

NAW EC MEMBER BERNADETTE KEAVENEY (LEFT), WITH WENDY EMMETT AT THE DERBY SILK MILL FESTIVAL, HELD ANNUALLY TO COMMEMORATE THE LOCK-OUT OF SILK MILL WORKERS IN 1833



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# rock on for our rights



UNITE'S NATIONAL OFFICER FOR EQUALITIES SIOBHAN ENDEAN REPORTS ON THE PRO-CHOICE CAMPAIGN IN GIBRALTAR

**T**HE Pro-Choice Campaign, headed jointly by Unite the Union and Equality Rights Group, has welcomed the announcement by the Gibraltar

government regarding its intentions to enter into formal consultations with a view to decriminalising the law on women's reproductive rights. This follows the grass roots campaign for abortion rights in Gibraltar.

The pro-choice campaign is stepping up its campaign to ensure the government of Gibraltar makes the changes to the relevant sections of the Crimes Act 2011 which uses language such as "infanticide" and "child destruction" in respect of a woman's termination of a pregnancy. The very presence of such an offence and category in the Act brings women's right to choose into the criminal law itself.

The Equality Rights Group initiated and moved the campaign forward, and it is set up to open to full and equal participation and inclusion of all other civil society players.

Civil society has proven, once again, that its voice not only matters, but is constructive and crucial to progress in our society. We are encouraged by the multiple voices on all sides that have arisen since the launch of the campaign. As the Gibraltar government's statement has acknowledged, it has

been a concern of the first order for the Pro-Choice Campaign that respect for all views be the cornerstone to social dialogue on this issue. Whilst we considered a referendum process inappropriate for a question of human and civil rights, which must be framed by concern for fundamental moral issues and not numbers, we fully support and, indeed, recommended a democratic exercise of consultation with all parties.

This said, both Equality Rights Group and Unite the Union will continue to argue in favour of amending our existing legislation in order to move us away from fear, intimidation and criminal sanction of women, to a more reasonable framework where women's health, safety and autonomy are a foremost consideration.

The Pro-Choice Campaign is therefore appreciative of government's announcement and looks forward to continuing the cooperative process of dialogue which has brought us this far.

YOU CAN SEE A MEDIA INTERVIEW WITH SIOBHAN ENDEAN AND GIBRALTAR TV AT [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=VBJ-CD7XZZE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBJ-CD7XZZE)

## step aside **brother**

**T**HERE is a chronic under-representation of women, young, black, disabled and LGBT+ workers in the trade union movement. Despite great intentions, we continue with an over-representation of older white men.

Of course, men are not the enemy of equality. Union brothers make daily sacrifices, and win for workers. Most want to increase our diversity and encourage participation. More inclusive union practices, rule changes, reservations and quotas are not enough. Real change comes with shop floor union practices. "Step Aside, Brother" is a simple ask to free up space and mentor someone new in.

We have been debating gender vs class my entire adult life. Seeking to improve women's representation in particular, is too often attacked as creating unnecessary divisions. As if women aren't a major cadre in the working class movement. Opening space does not create a flood of the "wrong" kind of women. It's a hugely sexist assumption that future women activists will be inferior to current male incumbents.

Step Aside Brother is not an electoral challenge. It's a polite request to build participation, not diminish activism. We need more workers participating so less of us hold multiple positions.

Judging examples of the few women in senior leadership on their gender not their actions is outright misogynist. If the TUC is lacklustre in fighting austerity, it isn't because its general secretary is a woman. For 143 years, men controlled the TUC's institutional power and never a peep about their gender failing workers.

Step Aside Brother will not overthrow the power elite, capitalism or

smash the patriarchy. But since when did that become an excuse for inaction?

Women too can step aside, but too often it is only women that do.

If Step Aside, Brother hits a few raw nerves, it is because most Brothers think they have neither the responsibility nor the power to make the change.

BY LYNN HENDERSON  
LYNN IS PRESIDENT OF THE SCOTTISH TRADES UNION CONGRESS (STUC) AND NATIONAL OFFICER FOR SCOTLAND AND IRELAND FOR THE PUBLIC & COMMERCIAL SERVICES UNION

## period **poverty**

**O**UR union is always at the forefront of the anti-austerity fight taking part in strike action, lobbying and organising across the UK to fight cuts and demand fair pay. Whilst these issues are traditional trade union fare – they are also fights for dignity at work.

