is good for economic growth.

Janet Stotsky, who has researched the economics of gender since the mid 90's, recently led an International Monetary Fund survey. She has said simply that;

'gender budgeting is good budgeting'.

The imperative for a budget that works for women goes far beyond an economic one. Legal and international obligations on the Government are clear in the need to protect and advance women's economic equality.

The Equality Act 2010, introduced by Labour, enshrined in law the public sector equality duty which requires public authorities to have due regard of equality considerations when exercising their functions.

In section 149 of the Act, Labour placed the provision that any public body must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to "eliminate discrimination" and "advance equality of opportunity" for those with protected characteristics, which include gender and ethnicity.

Given that the legal and economic arguments are clear that budgets must work for women, why is it women who continually fair worst under this government?

My belief is it is a combination of outdated and intrinsically biased assumptions in accounting and policy, as well as a lack of transparency in how equality considerations are taken into account, have brought us to the point where the 86% figure I mentioned earlier is a reality.

Take, for example, the way investment and current expenditure are defined by the Treasury.

Currently, the wages of construction workers paid to build a school count as public investment. However, when government staffs the school to provide education, the wages of the teachers are not counted as investment expenditure, but as current expenditure.

The benefits produced by teachers accrue over the years, both to the children who have been educated, and to the wider economy. These are not just 'day to day' immediate benefits.

Feminist economists have long argued that the work force is a produced asset that requires investment of resources for it to be available on a daily basis.

In the example I just gave – both the wages of the teachers and the construction workers would be defined as public investment.

Similarly, there is also an inherently skewed way that governments think about infrastructure.

The Labour Party have long acknowledged that economic development requires a well-functioning social infrastructure; Schools, hospitals, care and public services.

Investment in social infrastructure both alleviates unpaid care work and generates more jobs for women.

Underinvestment in public services and infrastructure not only reduces the productivity of the current and future work force, but it also dumps the burden of, often unpaid, care work on women. This leads to an inevitable impact on women earning ability.

Yet in statement after statement, we hear the government effortlessly justify investment of tax payer money in roads and transportation projects, while their last Autumn Statement, failed to offer any investment in care or the NHS.

The government's excuses
for their unprecedented lack of investment in care, the NHS and public
services
don't stack up for the economy, and they definitely don't stack up for women.

When the UK Labour
government invested in creating the NHS in 1948, the ratio of debt to GDP was
over 200 per cent, and that higher public investment led to higher growth.
High
debt ratios did not prompt cuts to public investment in the 1940s, 1950s or
1960s.

What is unarguable is
that at the same time as imposing cruel spending cuts that have been shown to
hit women hardest, this government has added almost £700bn to the national
debt.

That's not just more
than the last Labour government.

It's more than every
Labour government, in history, added together!

So, not only have public
services like our NHS or our Local Councils been shredded, the scale of the
failure is such that the Tories can't even claim to have reduced the debt!

The question that we
must focus on is whether an individual investment project has economic
returns
that are higher than, or at least equal to, its costs in terms of interest
payments.

If the returns are high
enough, debt sustainability would automatically be satisfied as the
additional
growth would decrease, or at least stabilise the debt to GDP ratio.

But, if we continue to
think of public investment exclusively as spending on physical infrastructure
—
roads, railways, ports, airports — the benefits to women will continue to be
limited by this definition.

And remember, this is in
addition to the deepening and damaging cuts to social infrastructure under
this
government that fail to invest in our future workforce, and women in
particular.

The last autumn
statement posed a real opportunity for the Government to make changes:

They had the opportunity
to start a new economic path with a new female Prime Minister.

They missed that
opportunity by a mile.

The disproportionate
impact on women had in fact increased from the autumn statement the previous
year, from 81 to 86%.

Joint analysis from the
Runnymede Trust and the Women's Budget Group also showed that, as of the last
autumn statement, low- income black and Asian women are paying the highest
price for this Government's failed austerity agenda.

The 86% impact figure
sounds shocking, but we know it isn't just a number in a textbook or a policy
paper.

