



National Assembly of Women Annual Report 2010-11

The National Assembly of Women was founded in 1952 to work for full social, economic, legal, political and cultural independence and equality for women irrespective of age, race, religion, philosophical belief, sexual orientation or nationality. These aims, of course, can only be fully achieved in a world at peace and to this end we campaign for an end to nuclear weapons and militarism.

From the President



Since our last AGM we had a change of government. The new Con/Dem coalition with their old policies and ideas wasted no time in leading the political attack on women. Some of the key casualties are:

- National Women's Commission abolished
- they set a budget that disproportionately affects women and children
- they attacked pensions particularly through the increase in women's State Pension age
- pay freezes and cuts in services
- ... and the list goes on.

Last year I told the AGM that there would be many challenges ahead for us all – and some of those challenges have got even bigger. These included the NAW having to operate without the wonderful organising skills of our Secretary Val Duncan due to illness. Val is on the road to recovery and we wish her a full and speedy one. Thanks to the Executive for their time and commitment, representing NAW on your behalf at home and abroad.

Barbara Switzer and I attended a conference in Portugal in May hosted by the MDM, and EC member Janette Ferguson and I were privileged to go to Mozambique for the WIDF steering committee to help prepare for the WIDF world conference in Brazil in November 2011.

This year our AGM guest speaker from Greece will discuss the effects of the economic crisis in Europe, one not brought on by workers or the women of Europe. I look forward to seeing you all there again. Don't forget your pledge to bring along at least one other member to engage with other wonderful, resourceful and like-minded women.

President Dona Feltham
Secretary Valerie Duncan
Treasurer Eleanor Lewington
Executive Committee.

Margaret Boyle, Megan Dobney, Janette Ferguson, Pam Flynn, Rose Keeping, Dr. Ute Navidi, Barbara White

Vice Presidents: Vera Baird QC, Rita Donaghy CBE, Pat Hawkes MBE, Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, Alice Mahon, Terry Marsland, Gloria Mills CBE, Baroness Margaret Prosser

Executive Committee Meetings

There were five EC meetings during the year, held in London, Manchester and at Wortley Hall.

In addition a working group was set up to plan a 60th Anniversary event at Wortley Hall in July 2012

Branch Activity

The West London and South Yorkshire branches meet and arrange speakers on a regular basis. South Yorkshire branch has covered topics including Trident, asylum seekers, international garment workers, and the cuts.

Sisters

Four issues of Sisters were published during the year reflecting the work and campaigns of the NAW. In addition a report of the 2010 AGM was circulated to all members, as was the Annual Report.

Website

Judging from the large increase in emails from organisations and people doing research projects the web site is being accessed frequently. The number of hits to date is 404. A regular input from West London and South Yorkshire branches would be welcome. Over the months leading up to the 60th anniversary, a gallery of photographs and cards of significant events will be developed and Sisters will be catalogued for archiving in the Women's Library as well as on the web site. So please hang on to any material you may have to fill in any gaps.

www.sisters.org.uk

NATIONAL CAMPAIGNS

Since the NAW AGM in April 2010 our national work has concentrated on the following areas:

PUBLIC SERVICE CUTS

Our AGM in 2010 carried a resolution opposing public sector cuts, recognising that cuts would have a greater impact on women as public sector workers and users of public services. Since last April, we have done all we can to expose the real impact on women of the savage cuts, mobilise women to oppose them and supported other organisations in their campaigns.

We highlighted different aspects of the cuts in each edition of Sisters and prepared a briefing for debate at the Charter for Women Conference which showed how women would carry 72% of the cuts. We recently put together a short Pensions campaign leaflet showing how much individual women aged between 54 and 57 years would have to stump up if the ConDem government gets away with punitive increases to women's state pension age, thought up by George Osborne over a cup of coffee last June just a month after signing up to a Coalition Agreement promising no further increases until after 2020.

The terms of the deal for coalition between the Tories and the Liberal Democrats, ie that fairness in sharing the pain would be the driving moral force of the government, is not just toe-curlingly funny, but represents a great weapon for the left. Fine we say, you asked to be judged on the "fair" criterion and here it is; you aren't doing it and you can't do it. Cuts don't hit the rich and powerful, they hit the poorer and vulnerable.