In Scotland, we've been campaigning to tackle period poverty and PCS members have been on the frontline. Every union has women members who, because of poverty pay and the roll back of social security, will go without when menstruating.

This year our conference delegates highlighted the work in Scotland and voted to campaign for women in every workplace to have access to free sani-

tary products. One member launched her own campaign in SportScotland for free sanitary products in staff and visitor facilities. After winning the backing and support of her colleagues, SportScotland now offer this service.

In Glasgow, near where I live, Celtic Football Club decided to provide free sanitary products for fans, as a result of a campaign set up by three fans, all of whom are working class women.

Scotland might have led the way on fighting period poverty, but trade unions in every part of the UK can join the fight too. The best way to win back dignity at our work is to join a union and be part of a collective campaign.

BY JANICE GODRICH, PCS PRESIDENT

# changing the world of work for good



UCU PRESIDENT VICKY KNIGHT PREVIEWS THE TUC'S ANNUAL CONGRESS

**I**n this 150th year of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) it's interesting to look back at where we've come from and how our agenda has evolved in

the century and a half from our inception.

Discussions in 1868 centred very much around the debates we are still having today: the length of a working day, pay (or lack of it), the ability to be a member of a trade union and the justice and equity that this should bring.

But what is clear too is that workers need unions now, as much – if not more – than ever and the unity in our 'trades', our alliances and our collective ability to bring change from communities, to workplaces, to parliamentary matters keeps us strong when representing the interests of the working classes.

Our parliament, the TUC's annual congress will meet in Manchester – the birthplace of the TUC – between 9 and 12 September. The agenda is packed, both in session and on the fringe with debates ranging from the economy 'for the many' to abortion rights, interspersed with public sector investment demands, Grenfell, challenging the politics of hate, energy, gender pay

gaps and reporting, sexual harassment, privatisation and the collapse of Carillion, to the crisis in education and the nation's struggle with health and social care – particularly mental health.

We are truly representative of working Britain, including the agendas of youth, race, sex, sexuality, and disability – and often, ours are challenging debates but discussions that progress the lives of workers are vital. We link domestic and international struggles that make sense of the chaos seen around the world, because in our movement as workers of the world, united we must stand in our principles: Internationalism and Solidarity.

So let us continue to change the world of work for good, with a strong, united voice, building activism, collectivism and organising as we go. Because this Tory austerity and its cuts are not working, a lack of investment in our public services is breaking our infrastructure and the lack of care for our citizens is costing too many lives. It's time for change.

## long live the bundle of sticks!

### NW TUC REGIONAL SECRETARY LYNN COLLINS CELEBRATES OUR WOMEN

**T**HE 150th anniversary of the TUC has produced an opportunity to celebrate the key role that women have played in our history. Here in the North West, we've celebrated just a few of them, demonstrating the power of collectivism, campaigning and fighting for fairness at work.

Women like Mary Bamber who moved to Liverpool in 1891 from Glasgow, and played a significant role in creating the labour movement.

When Mary arrived in Liverpool it was the second largest port in the British Empire, which meant not just 'men on the docks' but women in domestic service, in the factories making jute bags and sacks, and working in laundries. It was these women that Mary took trade unionism to.

In 1911, the landmark year for the Liverpool labour movement and the time of the Liverpool Transport Strike, Mary became one of the first women full-time trade union officials for the Amalgamated Warehouse and General Workers Union. Never the bureaucrat, always the organiser, Mary led strikes of jute bag and sack workers, and at the Wilson Brothers Bobbins works, and was described by Sylvia Pankhurst as "the finest fighting platform speaker in the country".

The merger of the union with the Amalgamated Union of Cooperative Workers in 1921 brought Mary togeth-

er with another North West trade unionist – Ellen Wilkinson – and they were appointed as joint National Women's Organisers for the new union.

Ellen was born in Manchester in 1891, and after a difficult schooling won a bursary to begin teacher training – which at the time was delivered in the Mechanics Institute in Manchester – and famous as the birthplace of the TUC in 1868.

Always involved in politics, she also became a paid worker for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1913 before being appointed as a union organiser in 1915. She fought for equal pay for equal work and for the rights of unskilled and lower paid workers when these interests often conflicted with those of the higher paid craft unions.

Wilkinson, like Bamber, joined the Communist Party and unsuccessfully stood for election in 1923 for parliament, but did serve briefly as a councillor.

