

TEN YEARS ON

Fabian
Women's
Network

**Speech by Seema Malhotra, President and
Founder of the Fabian Women's Network**

**FABIAN
WOMEN**

ABOUT THE FABIAN WOMEN'S NETWORK

The Fabian Women's Network exists as a thriving network for women to achieve social and political change and to participate in public life. The Network was founded in January 2005 by Seema Malhotra, and since has developed a high-impact events programme, founded its own magazine, *Fabiana*, and, in 2011, launched a ground-breaking mentoring programme for women aspiring to careers in politics and public life. The Fabian Women's Network is a wing of the Fabian Society run by a committee of volunteers, and membership is automatic for all the Society's women members.

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The Fabian Society is Britain's oldest political think tank. Founded in 1884, the Society is at the forefront of developing political ideas and public policy on the left. The Society is alone among think-tanks in being a democratically constituted membership organisation, with almost 7,000 members. The Society was one of the original founders of the Labour Party and is constitutionally affiliated to the Party. It is, however, editorially, organisationally and financially independent and works with a wide range of partners from all political persuasions and none.

The Young Fabians are the under-31 section of the Fabian Society. Founded in 1960, it is Britain's only think-tank run by young people for young people. The Young Fabians are a voluntary body led by an elected executive committee, and it is affiliated to, but separate from, the Labour Party and has formal representation on the Young Labour National Committee. Membership encompasses the broad church of the Labour Movement, and the organisation takes no formal positions and values its commitment to working with all strands of Labour thought.

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1

WHY IT MATTERS

IVANA BARTOLETTI, *Chair, Fabian Womens Network*

I feel very privileged to chair the Fabian Women's Network in these fascinating times: women are still making advances in every country and in every sector. Over the past decade a lot has been achieved in terms of women's rights and many other aspects of society. The next President of the US might be Hillary Clinton; the chief of EU foreign policy is Federica Mogherini, preceded by Baroness Ashton. Young women like Malala Yousafzei inspire millions across the globe and so do leaders like the President of Chile, Michele Bachelet. Female scientists, lawyers and judges are reaching the top, and boardrooms of large companies are – slowly – becoming more diverse. All this is happening, and it is thrilling.

However – there is another side, a much darker one.

Since The Great Recession hit in 2008, the 1% have only grown richer while the rest find life increasingly tough. The gap between the haves and the have-nots has widened. And women are at the sharp end of this. When the public sector shrinks, when inequality surges, and when policies are pursued that do nothing to tackle this, then women bear the brunt. It has happened in our country, where 52% of the UK population – women – have been hit by 85% of the pain. At the very same time, the wealthiest have received tax cuts.

This is why *now more than ever before*, the feminist movement is bound up with the need for a radical agenda to tackle the unequal distribution of wealth, power and resources more generally. And now, more than ever, the energy required to fight the global challenges we are facing is located in the stamina, radicalism and innovation of the feminist agenda.

Feminism has always been about transformation – be it in the family or more widely. It has always been about revolutionising the traditional hierarchies and shaking up

societies. Politics needs that energy now to challenge the way we have been doing things over the last decades. **Business as usual is no longer an option.** With houses now treated as commodities and not homes for people to live in; with our high streets hollowed out by international corporations – being the only ones that can afford the sky high rents; with the younger generation struggling for any sense of security or achievement – the rules of the game need to change. Not by invoking isolationism, shutting the doors to the rest of the world and blaming globalisation (or immigration) for where we have got to.

Quite the contrary. The changes we need require a global approach, and the courage to affirm that an economy works where work – and its dignity – are at its very heart. It requires the energy to turn our State into an enabler of growth, an entrepreneur able to support innovation and research. Most important, it needs to make work pay for everybody so that people's money can go further at the end of the month.

Let me say again that feminism is meshed with all the above – To me, feminist policy in modern times is about a radical transformation of the allocation of power, whether that is in families, institutions, the media or the wider economy. It has many parallels with the Left's ambition to reform the distribution of power, be it economic, cultural or political, by giving far more of it to the people. And more than anything, power means presence – in workplaces, in politics and in society. Power means upskilling those thousands of people – including a great many women – who have been hit by the growing impact of technology, so that they win back their place in the market. Having more women in company boardrooms is not just about recognising that 52 per cent of the population is female. It is about embracing a new culture of corporate governance, less focused on high risk and more orientated towards long-term stability and sustainable growth. Having more women in politics, likewise, is about changing the way we do things and the way we run our institutions.