These are real
women.

Real women whose lives
are being made increasingly more difficult through government policy and
successive budgets.

Women who have to
struggle with more caring responsibilities due to the ever increasing gap in
social care funding.

Women on increasingly
insecure employment terms, unable to plan properly for their family's future.

Women born in the 1950's
who, with little to no notice, are having to face a crisis in their
retirement
planning.

54,000 women a year who
are forced out of their jobs through maternity discrimination and who can't
afford this government's extortionate fees to take their employer to
tribunal.

Women in my constituency
and constituencies up and down the country who will have to wait another 60
years before the gender pay gap closes.

155 women and 103
children on a typical day, who are turned away from refuges due to lack of
space, according to Women's Aid

Women struggling under
more pressure placed on them through cuts to universal credit and to child

tax
credits.

And perhaps most
shamefully, women who, as of next month, will have to prove their third child
is a product of rape if they wish to qualify for child tax credits.

I'm not sure how we have
ended up here?

But I am sure that this
cannot continue, and that Labour will hold this government to account for
their
seismic failings.

Twice Labour has
formally presented the government with clear analysis on the impact of their
budgets on women, only for the data to be dismissed out of hand by Ministers.

It would be far more
credible if the government produced their own gender impact analysis
alongside
their financial statements, rather than to criticize the House of Commons
library data without producing any alternative of their own.

To add insult to injury,
the Government knows how to conduct a proper audit of their policies on women
and
those with protected characteristics.

The Equality and Human
Rights Commission, and the Women's Budget Group, have outlined suggested
methodologies very clearly.

We have to ask why, in
the light of the availability of those methodologies, the Government continue
to be so evasive in stepping up to their duties.

It is getting to the
point where the government can no longer plead ignorance of the way their
policies are impacting women or that there doesn't exist evidence to show
this
impact or the strategies to overcome it.

And the continued lack
of transparency is deeply concerning.

The cross party,
parliamentary Women and Equalities select committee have had precious little
cooperation from the government in this area.

The Treasury have
refused, in writing, to send a minister to answer questions on the impact of

the Autumn Statement on women. And they have sent inadequate or incomplete answers to questions asked by the committee.

The committee have
stated publicly that, I quote,

'The lack of information
provided to us demonstrates a concerning lack of transparency. The promotion
of
transparency is a central aim of the Public Sector Equality Duty
requirements,
but the Government's current position does not engender confidence that these
requirements are being complied with.'

Next week, during the
Chancellor's budget, on international women's day, there will be nowhere to
hide if the government continue to avoid addressing this omission.

The game is up.

Labour is demanding the
government put an end to this embarrassing ducking and diving and produce a
transparent, cumulative impact analysis of their policies on women since 2010,
as well as an equalities impact assessment of the specific measures announced
in the Spring Budget.

The usual one-off cash
give-away, or a gimmicky policy aimed at women, will not suffice.

Let me be very clear;

We are talking about a
fundamental, structural, disproportionate impact on women of government
policy
since 2010.

Nothing short of a
fundamental, structural solution will do.

This government seem
keen to support gender equality on paper if it only means marginal changes,
or
a few one off measures.

What is needed however,
are root-and-branch changes on how the fiscal system supports gender
equality.

I appreciate this is
much more challenging, but it is vital and long overdue.

The Labour Party will
not shy from this challenge.

I am pleased announce
today that Labour will build upon current equalities legislation, consulting
over the next 12 months on bringing in an Economic Equality Bill.

Put simply, this Bill
would seek to ensure that on equality, the money follows the policy.

It will no longer be
possible for governments to talk the talk on equality while implementing
economic policies that make life harder for women and protected groups.

It's about ensuring that
we eliminate intrinsic, structural barriers that prevent people from reaching
their full economic potential.

Next week, during the
Spring Budget, Labour will be watching.

In the absence of the
government conducting their own gender impact analysis on the budget, once
again, Labour will be working hard with the House of Commons Library to
produce
this data.