She went on to become the Labour MP for Mickleborough East and then became the second woman (after Margaret Bondfield) to achieve a place in the British Cabinet, implementing the historic 1944 Education Act.

But it wasn't just in the big cities that women like Mary and Ellen were organising. The TUC's 150 Stories website at [tuc150.tuc.org.uk](http://tuc150.tuc.org.uk) will tell you more about some of the other

women working hard to better the lives of working people.

Like Alice Foley, fighting for workers in the Lancashire cotton industry, overcoming discrimination to become her union's general secretary.

And Mary Macarthur, travelling the land to fight for better pay and conditions.

And it's one of Mary's quotes that I think best describes the conditions of women workers and the power they have as a collective to effect change:

"A trade union is like a bundle of sticks. The workers are bound together and have the strength of unity. No employer can do as he likes with them. They have the power of resistance. The can ask for an advance without fear.

"A worker who is not in a union is like a single stick. She can easily be broken or bent to the will of the employer. She has not the power to resist a reduction in wages. If she is fined she must pay without complaint. She dare not ask for a rise. If she does, she will be told – your place is outside the gate, there are plenty to take your place.

"An employer can do without one worker – he cannot do without all his workers."



## kristina harrison says...

KRISTINA IS A PUBLIC SECTOR WORKER, UNISON MEMBER AND SOCIALIST, AND A TRANSWOMAN. THIS IS AN EDITED VERSION OF THE SPEECH SHE GAVE IN JUNE AT THE WOMEN'S PLACE UK MEETING IN HASTINGS TO DISCUSS THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS TO AMEND THE GENDER RECOGNITION ACT. THE FULL SPEECH HERE [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=SOOWE71LB6A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOOWE71LB6A)

I've marched against section 28, stood tall as a proud and unapologetic transwoman, demanding rights, dignity and properly funded services for trans people, but I have also demonstrated in defence of women's abortion rights and their right to control their own bodies, definitions, spaces and to direct their own fight against sexism. Scandalously for that I've been accused of allying with bigotry and the far right.

The fact that I'm opposed to the proposals for self-recognition of gender identity is entirely consistent with all that activism precisely because I think they are bad for women, bad for gay people, play directly into the hands of the right wing and are ultimately bad for all trans people, particularly transsexuals like myself. I say transsexual because that describes someone who (usually) undergoes or wishes to undergo gender reassignment surgery and have hormone treatment, to complete a meaningful medical transition, a largely irreversible commitment that not only helps us to fit into an opposite-sex social reality but also, I'd argue, goes some way to putting many women at greater ease of having male born people in their spaces.

The far more nebulous words transgender and transwoman have come to dominate in a movement that has expanded its definition of trans to include full time and part-time cross-dressers, non-binary people, gender fluid people who identify one day as female and on other days as male and in fact any gender non-conforming people. Many people from these different groups will call themselves transwomen as Eddie Izzard now does, having previously asserted he was a male transvestite (cross-dresser) and was widely admired for doing so. I totally support Eddie being able to dress and act how he likes and I'd happily address him how he wants, defend him from discrimination, his right to safety and dignity but he's not a woman and neither am I. He doesn't have the right to be on an all-woman shortlist designed to overcome the disadvantages of being female and the under-representation of women.

What many, probably most, of these

people have in common apart from coming under the 'trans' umbrella is that they will proudly retain their penis and many will not even have any hormone treatment. This is reinforced by a trans ideology that insists trans identity is fixed and innate and confers womanhood on anyone who says they have this identity. According to this theory, if you identify as a woman, you are one and always have been. Therefore, no physical changes are necessary and a penis on a transwoman becomes a 'female organ'. So, Gendered Intelligence, an organisation that advises schools on trans issues declares in their sexual health guide for young people that "a woman is still a woman even if she enjoys getting blow jobs". This kind of thinking is why lesbians are being accused of transphobic bigotry for refusing to accept that a 'transwoman' with a penis is a potential sexual partner for them.

This brings me to a fundamental point which is glossed over or completely ignored by proponents of self-identity. Why is there no controversy about transmen and men's spaces? Are men less bigoted than women? No, of course not. The fundamental reason there's no controversy is that men are not oppressed by or vulnerable to female bodied or female born people. The elephant in the room and why there is so much controversy about access to female spaces is the systematic oppression of women and girls, including high levels of violence by men and oppression by a male dominated economic system.

