

Please see below the text of a press release which went out yesterday Tuesday 13 April 2010 following the discussion we had at the Fairplay South West meeting on Monday

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The Conservatives have betrayed women workers by abandoning key parts of equality legislation, according to campaign group Fair Play South West.

As the party today (Tuesday) launches its general election manifesto – which contains 28 chapters, none of which is on equality – the regional body accuses the Tories of caring more about business than equality after a local MP admitted his party would scrap plans to bring about equal pay in the workplace.

Speaking in Parliament last week, Forest of Dean MP Mark Harper said the Conservatives would not implement three parts of the newly-passed Equality Act: a law to narrow the gap between rich and poor, a law to allow employers to take positive action and a law to close the gender pay gap.

His remarks infuriated members of Fair Play South West (FPSW), whose chair Jackie Longworth said: “These comments expose the Conservatives’ true colours regarding equality – their policies are shaped by businesses who seek to benefit from a lack of legislation rather than the victims of discrimination these laws are supposed to protect.”

Although disappointed with all three potential exemptions, FPSW’s main objection is the remarks on equal pay because the Conservatives say they will not implement a clause in the Act that requires employers to measure and publish their gender pay gap. If you don't measure it how can you change it?

Jackie Longworth said: “Women routinely earn as much as 30% less than men in some areas of the South West, yet if we don’t know how much our colleagues are being paid, how are we to challenge our employer and hold them to account over equal pay?”

“The Conservatives are on the employers’ side in all this. By refusing to implement this law they are presenting employers with a get-out clause and, at one stroke, betraying women workers.”

Jackie added: " The Government has steered this legislation through the Commons and Lords and got agreement, apparently, from all parties. It is only at the last moment that the Tories have said they won't implement bits important to women, despite having voted for it!"

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Notes to editors: Mark Harper's comments are available online at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100406/debtext/100406-0022.htm#1004073000170>

FPSW represents women in the South West by running the gender equality network and its events.

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