Finally, power means retrieving control over women's bodies. The Labour party should work with campaigners to put a stop to the hyper-sexualisation of our society, which for

women and arguably men too has gone from a liberating starting point to become a new all-ervasive form of slavery that we are forced into from an earlier age every year. Even unborn babies have now joined the newspaper galleries of celebrity flesh, in the cult of exposure.

It is not by chance that the issue of power over our own bodies is the topic which has most galvanised younger generations of women.

This is why the Fabian Women's Network is important – because it is no longer about “women's” policies, women's stuff. It is about what we need to make the economy and society work so we can enthuse people to believe politics can still achieve and change the world for the better.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORING

CHRISTINE MEGSON, *Mentoring Programme Coordinator*

“A lot of people have gone further than they thought they could because someone else thought they could.” – Unknown

The FWN Mentoring programme was launched in 2011 on International Women’s Day. The aims of the scheme are to increase women’s political understanding and confidence, increase the impact and influence of women in politics and public life, and increase their networks.

Over four cohorts, one hundred amazing women have completed the programme. Over ten months they received mentoring, as well as taking part in organised training and networking activities. The scheme includes spending time in Parliament, in Brussels and on a residential, focussing on the core skills required to be effective in public or parliamentary life. The programme has attracted women from 20 to 58 years old, from a wide variety of ethnic groups, who are employed across public, private and third sectors. Our mentors are drawn from female MPs, Peers, Trade Union Officials, senior in public and political life; they provide incredible personal and professional support and challenge.

What distinguishes this programme from other mentoring programmes is the peer mentoring aspect: women in each cohort work together as a group and this endorsement is powerful. Women are inspired by others acting as role models and supported to achieve. The real strength of the programme lies in the mentees and their openness to maximising every opportunity we give them. At the end of each year, women identify what other kind of support they might need and then create further opportunities for the whole group.

The programme has already delivered some incredible results for its participants and the Fabian Women’s Network. Six women are PPCs in this election and nine others ran or were shortlisted. 21 women have been selected as councillors and taken up significant local cabinet roles; a number of

women have gone on to become school governors, trustees and directors on national boards. Many have been elected onto the Fabian Women's Network executive committee to support other women to achieve. The majority have gained promotion, been nominated for awards and written or spoken in national media. We have regular reports that former mentees are speaking at a Washington peace conference or at the NATO future leaders' programme; that a mentee has been appointed to a senior role at *The Guardian*, *Which?* or the Cabinet Office. Many are involved in significant research in the UK or internationally. The list goes on and makes compelling reading.

"Being part of the FWN mentoring scheme taught me that if you want to see progress and change, you have to be part of that yourself. The scheme points to the glass ceiling and hands you the hammer to break it down."

"The mentoring scheme helps to challenge you - both in your professional ambitions and those assumptions you have made about what you are capable of. It has enabled me to begin to plot a way forward whilst learning from a group of talented and amazing women on the way.'

"The FWN mentoring programme has given me the confidence to push myself further than I thought I could - and not just in politics."

"A year on, I'm substantively more active in both political and public life, and have a network of supportive and knowledgeable women whose insight and expertise I can draw on."

"The FWN programme has found a way to support women from across the country, from across differences in faith, ethnicity, age, sexuality and class and given us the tools to make our voices count."

"The scheme constantly creates new cohorts of admirable women, from all walks of life, who become eagerly enthused to enforce some form of change in a public space, in line with their own niche goals."

“The Fabian mentoring programme has been a key element of my political education. As I said to one of the organisers during one of our sessions, ‘If not us, then who? If not now, then when??’ It’s our time, it’s our turn.”

A note from our partner

I have run the external evaluation of the Fabian Women’s Network’s mentoring and political education programme, with Professor Joni Lovenduski, since 2012. The scheme is an exemplar of best practice in the training and recruitment of women for public and political life. The participants’ overwhelmingly positive feedback, is testament to this. The fact that the programme is run by experienced leaders (Christine Megson, Caroline Adams and Seema Malhotra MP) and receives support from high ranking politicians is crucial to its success. The programme has been thoughtfully designed to enhance the participants’ skills base using a bespoke political skills framework and a comprehensive self-monitoring and evaluation process. Analysis of the self-evaluation exercises demonstrates a step change in the participants’ ratings of their own skills and abilities as a result of the programme generating a crucial boost to their self-confidence.