I have to say, I find it
shameful that we have to hold the Government's feet to the fire in this way,
simply to ensure that their policies are not disproportionately impacting one
particular group and reversing progress on economic equality.

Globally, when one of Trump's
first acts as President, in a room full of men, was to curtail women's
reproductive rights while Vladimir Putin has de-criminalised domestic
violence,
leadership from the UK on gender equality has never been so urgent.

Then there is the
triggering of Article 50 and a Government white paper that failed to even
mention the word equality.

The prospect of the UK
becoming a deregulated off shore tax haven, free from EU treaties and law
does
not bode well for women.

Labour will make clear
during our budget next week that that we expect the government to
fundamentally
and structurally enable and promote economic equality for all
women.

Labour's economic aims
always have, and always will be, our social aims too.

Our new Economic
Equality Bill is the next step in realising this.

Labour is committed to
overturning a rigged economic system that sees women bearing the brunt of
failed austerity.

Labour has committed to
producing a gender impact analysis alongside all of our financial statements
in
government.

Historically, I am
extremely proud that that almost every major piece of legislation that has
improved the lives of working women has been introduced by a Labour
Government.

It was a Labour
Government who introduced legislative protections for women under the Equal
Pay
Act, the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equality Act.

Labour were the first
administration since the Second World War to accept state responsibility for
developing childcare policy, and we introduced paternity leave and increased
maternity leave. Labour brought in Sure Start centres, working tax credits
and
all-women shortlists, and we have more women MPs than all the other parties
in
the House combined.

And it is Labour who are
now at the forefront of challenging the government on their abysmal record on
gender economic equality and it is Labour who are taking the lead on working
to
develop in government, a budget that works for all.

Public want paedophiles dealt with properly – Diane Abbott

Diane

Abbott MP, Labour's Shadow Home Secretary, speaking in response to remarks
from Chief Constable Bailey, said:

"These
comments are deeply troubling. The public are

right to demand that this crime is treated with the utmost seriousness.

“Talk of police forces who ‘cannot cope’ will fuel concerns that this is motivated by lack of resources.

“Labour has repeatedly warned about the consequences of Tory cuts to the police budget and to overall police numbers.

“It’s not good enough for ministers to say that they expect these crimes to be investigated properly, when their cuts are placing the police in an impossible position.”

Ends

**Notes
to editors**

– Reports of Chief Constable Stephen Bailey’s remarks are here
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-39112911>

– Since 2009 total police officer numbers have fallen by 20,000

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36857326>

[Rebecca Long-Bailey responds to reports that Sir Philip Green has agreed to pay £363m into BHS pension fund](#)

Rebecca

Long-Bailey MP, Labour’s Shadow Business Secretary, commenting on reports that Sir Philip Green has agreed to pay £363m into the BHS pension fund, said:

“The 20,000 members of BHS’s troubled pension scheme will no doubt be relieved to see almost a year of uncertainty come one step closer to resolution. But this

deal falls far short of justice being done.

“The £363m contribution – a capitulation to months of pressure, despite his claim that it is voluntary – is peanuts to billionaire Sir Philip, yet will leave an outstanding hole of £200m in the pension scheme.”

If the Chancellor has no plans to cut top rate of tax to 40p he can simply put the record straight – John McDonnell

John

McDonnell MP, Labour’s Shadow Chancellor, responding to Philip Hammond’s refusal at Treasury Questions today to rule out cutting the top rate of tax from 45p to 40p in next week Budget, said:

“It is alarming that the Chancellor is happy to admit he is prepared to continue with brutal cuts to disability payments next week, but he won’t rule out further unfair tax giveaways to a wealthy few such as cutting the top rate of tax. When he is slashing public services in this parliament how can he not rule out another handout to the wealthy?

“Philip Hammond has shown that he is prepared to follow on with George Osborne’s failed austerity cuts, and it looks like he could go even further than his predecessor with the tax giveaways to a wealthy few – paid for on the backs of the disabled and the poor.

“It is very simple, if the Chancellor has no plans to cut the top rate of tax to 40p in this parliament then he can simply put the record straight.”