Odd that Dave and Nick didn't spot that. We were delighted when Fawcett challenged the government's failure to carry out a gender impact assessment of its budget and even more delighted when it succeeded in forcing a belated, though incomplete, assessment out of the government. The NAW followed this with a formal complaint to the Equality and Human Rights Commission about the government's failure to gender proof its policies and we were glad to see the EHRC start a formal review of the Treasury's actions in November 2010.

CHARTER FOR WOMEN CONFERENCE

Charter for Women delegates met in London in October 2010 to assess the impact on women and children of the Coalition government's onslaughts. The Conference was chaired by historian Mary Davis, who said that the Coalition is the worst government since 1815 in its impact on working people.

Angela Eagle, Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, showed how the deficit, so often cited as the reason for the Slash and Burn approach that is upon us, is actually a chimera. 'It is all rubbish', she said, 'the need not to frighten the bond markets is a non-existent problem, for which the solution is to do extreme things'.

Sharon Allen Secretary of the Charter for Women Steering Group reminded us that the welfare state was created when the UK was bankrupt after two world wars in 20 years and debt was more than 100% of GDP.

The ghosts of the 1834 Poor Laws are with us, concepts of the deserving and undeserving poor are creeping in, demonising those receiving welfare benefits. This is a grim scenario which we must organise against.

ABORTION RIGHTS

NAW is affiliated to Abortion Rights. There is a real risk that cuts to public services and spending together with the radical restructuring of the NHS will threaten access to abortion services. Already there are alarming signs that reproductive health services are being reprioritised with independent advisory groups on teenage pregnancy and sexual health falling victim to the so-called 'Bonfire of the Quangos'.

NUCLEAR ENERGY AND UK ENERGY POLICY

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities movement are highlighting with concern the development of floating offshore nuclear plants in Russia, and underwater nuclear power stations being designed for use by France. Politicians of all parties are being informed.

TUC CONFERENCE A Future for Civil Society

In early February, NAW joined more than 100 delegates to this important conference, bringing together representatives from trade unions and voluntary and community sector organisations to look at the impact on civil society organisations of the Government's package of spending cuts, welfare and public service reform. The conference set out a vision for the future of civil society and identified ways in which unions and voluntary and community organisations can work together to achieve this. The aim is to build a strong and diverse alliance to put pressure on coalition MPs in their constituencies and at national level.

NAW – working within other organisations

Women's National Commission (WNC)

In October 2010, NAW was notified by WNC Chair Baroness Joyce Gould that the decision had been taken to close WNC with effect from 31 December 2010. The intention, it seems, is that some of the functions of WNC will be delivered centrally through the Government Equalities Office (GEO), and that the Government will change how it communicates with women in the future. This smacks of a government that, when it does not like the messages, shoots the messenger! WNC was never a campaigning organisation but was a well respected consultative body which prepared and presented views of partners and made recommendations to government.

WNC estimated its partnership at around eight million women's voices at the point of its abolition. In the Legacy Document published last December, Gould said: 'We maintained – and strengthened – the tradition of providing a trusted, cohesive position for government. The need for this dedicated machinery remains necessary in the 21st century because women still lack an equal voice in our democratic institutions, in public discourse through the media and elsewhere, and in senior decision-making forums.' WNC commissioners set up a facebook site for former partners and friends to network, and for organisations to offer a critical challenge to government:

www.facebook.com/#!/pages/The-Phoenix-Womens-National-Commission-lives-on/165822453459607

Women's International Democratic Organisation (WIDF)

Regular updates on WIDF activities are received via the electronic WIDF Google network from the President and Secretary. Individual affiliates in Japan (KDYU), North Korea, League of Lebanese Women and occasionally Greece report on events in their countries; more recently African affiliates have started doing the same. An NAW response and/or support is given as required. WIDF held an International Seminar at the Committee on Status of Women in New York in March for the celebration of the 100th Anniversary of International Women's Day.

Our President and Barbara Switzer attended the MDM biennial conference in Portugal. In her contribution Dona highlighted the priorities of the European Manifesto and how it was used in the UK. The report was circulated and well received. She dealt with the campaigning issues in the Charter for Women and concluded with a summary of the financial situation in the UK, laying the fault with banks. Read the full report in Sisters (winter edition). Dona and EC member Janette Ferguson attended the WIDF Steering Committee in Mozambique, alongside representatives from most African nations, UK, Portugal, Greece, Palestine, Jordan, Cuba, Columbia, North Korea, Vietnam and India. Sadly, European WIDF President Skevi Koukuomas was unable to attend.