DR ROSIE CAMPBELL, Reader in Politics (Birkbeck University of London)

3 FABIAN WOMEN'S NETWORK 10 YEARS ON: A STORY OF WOMEN, POLITICS AND POWER

SEEMA MALHOTRA MP, *Chair of the Fabian Society and
President of the Fabian Women's Network*

Speech at 10th Anniversary of the FWN, 10 February 2015

Introduction

Thank you Yvette for your kind introduction, and for your support to me personally and to the Fabian Women's Network.

I am incredibly proud to be here today and to be marking the 10th Anniversary of the Fabian Women's Network with so many FWN friends and supporters

It's a moment to reflect on how far we have come, and put some markers down for the journey ahead.

Let me put on record our thanks for all the support over the years from Fabian staff:

Andrew Harrop, Marcus Roberts, Felicity Slater, Giles Wright and the team at the Fabians today, and former General Secretary Sunder Katwala, who was instrumental at the start.

Past and present members of the Fabian Society Executive have also been on the journey with us, and a special thank you to Jessica Asato. And another special mention goes to Barbara Follett who has been a rock of support since day one.

To leaders and general secretaries of the Labour party – and particularly to Ed Miliband and Iain McNicol over the last few years who have always gone the extra mile for us.

We also have an amazing Fabian Women's Network Executive – all volunteers who work incredibly hard and I particularly want to thank the Chair Ivana Bartoletti, Sara Hyde, Claire Leigh and Reema Patel who have shown incredible patience to help make today happen.

Tonight I would also like to thank our sponsors Canary Wharf PLC and Punjab National Bank – along with past sponsors for their support for FWN.

Your support is what makes all the difference and we really appreciate it.

The context

I want to start by recognising why we are all here.

It is because we believe in the fundamental issue of women's representation and women's voices being heard in politics and public life.

We know Britain has a gender problem.

Women form 51% of the population, but are woefully under-represented in the spheres of power – socially, economically and politically.

Women form 23% of FTSE 100 directors, and 17% of FTSE 250 Directors.

Women remain poorly represented in most senior managerial positions (32%), form around 27% of police officers and around 21% of professors, and 8% of justices of the Supreme Court.

Women's **pay** is still unequal to men's. Women today still earn just 80p for every male-earned pound, 45 years after Labour's Barbara Castle, who joined the Fabian Society in 1941, passed the Equal Pay Act.

And that's why I'm proud that Labour is backing Sarah Champion MP's Ten Minute Rule Bill demanding that large companies show their commitment to equal pay for

men and women through publishing their gender pay gap. Parliament voted in favour of her measures for pay transparency in December but the Government has so-far refused to implement it.¹

Representation

Arguably devolution has been good for women.

Women (led by Labour) form 50% of Welsh Assembly Members and 35% of the Scottish Parliament. Women form 32% of the London Assembly, and 41% of UK MEPs.

But after the Northern Ireland Assembly at 19% women, Westminster has the worst record of all.

Women form 23% of MPs.

Internationally, we rank 74th out of 190 countries for women in Parliament.

Yes, it was worse not so long ago. Prior to 1987 women had never made up more than 5% of MPs.

We have 650 MPs today. Yet only 370 women have ever been elected to Parliament – **in total**. (I was the 366th.)

As the old saying goes “Altogether, when we talk about women & politics, women remain just a blip on the male political landscape” (Reynolds 1999).²

AWS changed things

Now it is true that historically women found it difficult to be adopted as candidates by the main UK political parties, and when they did find a seat it was likely to be less winnable than those for which men were selected.

¹ This speech was made on 10th February 2015. In March, the coalition government announced that it would indeed require large companies to publish their gender pay gap, which Labour’s legislation provides for.

² Reynolds, Andrew (1999). “Women in the Legislatures and Executives of the World: Knocking at the Highest Glass Ceiling,” *World Politics* 51(4): 547-72

In the last two general elections, all-women shortlists have broken down the association of candidates' gender and seat marginality.

But the political statistics highlight some interesting points. Representation of women in devolved assemblies is higher than in Westminster,

And whilst the number of women MPs has increased in Westminster, representation at the most senior level has decreased.

Five women currently hold Cabinet positions. (14%). The highest number of female ministers concurrently in the Cabinet ever was **eight**, in 2007.

What matters is not just representation – but women's access to positions of power.

And it's significant that we have around 45% women in Labour's Shadow Cabinet – should Labour win in May, it will be the most gender-balanced government that Britain has ever seen.

Engagement of women

But the involvement of women in politics is also about attitudes to engagement.