The almost total absence of dissent from the parliamentary women's Labour party speaks volumes, no one has been brave enough to put their head above the parapet to clearly oppose this agenda. Instead it's been left to ordinary trade unionists, socialists and feminists, mainly women but also increasing numbers of men and transsexuals.

No one can object to anyone's private identity. We defend people's right to their own beliefs, to dress, behave and be how they want to be in regards to gender but when such identities become social demands that undermine other people's rights and autonomy then we have a problem. We can respect the right of deeply religious people to believe in God and the bible, Allah and the Koran, to dress, worship and practice their religion how they choose and free from discrimination, but if religious people then demanded that we all agree with their beliefs in God and that we alter our laws in accordance with the bible we would have a real problem.

Given that trans people themselves are oppressed as deviants for trans-

## naw member p introduces the

**A**T the NAW Annual General Meeting earlier this year, a resolution on the Equality/Gender Recognition Acts was debated and carried. The resolution drew attention to an apparent attack on women's rights and any debate about them which is miscast and misunderstood as a debate about Trans rights versus Women's rights. It called for a more comprehensive and less emotive debate about all the issues involved. My perspective here is part of the debate.

Trans oppression and transphobia are unacceptable. The same is true of LGBT oppression and homophobia. The same is true of sexism and misogyny. Capitalism has always sought to divide and rule and these toxic times in which dialogue is often reduced to tribal anger and babble require us to remember that **United we Stand, Divided we Fall. We should know the enemy.**

Gender and sexual identity are different things. People often experience a "wrongness" in capitalist social relations – this is because there's plenty wrong! In turning away from sexism and misogyny it's easy to think that we're not the right kind of woman or man. In reality all human beings are the right kind of them. **Some persons change their gender.**

**We must defend the safety of everyone whatever their gender. Health and safety issues of female to male trans persons are as important as those of male to female. Questions of pregnancy, menstruation, menopause can apply whatever a person's ascribed gender and need to be thought through in trade unions and wider society.**

gressing the gender role norms which evolved to oppress women and to prepare boys for work and warfare there certainly can be no trans liberation without a women's liberation from these norms. A trans movement that collaborates with the gender oppression of women is leading trans people to an enormous backlash.

By denying the reality and importance of sex in a sexist world and by codifying and raising up gender, the very thing which demeans and diminishes women to be the pre-eminent social and legal category governing female spaces, political autonomy, representation, the transgender movement is subordinating sex to gender.

Gender norms that tell women they are weak, vain, passive, frivolous and valued for their looks more than for what they do in life, oppress and keep women in a second class position in society and they completely devalue

## adam flynn discussion

Older women (and men) need to learn more about the new identities and categories being worked through in modern social relations – a recent exhibition “Never Going Underground” here in Manchester where I live had really interesting videos made by younger people about non-binary, and about challenging most of our assumptions about gender and sexual identity.

And in asserting our abhorrence of violence and attacks (both attitudinal and actual) against trans women and men, we must acknowledge that it is also unacceptable and abhorrent to “troll” people on social media, or undertake deliberate campaigns to bring down persons and organisations perceived as critical of trans rights.

Much of this behaviour in defence of trans ideology and rights is experienced by people born female, known as women, as misogyny and bullying. In particular, there is confusion, resentment and anger from feminists now labelled and attacked as TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminists). This kind of division helps no-one.

We should honour the struggles of the past and move forward in solidarity. Without this we can get neither justice nor equality.

The public consultation on reform of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 is open until 19 October and is available here <https://consult.education.gov.uk/government-equalities-office/reform-of-the-gender-recognition-act/consultation/intro/>

and negate masculine girls just as the male gender role devalues and often humiliates feminine boys.

We are also a tiny and vulnerable minority, our interests lie in cultivating solidarity with the women’s movement and our shared interest in opposing male violence, in opposing the gender norms that oppress us both, not in demonising women who disagree with relatively new claims and theories.

It’s not only not in our interests it’s totally unnecessary. Is there a need for reform? Absolutely. We need a fully funded system that is much more prompt, supportive and responsive, not demeaning and cumbersome but we still need a system and one that women can have confidence in. We also need professional clinicians free to do their jobs of diagnosis and of assisting patients to fully understand their own underlying feelings and

motivations. Far from knowing best, children and adults who come out as having a trans identity are often wrong.