The key task of the meeting was to determine the programme and activities for the WIDF Congress in Brazil in November 2011. Discussion focused on the proposed themes: Imperialist aggression and occupation and its challenge; World peace; Capitalist crisis and its impact on women, Climate change and food security; Women's approach to equality, development and peace; and Approaches to cultural, ethnic and racial diversity. Members of the NAW Executive are developing our input to these themes. For a report, see the spring edition of Sisters.

Unfortunately, the WIDF website, though accessible, appears to be stagnant since the 2007 congress in Venezuela. Barbara Switzer is trying to clarify the position. Our accounts show that our international involvement takes a large slice of our funds. The EC hopes to send a full delegation to the Congress in November, and if it is to meet its obligation as members of the WIDF Executive Committee and attend its meetings, substantial fund raising will be necessary to make this possible.

UN Women - new agency begins work

In the last annual report, we welcomed the resolution of the UN to create a strong women's agency headed by an Under Secretary. UN Women, the United Nations organisation dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women, officially began work on 1 January 2011. This ambitious new organisation consolidates and scales up UN actions to achieve gender equality, offering the promise of accelerated progress in realising the rights of women worldwide. Michelle Bachelet, formerly President of Chile, is its first Executive Director.

UN Women emerged from agreement by UN Member States — backed by strong advocacy from the global women's movement — that more must be done so women can claim equal rights and opportunities. The new agency merges and builds on four parts of the UN system including the Division for the Advancement of Women and the UN Development Fund for Women. As a global champion for women, UN Women will work with UN Member States to agree on international standards for gender equality, and help countries implement them, and assist other UN agencies engaged with a broad spectrum of development issues to integrate gender equality priorities in their activities. UN Women will also work closely with civil society partners.

Gender equality is a basic human right and has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women fuels thriving economies, for example, spurring productivity and growth.

NAW ACCOUNTS for 1/1/10 to 31/12/10

Balance brought forward from 2009	£7352.70
Membership	2690.00
Affiliations	325.00
Donations	1048.84
AGM	1939.00
Sales	199.75
Bank Interest	9.34
Total Income	£13,564.63
Income in 2010	£6211.93

EXPENDITURE

EC travel	1281.30
Other Travel	260.40
Post	375.94
Telephone	179.17
Stationery	149.53
Sisters	282.90
Printing	88.00
Website	405.75
Affiliations	255.00
Donations	50.00
Room Hire	12.00
Stalls	175.50
Adverts	50.00
AGM	2432.70
Delegations	2779.22
Miscellaneous	301.98
Expenditure 2010	£9079.39
Balance c/f to 2011	£ 4,485.24

Treasurer's comments

IN the financial year 2010, we have spent more than our income. The main reason for this is that we had to two international delegations, one to Portugal and one to Mozambique.

We will need to do some serious fundraising this year as we intend to send a full delegation to the WIDF congress in Brazil, as well as to fund a celebration of our 60th (diamond) anniversary in 2012.

Affiliations

The NAW is affiliated to Abortion Rights, Campaign Against the Arms Trade, CND, Charter for Women, Campaign for Press & Broadcasting Freedom, Cuba Solidarity Campaign, End Child Poverty Campaign, International Homeworkers, National Pensioners Convention, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Women's Design Service, Women's International Democratic Federation and Women's Resource Centre.

NAW Membership Information

The individual membership has reduced to around 140 during the year. Membership retention is good for those people who pay by standing order, but poor for those who pay each year.

The number and mix of affiliated organisations has also been similar to previous years and we are considering ways to increase these.

The Sylvia Pankhurst memorial lecture, How the Vote was Won, was given by Irene Cockcroft, exhibition curator, author and lecturer. She illustrated it with wonderful slides. See www.sylviapankhurst.gn.apc.org

Conferences and Stalls

NAW had a stall and participated in the Morning Star Conference on Capitalism the Crisis. In addition we had stalls at the Women's TUC, the Wortley Hall Festival, a Manchester Trades Council fringe meeting at the Labour Party Conference and the Scottish TUC Women's Conference.

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