Positively, when questioned on whether voting is a civic duty,³ findings from the British Social Attitudes Survey reveal that more women believe that it is a duty to vote than men.⁴

The latest round of the [British Election Study](#) (BES) asked around 30,000 respondents, "If there were a UK General Election tomorrow, how likely is it that you would vote?"

56% women said "very likely" compared to 63% men.

So we have an interesting paradox where more women than

³ respondents to the 2013 British Social Attitudes Survey

⁴ 63% of women stated that it is everyone's duty to vote compared with 58% of men.

men say people ought to vote, with more men than women saying they intend to do so.

The records show that there has been a higher turnout among men than among women in every election except 1997.

But the fact that women seem to have a stronger recognition of the civic duty to vote suggests that, to some extent, they experience obstacles and barriers to the practical act of casting a vote.

Anecdotally anyone who has been on the doorstep on polling day knows it can be that one of the kids is ill, or she's just got in after work and is cooking, and voting becomes one thing too many in the day. We need to understand what those obstacles are to voting. There are clues in research by the Electoral Commission that showed in areas piloting all-postal voting in May 2003, reported turnout among women was 13% higher than among men.

That is very important for Labour, because since the days of Margaret Thatcher women's support for Labour has been transformed.

Women have shifted decisively to Labour since the 1970s and since Thatcher and Major, when the Conservatives had much bigger leads among women than among men.

That changed in 1997, and in 2005 and 2010 women stayed with Labour as men switched away.

One argument is that Labour changed its appeal to women by electing more women MPs and councillors, and because Labour women have demanded and achieved more influence over policy and organisation.

A Brief History of Fabian Women

But the story of women's exclusion from politics is changing, and we can be positive when we look at how far we have come in the last 100 years.

There are still many women alive who would have been born before women got the right to vote in 1918.

The role of women in the Fabian Society is part of a bigger picture.

You know, of course, that Fabians founded the London School of Economics, and the New Statesman magazine.

That Fabians led by Beatrice Webb produced the Minority Report to the Poor Law Commission, which sounded the death knell for Victorian paternalism and helped to herald a welfare state based on the idea of social justice for all.

Fabians invented the idea of a National Health Service. We championed comprehensive education.

We pioneered the idea of a United Nations.

Our past members include George Bernard Shaw, Rupert Brooke, HG Wells, Emmeline Pankhurst, Virginia Woolf and Mahatma Gandhi, and as well as many of the first wave of post-colonial leaders around the world.

The Fabian Society is the powerhouse of progressive ideas, and our contribution to the twentieth century is unmatched. Women have been equal partners on that journey.

We know about the titanic contribution of Beatrice Webb. But alongside her, many other great women have played their part: from Annie Besant leading the Match Girls' Strike, to Rita Hinden's Fabian Colonial Bureau paving the way for independence across Africa and Asia, to my friend and Labour's Deputy Leader Harriet Harman's work over 30 years to place second-wave feminism in a modern political context.

Fabian women have written pamphlets on child labour, on school nurseries, on women's health and on equal pay, all decades before governments have taken action.

It is also noteworthy how international many of the Fabian women were:

Webb conducted study tours to China, Japan and notoriously Russia; Annie Besant ended up in India; Maud Pember Reeves started out in New Zealand where women got the vote in 1884, the year the Fabian Society began.

The First Fabian Women's Group 1908 – 1944

The first Fabian Women's Group was founded in 1908, at the height of the women's suffrage, when there were eight women members of the Fabian executive.

1908 was the year that Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, first woman to qualify as a physician, first woman elected to a school board, and first woman magistrate, was elected as the first woman mayor in Aldeburgh in Suffolk.

Her achievements highlight an important point. When the movie *Suffragette* appears later this year, with Meryl Streep and Helena Bonham Carter, filmed in part inside the Houses of Parliament, it will no doubt focus on the famous militancy of the women's suffrage movement: the window smashing, the fire bombs.

Yet behind the militancy was the quiet constitutionalism of the women who saw the opportunities to get elected to school boards and other local municipal forums.

The practical experience of women serving their communities in elected positions helped pave the way for Votes for Women.

When the first Fabian Women's Group began in 1908, it immediately concerned itself with the role of women, not only within the constitution, but also within society and within the economy.

Amongst the first acts of the Group was to commission William Morris's daughter May to create a banner in support of women's suffrage.

The Fabian banner appeared on five Votes for Women demonstrations in London in 1910 alone.

The Fabian Women's Group ran a voter registration campaign aimed at 100,000 women in London eligible to vote in the London County Council elections.

They organised a Citizenship Committee to stand candidates in borough elections on a platform of pure milk for mothers and babies.