Dr James Cantor has shown repeated studies indicating between 60% and 90% of children who identify as trans stop doing so after puberty and most of those turn out to be healthy gay and lesbian young people.

Whatever you do from here and whatever your stance in this debate, I implore you to accept that there is a legitimate debate to be had and we so very badly need to have it in as progressive and respectful manner as possible.

The role of the left in this is absolutely vital. A left which thinks supporting trans people means demonising and marginalising women, forgetting that women too suffer oppression is a left that risks alienating a huge number of working class women and scoring an historic own goal at a time when we have such potential for radical change. We need a left which takes a firm stance that values women and trans people equally, that stands up to the extremists, against self-identity, in defence of sex based rights but is also implacably opposed to discrimination against trans people.

## jo stevenson says...

JOANNE IS A MEMBER OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN

Gender recognition has been with us since the first UK act of parliament in 2004 and recent high-profile controversy has seemed focused mainly on the rights contained in these existing laws, with a great deal of attention to what has not yet become law. Yet it was only very recently that the government launched a wide civil society consultation, which is to look everything, in a favourable assessment of the essential nature of self-definition instead of medical determination.

Let’s be clear, there’s little concern expressed about transmen (women who have transitioned to become men). This is all about men changing into women. Yet, transwomen often say they don’t recognise themselves when they hear the terms some women think of them as former men. There can be a lack of understanding as to how offensive it can be to transwomen to not accept them. The pain to someone who has seen and felt themselves to be a woman the whole of their life should not be underestimated.

Nor is any of this easy. Although gender recognition legislation gave rights to change one’s birth certificate in certain circumstances, it’s not so easy to change it back again. But the drift in global thinking is made clear by the fact that the World Health Organisation, just as it did some decades ago about homosexuality, has changed its definition of gender dysmorphia away from it being a mental health issue to being simply seen as a sexual health structure question.

Claim that debate is being shut down or imbalanced by one community or another does not exonerate anyone from the fact that these damaging divisions are weakening the fightback. It’s not coincidental that issues about discrimination began in 2010 with the ConDem cuts, when the argument could be heard that women were not bearing the brunt of the cuts. Yet they have become intensely and doubly exploited, whilst our world has dissolved into personality politics, fake news, and abuse on social media.

Related arguments about the reserve army of labour have come back into vogue. The rapid pace and thought-provoking medical and scientific advances bring problems of understanding, given that the very concept of transgender is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act, for some may raise issues. But attacks for whatever reason and the language used in this on the ability to self-define have also affected the disabled community and have been used to help attacks on benefits.

Disability is defined as having a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities. ‘Invisible’ disabilities are always under question and, although some objective criteria can be called into play, much may rely on self-definition. Casual disregard for this by campaigners is at the least careless and yet, in workplaces, union reps, familiar with using legislation daily, see the Act as a vital tool in their armoury. Just as the argument that the benefit system for the severely ill shouldn’t be abused or destroyed, we should defend the rights of self-identity and assistance for dysphoria under the NHS. Right-wingers will use any stick with which to attack us and our welfare system is imperfect but, thanks to the 2010 Act, it is not yet fundamentally discriminatory. Creating waves about the Act could do the job of conservative libertarians, so it falls to us all to be cautious about how we engage in these debates.

Divisions in the broad front that had once existed around the progress for women, blacks, youth, the disabled, and LGBTQI+ are not good for any of

us. Indeed, are not women composed of every single group with protected characteristics? We are a majority with unity around campaigns for all but when we fragment, we lose that moral majority. We should be clearly against anything detrimental to working-class women of all kinds. Even if we are polite or non-violent about it, divisive comments and behaviours is not the way to win an argument.

From some individuals, criticism has come that claim intense pressure on young women or girls to transition into a male instead of accepting their sexuality. Others have not followed such claims and there is little evidence of peer reviewed scientific analysis to back the argument. Most of the claims appear on the internet as assertions. Possession of one set or another (or both!) sexual organs does not have a defining role in the development of individual sexual pleasure or identity. Whilst gender reassignment need not have a specific effect one way or another on sexual orientation. Like all humans and many animals, transgender people exhibit the full range of possible sexual attractions and none.

