



WE Party Conference

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Title: Update the Equality Act to include socio-economic status as a protected characteristic

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Type of motion: Policy Motion



Motion text:

1 WE call upon the Westminster government to update the Equality Act 2010¹ to include 'socio-
2 economic status' as a protected characteristic through the introduction of a Socio-Economic Status
3 bill in Parliament.

4 At present there are nine characteristics which are protected under the Equality Act 2010. Socio-
5 Economic status was due to be included in the Equality Act under Part 1 but was not enacted by
6 the Conservative Party². Socio-Economic Status would be established and defined in legal cases
7 brought under the Equality Act, using a comprehensive list of indicators of socio-economic position
8 using precedents from health and sociological research and those used by the Office of National
9 Statistics, such as systems outlined by Galobardes, Shaw, Lawlor, Lynch & Smith and Rose,
10 Pevalin & O'Reilly.

Motion rationale:

11 Updating the Equality Act to include socio-economic status will have a vast impact – both legally
12 and culturally – on women's lives, as women experience more societal discrimination, making
13 class status even harder to overcome. Having 'socio-economic status' as a protected
14 characteristic puts class status on the table as something which should be discussed and
15 considered, helping us to critique systemic classism and institutions that are still part of the 'old
16 boys' club'. Occupational segregation overwhelmingly affects women. For example, in the NHS
17 women make up 89% of nurses and 90% of support staff³ – roles which pay lower wages. Having
18 a law that rigorously considers the effect of socio-economic status on our society will mean that
19 women who are at a higher risk of experiencing socio-economic discrimination will receive support
20 both legally and culturally.

21 This motion also has the potential to impact positively on other areas of discrimination such as
22 race and is vital to our commitment as a party to an intersectional feminist approach. If you have a
23 low socio-economic status, this compounds other protected characteristics and creates further
24 barriers. This change in law will help race relations amongst the working classes because it will
25 highlight the intersectional difference between someone systemically disadvantaged due to their
26 socio-economic status and because of their race – something that is often blurred in discussions
27 about 'gang culture' or 'urban communities'.

28 Under the existing Equality Act legislation, it is illegal to discriminate, harass or victimise someone
29 on the basis of that characteristic and reasonable adjustments should be made to accommodate a
30 protected characteristic. Many of these characteristics are not instantly definable, particularly in the
31 case of disability discrimination – which does not allow for you to self-identify as being disabled but
32 requires you to prove it⁴. There are several methods already in use by the Office of National
33 Statistics⁵ and the health service⁶ that allow for defining someone's socio-economic status and
34 would allow someone to prove discrimination, or a lack of reasonable adjustments. Moreover, in
35 the way that the current act does not allow for someone of a race that is over represented in a
36 sector to sue for discrimination when positive action is being taken to redress the balance,
37 someone could not claim they were being discriminated against because of their higher socio-
38 economic status when an organisation took steps to assist people from lower socio-economic
39 backgrounds.



40 Natalie Gil said “Class can't be divorced from gender and ethnicity – black and minority ethnic
41 workers are far more likely to be trapped in insecure work, while women bear the brunt of
42 government cuts and both groups have lost out more than white men thanks to austerity.”⁷ It is
43 clear that in order to combat gender inequality, the Women’s Equality Party must embrace
44 eradicating socio-economic discrimination as well.

References:

1 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

2 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2010/nov/17/theresa-may-scraps-legal-requirement-inequality>

3 <https://digital.nhs.uk/news-and-events/latest-news/narrowing-of-nhs-gender-divide-but-men-still-the-majority-in-senior-roles>

4 https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David_Pevalin/publication/312200977_The_National_Statistics_Socio-economic_Classification_Origins_Development_and_Use/links/58762d9308aebf17d3b972e6/The-National-Statistics-Socio-economic-Classification-Origins-Development-and-Use.pdf

5 [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(16\)32380-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(16)32380-7)

6 <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/discrimination/protected-characteristics/what-counts-as-disability/>

7 <https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/2019/05/231291/how-social-class-affects-uk-women>