

National Women's Conference 2024

- Venue: Brighton
- Date: 15-17th February 2024
- Delegate: Laurie Carter- Nottinghamshire branch.

I attended the National Women's Conference as a delegate for the first time this year. I wasn't sure what to expect when I initially expressed my interest, but I did know that there were certainly women's topics that I wanted to explore further, and this seemed to be the perfect way to do so. As I always like to end things on a positive note, so I'm going to start with the things that I didn't feel were so positive.

To start, here was a huge number of motions to get through and I felt many of these could have been grouped better, to avoid repetition. Also, when people are getting up to support the motions, at times there was 10+ women going up and I felt at times this appeared to be excessive, particularly as several of these women got up for almost every other motion too. Whilst I appreciate that they are likely to be passionate about the motions, because the same people got up time and time again, it meant that on occasion they stopped people from speaking and those who only got up to support one of two motions, missed out on their opportunity to speak, because someone who had spoken out in support of 15-20 other motions had got to the front of the queue. I felt this could have been managed better and because the motions are sent out in advance, women should only be allowed to pick the 3-5 most important motions to them, to allow everyone who wants to speak up, the opportunity to do so.

On the second day, I went to a workshop about the cost of living crisis. There were a few people who arrived 1-2 mins late but, the main facilitator (a lady called Polly) wanted to start before the 9:30am start time. This resulted in her being quite rude to those people arriving from 9:28am and she began to tut and be rude to people telling them they were late (they weren't, as it wasn't quite 9:30).

There were lots of lots of acronyms used over the course of the 3 days and whilst there was information in the packs sent out to delegates in the post in advance of the conference, we didn't need to carry them around all day. I would have been helpful if they didn't use or at least said what they meant and then used acronyms, especially for those of us who were first timers.

Finally, in terms of the not so positives, I did find that lots of women had their own agenda to push. There was one East Midlands delegate (I didn't catch her name, but she led the strikes for Ashfield academy in Leicestershire) who was quite pushy about what's happening in Palestine. I'm not saying she is wrong to support it, it's a valid concern and anyone would be hard pushed to disagree with her however, I felt it was incredibly rude when people were talking about other motions and her (whilst encouraging several others) shouting 'free, free Palestine' took away from the motion that was being discussed, which were likely a very important topics for others in the room. There had also been a motion on the women of Gaza discussed as an emergency motion, so there had already been opportunity on day one, for her to share her views on this and she did go up to speak in support of it. On the final day, she staged a mini protest in the middle of an MP speaking to us, which I felt was incredibly rude of her.

The positives however, far outweighed the few negatives above. I met some inspiring women, and I heard some inspiring stories. The presentation in the cost of living crisis workshop provided a useful insight into how we might combat it. I particularly enjoyed hearing motions on new rights for pregnant workers and new parents and paid leave for pregnancy loss and end of pregnancy. Christina McAnea gave a powerful speech and there was a shadow labour MP (I'm sorry I don't recall her name) who spoke to us on the Saturday morning, and it was really interesting to hear the labour manifesto and how they intend women and children moving forward.

It was an enlightening 3 days, in a place I have never visited before, so it was also nice to visit and explore a new place. I would be keen to attend another conference in the future and, it has inspired me to become more involved with my own union branch, so I have since made enquiries about being a women's officer.

I just want to take this opportunity to thank the branch for agreeing for me to attend and covering the costs associated with this and I hope I have another opportunity to attend in the future.

Laurie Carter- Nottinghamshire delegate.