Alongside this came the Fabian concern for the practical implications of policy: investigations followed into the role of diets on healthy childbirth, the treatment of women in prison, and the role of women in the professions.

This has always been our approach: women's political rights are meaningless unless they are matched by social and economic rights. A woman with the vote is not equal if she is subject to violence, poverty and exclusion from society.

We see this here at home, and around the world where women are denied the most basic of rights and opportunities. 'Equal Opportunities for Men and Women' was their adopted slogan – still our demand and desire a century later.

Launch of the FWN

The Fabian Women's Network in 2005 started out as an answer to a problem about the visibility of women in our public life, and the relationship between the bubble of Westminster and the world outside.

At a Fabian Executive meeting in 2004, we reviewed the number of women speaking on our panels and writing articles. It was a predictable story – about women speakers being “hard to find” and “not coming forward”.

However, we then found the Fabian Society had over 1500 women members, including over 70 women Members of Parliament, 15 Ministers and six Secretaries of State. (Today 174 male and 57 women Labour MPs are Fabians, and in the House of Lords 120 men and 33 women Peers are Fabians).

The problem wasn't the women; it was how we saw the women- it was how we invited the women to participate.

Our vision for the Fabian Women's Network then was of thriving network for social and political change, that would connect Fabian networks with Fabian Women Parliamentarians and provide new ways in which women from all backgrounds and sectors could engage in topical policy debates.

FWN was launched by Cherie Blair QC, who has remained a huge support, and other speakers including Harriet Harman, whom I remember calling me on her way and saying in that brilliantly direct Harriet way "This is such a great idea, why on earth hasn't it happened before!."

New Wave of Feminism

And little did we realise quite how significant the timing was. We were at the start of the new wave of feminism; small groups beginning to kick off. The Fawcett Society was of course vibrant across the country, but not yet Netmums, Mumsnet, UK Feminista, One Billion Rising, Women's Parliamentary Radio, No More Page 3, Everyday Sexism - all had yet to appear.

Younger generations of women were starting to use the F word again.

And doing so with pride. As Yvette said at one of our receptions, feminism is back – and it was about time. This new generation of women were starting to approach politics with the awareness that they needed to stick together if they wanted to achieve.

That spirit of solidarity is growing stronger.

I want to just say a few words about One Billion Rising.

It is the biggest mass action to end violence against women. Launched on Valentine's Day 2012 by Eve Ensler and Lynne Franks, it began as a call to action based on the staggering statistic that 1 in 3 women on the planet will be beaten or raped during her lifetime. This adds up to more than one billion women and girls.

I was proud to be at the launch this morning of this year's One Billion Rising, and on Saturday will be joining the crowds in London to "strike, dance, and RISE in defiance of the injustices women suffer, demanding an end at last to violence against women." If you haven't yet made plans, then I hope you will come along too to Marble Arch at noon.

I may also take a moment to pay tribute to the work of many Violence Against Women and Girls (domestic violence, forced marriage, FGM) campaigners here today from Plan UK, Daughters of Eve and other organisations and to say thank you for your extraordinary work.

What the FWN have achieved

So, returning to when we started FWN, our vision was of a space in which women from all backgrounds could be able to come together in a spirit of change, using the history and networks of the Fabian Society to deepen the connection of that space with political decision making.

We wanted to increase the visibility and impact of women in political debate and in changing local communities up and down the country.

We wanted a space that felt different, that invited women in and valued their time.

Over the last ten years, we have held events across the country. We have also worked extensively with the former EOC, the EHRC, Age UK, Carers UK and others, on women and pensions reform, the Women and Work Commission and trade unions.

We have campaigned on increasing the number of women in science, on disability, mental health, childcare; we have worked with other organisations and helped drive it high on the political agenda, and debated the progress of women on company boards.

We are also proud to have been part of the journey of what Labour in government achieved for women – the National Minimum Wage, 3,500 Sure Start Children's Centres, the

doubling of maternity pay and paternity leave. This week we have announced Fathers' Month – an extending of paternity leave from two weeks to four weeks.

On violence against women, we saw an increase in rape convictions under Labour and we strengthened the law on domestic violence, improving how the police, prosecutors and courts handle domestic violence cases. Today we remain concerned about the Government's chaotic funding and policy changes, implemented without evaluating their cumulative impact on women's safety.

But today something in our culture seems to be normalising gender-based violence. One in six teenagers in relationships say they've experienced sexual violence. One in three teenage girls say they've had to put up with unwanted groping or harassment in school itself.