Essentially, what is going on here is a lack of understanding of how dysphoria and sexual identity overlap. Transgender respondents to surveys rarely self-identify as straight. Only about 15% are likely to be attracted to the opposite sex to which they have transitioned and about 10% will be asexual. The overwhelmingly majority will identify as queer (21%), pansexual (18%), gay, lesbian, or same-gender-loving (16%), or simply bisexual (14%). Sexuality is much more fluid than was believed even just 20 years ago.

Making the arguments of some even more suspect, it has even been argued that 'children' are encouraged, directed, or even forced to take irreversible gender reassigning medication. Only after reaching puberty would anyone be treated with gonadotrophin-releasing hormones and only then with the permission of their adult next of kin. These synthetic hormones mimic the role that puberty plays, for example, testosterone stimulating penis growth from clitoral development. GnRH analogues will only be prescribed for a young person under the age of 18, where they are experiencing clear distress leading to a strong desire to live as their gender identity, probably to the point of being suicidal if thwarted. The effects of treatment with GnRH analogues are fully reversible, yet some have implied that surgical sex organ changes are involved, which would not be legally permitted until the age of majority.

The main fake news story is that of transwomen sexually abusing women in toilets. This is a false story, with

there being no identifiable case of occurring anywhere across the world. It is transwomen who are being abused in toilets.

But fears are abroad that new legislation would lead to men guilty of domestic violence posing as women to chase their fleeing partners into refuge centres. Yet these ignore that fact that existing laws against offences to the person are quite adequate to prevent this. It is a serious criminal offence for someone to harass you, or put you in fear of violence, and their right to access does not trump this.

Whilst the policy positions of refuge centres are quite firm, whether it is a woman or a man or a trans. Rape crisis centres routinely carry out legally underpinned risk assessments before anyone can use facilities and those that pose a safety threat have been proven to be not necessarily of one gender. Yet rumours abound that men will be enabled to use legislation that does not yet exist to over-ride such protections. One simple word – how?

This all seems to be based on a single incident from 2012 in Toronto, when a mentally ill man dressed up as a transwoman and molested a child and raped a woman. Having been arrested and released on bail, he abused again after a similar episode of dressing up. His sexual gratification seems to be based on cross-dressing and violence, there was no dysmorphia involved. In mockery of this, another man in Washington state asserted his right to access by invading a woman only space. That's all.

A transition to fully gender-neutral public spaces is now well under way in schools and other institutions. The sooner business owners are forced to invest in decent facilities to all, will be a day we can all celebrate. Would campaigning efforts not be better spent in such directions than in opposing the rights of others?

The internet is full of total fabrication, a lot of emotion, and some half-truths. I would advise caution for anyone not fully aware of all the arguments on either side of this polarised debate, whilst we would all do well to be careful about the language we use in public discussions.

ruth serwotka  
says...

RUTH IS CO-FOUNDER OF A WOMEN'S PLACE  
AND CONVENOR OF THE SOCIALIST  
FEMINIST NETWORK – SOCFEM.NET

Just over a year ago a small group established the Socialist Feminist Network. Much of our campaigning has been dominated by the prospective changes to the 2004 Gender Recog-

inition Act through the highly successful campaign group *A Woman's Place*.

Despite some legal and social reform, British society remains scarred by inequalities, prejudice, bigotry and oppression of all kinds. Unity and collective effort to create a fair and equal society for all lie at the heart of the labour movement. Austerity has had a hugely detrimental impact upon working class women. We believe that it is imperative to retain women as part of our movement, to ensure the movement represents their interests and allows them freedom of speech. We do not think this contradicts the rights of any other minority group but in fact enhances the unity of our movement. We draw upon the work of feminists in our understanding of gender as a social construct which coerces a hierarchy between the sexes.

Transgender people have the right to live their life free from persecution, harassment or discrimination in any form. We note that under the umbrella of 'transgender' there are many different and variant gender expressions. We believe that individuals should be free to express themselves without diluting the rights and dignity of others.

The 2010 Equality Act is the cornerstone of hard won rights for those facing discrimination and to protect oppressed groups. We believe any suggested change that could impact upon existing provision within the Equality Act should be fairly scrutinised for the potential to dilute the rights of others or for unintended consequences leading to possible reversals in legal protections. We request the government undertakes an equality impact assessment on its proposals to introduce gender identity legislation.

The 2010 Equality Act enshrines rights for women and girls to be free from discrimination including sexual harassment and to have sex specific protections in law. These include the right for certain occupational roles to be legitimately categorised as female only in order to protect the privacy and dignity of women. Such roles include rape crisis counsellors or those roles in occupations with access to female intimate spaces. We believe these sex based protections are invaluable.

Tory proposals in the Maria Miller Report suggest no less than a re-categorisation of sex-based classification to that of gender identity. This is a change to the legal basis of our common understanding of man and woman. As such this is a legitimate and proper discussion about balancing rights and thinking through consequences. We do not accept that raising legitimate questions about balancing rights amounts to transphobic or hate speech and we are for free speech.

We want the labour movement to

organise a far reaching consultation process in LP branches and across trade unions to consider the impact of the Maria Miller proposals on women and girls sex-based protections. Access to the consultation arrangements should be assured for both women and LGBT members. The consultation should in particular consider:

- Sex categorisation of statistics so that we can meaningfully continue to monitor equal pay, representation of women in public life on company boards etc. and that the recording of male violence is not eroded.
- An agreed process for categorisation of national statistics on transgender trends.
- Female-only spaces including in schools and sports facilities and public venues and workplaces.
- Facilities for the most vulnerable women in society such as prisons and shelters.
- Sports arrangements and protecting the integrity of competition for women and girls.
- Free speech and any conflict arising from creating gender identity as a protected characteristic.
- Sex discrimination law and the potential loss of meaningful sex-based comparators.

Further consultation should take place with trade unions representing members who provide services to young people on the impact of gender stereotyping on their lives with a view to finding appropriate materials and support. We also want the involvement of trade union members who provide services to vulnerable women. Such a wide ranging consultation on these matters will bring about meaningful protections and a balance of rights that might result in agreed changes to existing equality law. Such an approach will sit within the labour movement's collective values. We also believe this approach will win wide support across all sections of society.

One year on we still have a lot to do. Meetings organised by A Woman's Place and others have faced intimidation and hostility. Online abuse and misogynist bullying have become a hallmark of the debate but from the position of many accepting there should be "no debate" we have come to a common acknowledgement that there are complex matters involving the balancing of rights of two groups. In one year we have made enormous strides with more and more women understanding the potential impact on the exemptions that exist in equality law to protect women only spaces and services. The potential loss of women's rights impacts on us all.

The next WPUK meeting will be at the Labour Party conference in Liverpool on Tuesday 25 September.



ON 15 August 2018, news was received that the Tehran Revolutionary Court had sentenced Nasrin Sotoudeh, one of Iran's most renowned and respected human rights lawyers, to five years imprisonment. She was never charged nor brought to trial but was found guilty of "spying" in absentia, as she found out in June when she was arrested after taking on cases of women who had been taken into custody after publicly protesting at the regime's draconian dress code by standing in public without their head coverings. Clearly her arrest and prison sentence were to punish her for her work on behalf of women and to warn off others who might take up similar cases.

The current wave of protests against the imposition of the hijab began during the widespread demonstrations against austerity measures and poverty, which swept Iran in January 2018. They have since come to symbolise defiance against anti-women discrimination which is endemic in the theocratic state and have been punished severely, according to the Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women, with sentences of up to six years in prison.

Equally harsh is the way the restrictions themselves continue to be imposed. On 22 April the news site Ma Zanan (Us Women) covered a very disturbing incident that had recently taken place in a Tehran public park. An Islamic Guidance patrol physically assaulted a girl whose hijab supposedly didn't conform with the small-print of the requirements. Video footage capturing the horrific attack and recording the young woman's screams and crying, went viral. It provoked public outrage that the authorities were unable to ignore. But the response of officialdom was simply to call for new strategies to secure compliance. None of them said anything about repealing the repressive dress code itself.

Sadly, this does not surprise us. The record of the theocratic regime's discriminatory and abusive treatment of women, its denial of their rights in all fields and the terror it employs to enforce its rules, continues to make Iran one of the worst places in the world to be a woman.

The Amnesty International Report 2017/18 published on 22 February this year, noted that "women remained subject to entrenched discrimination in law and practice". Violence against women was perpetrated with impuni-

ty. Proposed legislation to address this, dating as far back as 2012, remained unenacted. Horrifically cruel and humiliating punishments were meted out by the courts.

In March, the UN Human Rights Council received the report of its Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran, Asma Jahangir. She devoted several pages to the condition of women, also noting no improvement. Women did not have equal rights to men in marriage, divorce, child custody or inheritance. They could not travel outside Iran without the permission of their husband, if married, or male guardian if not (Passport Law Article 18).