That's why in addition to my role, led by Ed and Yvette, Labour plans to bring in a new Commissioner to tackle domestic and sexual violence, to integrate the protection of women and girls across government and bring in compulsory and age appropriate relationship and sex education in schools.

Fabiana

In 2012 we created Fabiana, a new online magazine, as a space for policy debate and discussion of new ideas.

We invited academics, think tanks and trade unions: female voices who do not always make the frontline, and yet are great innovators to put forward the new thinking our society needs.

We worked with IPPR, the New Economic Foundation and Cambridge Gender Studies to explore what feminism is today.

Mentoring Programme

And our political education and mentoring scheme is one of our most important achievements, set up by Christine Megson and myself. I want to acknowledge the work of Christine and Caroline Adams who now run the scheme day to day, and also Meg Munn MP who is Chair of our Advisory Group.

The MPs and peers and women in public life who act as mentors have made such a difference to the lives and achievements of the 100 women who have been through the programme to date.

Joni Lovenduski and Rosie Campbell wrote our evaluation report *Cracks in the Glass Ceiling* and were invaluable sounding boards in our early days.

100 women have been on the mentoring programme, aged 21-58, and have come from every region, and Scotland and Wales.

Six are standing as candidates in the General Election; 21 have been elected to local councils in the elections in May.

The learning from the early years of FWN, about political networks and women's engagement, was vital in designing a programme with the flexibility needed and support structures for women who would be a range of ages and from a range of backgrounds.

Women's lives change much more than men's, which tend to follow a more linear pattern. Keeping any programme sustainable would require flexibility and strong relationship building.

The 'political skills framework' was developed in response to early discussions about how to give the mentoring scheme purpose.

The programme was also started with a 10-year plan to grow FWN across the regions. We aspired to see a network of alumni that would stay connected with each other and lead their own initiatives for change, and use their relationships to grow FWN as local leaders closer to home. We have been absolutely delighted and quite overwhelmed by the self-starting nature of the intake so far.

Mentees have spoken at conferences in the UK and internationally and are organising many events for others including the highly effective Public Speaking Club in the House of Commons set up by Vicki Butler and Chloe Surowiec and run by FWN committee members Charlotte

Proudman and Paulina Jakubec, and launching the North West Fabian Women's Network. We remain hopeful that in the course of time, the balance between London and the regions will shift.

Recently we have also worked with the LGA to help achieve more female and BAME leaders in local government.

The ongoing under-representation of women

Representation is vital because we know that a diversity of experience and ideas makes for better decision making. Not just that, but research shows that, in general, male lawmakers are less likely to initiate and pass laws that serve women and children's interests.

In writing this speech, in many ways it was striking that not much has changed.

Women are still concerned about voter registration, campaigns to get women into the professions, concerns about childcare, nutrition and social exclusion.

But there is another important lesson from history which is about purpose. I use the example of the US vote on suffrage.

A movement that had united so many largely dissolved after the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920.

The US women's movement quickly declined after decades of organising because it no longer had a unifying goal.

People don't come together in politics because it's better than watching EastEnders. They come together to believe in the common project – because they believe in the change. So a network is powerful when it remains a network for change. Politics is powerful when it defines and builds a coalition of support around its purpose.

It's in that spirit that we continue to refresh, renew and stay relevant.

Conclusion

In 85 days we face a General Election.

If you want to see the cause of equality furthered, then you need a government for whom equality is the over-riding priority – and to be honest, that's why I'm Labour.

And if you want to see every woman in this country go and vote, then you should spread the word and play your part on polling day.

And equality goes beyond the vote. In 2005, commenting after the publication of Boni Sones's book "Women in Parliament: The New Suffragettes", Roy Greenslade, then media commentator of the Guardian, said:

"It is sobering to realise that the suffragettes' original demand was simply to have the vote. Some saw that as the end in itself, others as the first step on a long road towards genuine equality. Modern women MPs are still travelling down that road and are right to complain that their feet are sore."

So this is a moment to say a thankyou to the Fabian women of today, modern suffragettes who are part of that continued journey to equality.

And to close by saying if you aren't a member of the Fabian Society, and the Fabian Women's Network, the doors are open and we hope you will join us.

But the bigger issue is that what drove the Fabians' pioneering women to fight for equality one hundred years ago, is what motivates us here today, and what will inspire the next generations, until the fight is won.

Thank you.



**website <http://fabianwomen.org.uk/>
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Speech by Seema Malhotra, President and
Founder of Fabian Women's Network

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