Child marriage, permitted for girls from the age of nine, was still common. It was, Jahangir said, difficult to be sure of the numbers, as thousands of such marriages were not registered. Adultery was still punishable with lashing and stoning to death. If a perpetrator claimed that rape was a consensual act, the woman victim might still be punished severely, as female testimony counts for little in court.

Attacks on any women who dare to draw attention to their lack of labour, economic and social rights and to call for change, continue. Golrokh Ebrahimi was sentenced for her condemnation (in a fictional and yet unpublished work) of the continuing practice of stoning women. She, together with Atena Daemi, who was arrested for campaigning against child labour, were held with several hundred other women in a squalid, disease-ridden converted chicken farm without access to safe drinking water where the authorities think fit to hold, abuse and torture female detainees, as reported in a previous issue of *Sisters*.

The NAW, in solidarity with the brave women of Iran and their campaigning organisations, condemns the way theocracy treats women. It is supporting the Committee for the Defence of Iranian People's Rights (CODIR) in calling for the immediate release of Nasrin Sotoudeh, Golrokh Ebrahimi, Atena Daemi and all other prisoners whose only "crime" has been to challenge the regime's systemic discrimination against women and girls. The NAW, with CODIR, further calls on the Iranian government to punish the abuse of women, repeal all discriminatory legislation and recognise the equal rights of women and men in the family and workplace and in social and public spheres.

BY LIZ PAYNE, A VICE-PRESIDENT OF CODIR AND A MEMBER OF THE NAW EC  
THE TEXT ABOVE WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN CODIR'S MAGAZINE *IRAN TODAY* IN AUGUST 2018. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON WOMEN IN IRAN AND CODIR'S CAMPAIGNS, PLEASE VISIT [WWW.CODIR.NET](http://WWW.CODIR.NET)

# trico book

*Trico A Victory to Remember* book launch at Marx Memorial Library on 21 September from 7pm.

Hear from Sally Groves and Vernon Merritt on the historic 21 week equal pay strike of 1976 at Trico Folberth on the Great West Road, Brentford, West London.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT  
WWW.MARX-MEMORIAL-LIBRARY.ORG.UK

## pedalling for pankhurst



@pedal4progress (strapline: using the bicycle as a revolutionary tool for socialism) organised three sponsored cycle rides in August to Wortley Hall.

The rides coincided with the annual Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Lecture (given by Dr Sheila Hanlon and attended by over 90 people) and raised over £1,000 for the statue campaign!

## what's on...

**NAW Executive Committee** meetings are open to *all* members.

*The next meeting is on Saturday 27 October at 11.30am, in London*

If you would like to attend please contact the Secretary on [naw@sisters.org.uk](mailto:naw@sisters.org.uk) or at NAW, Bridge House, Newport Street, Hay on Wye, Powys HR3 5BG.

# NAW weekend seminar for women

## Economic and social policies that advance equality

**Saturday 29 to Sunday 30 September 2018  
at Wortley Hall, near Sheffield S35 7DB**

**Saturday: *The future of work – robotics, artificial intelligence and automation and its impact on women***

Film on the Lucas Aerospace plan *We've always done it this way* followed by contributions from **Sharon Graham** Unite Executive Officer and **Julie Ward** MEP for the North West region and discussion

**Sunday: *Valuing women and girls in the workplace and in society***

Keynote speaker **Kiri Tunks** President of the NUT section of the National Education Union followed by panel and discussion

Unfortunately (or fortunately?!) all residential places are now booked, but day attendance is welcome – £15 fee includes Saturday lunch, refreshments and all sessions

We are subsidising this event from the Val Duncan Memorial Fund

Book your place by cheque (payable to "National Assembly of Women") Bookings and enquiries to [naw@sisters.org.uk](mailto:naw@sisters.org.uk) or NAW, Bridge House, Newport Street, Hay on Wye, Powys HR3 5BG

## join the NAW now!

*I would like to join the NAW. Here is £20 for the annual subscription (£10 unwaged) which includes my subscription to **sisters**, the journal of the NAW.*

*Our organisation would like to affiliate to the NAW. Enclosed is: £20 (local organisation/NAW branch), £45 (regional organisation), £60 (national)*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation \_\_\_\_\_

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Send to: NAW, 1 Lee Close, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 0DW