

PALESTINIAN
FIREFIGHTERS
AT THE NAW STALL
AT THE SCOTTISH
TUC WOMEN'S
CONFERENCE



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P WINTER 2009/10

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world wide women

listen to women for a change

SATURDAY, 24 October saw over 60 women from the South Yorkshire area attend a conference organised by Sheffield FEMS, Sheffield Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the Sheffield branch of the National Assembly of Women. The women from differing walks of life, all ages (teenagers to pensioners) and various organisations, came together in an informal and friendly atmosphere. The aim of the conference was to enable women to discuss issues that affected their lives as well as encouraging women to network and work together for change.

We had five amazing speakers along with workshops where we had time to discuss and listen to the views of other women on the issues raised earlier. The hope was that each workshop would come up with one or two action points that women and organisations could take away with them for future activity.

Linda McAvan MEP opened the conference and talked about the effects of climate change on the lives of women. The droughts in Kenya have resulted in girls being married off at a much earlier age as their fathers need the dowries to support their families. Girls are having children at a much younger age than previously with the resultant health problems. Linda encouraged us as women to use our buying power to change corporations' attitudes to climate change, which will in turn help the women who are being directly affected by climate change.

Helen Jackson spoke about the 'Equalities Bill' and the importance of recognising the value of women's work; whether it is grandparents looking after grandchildren, as carers or mothers. Helen gave us food for thought by discussing the role of women in society; how women are the back-bone of our communities (carers, peace-makers, educators) and yet are still under-valued and under-paid. Equality is important for women and is worth fighting for.

Marie-Claire Faray-Kele gave an emotional talk about the many challenges faced by African women, particularly those in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Marie-Claire talked about the Declaration of the Voices of African Women. Colonisation of Africa de-humanised and disempowered African women. The women of Africa are fighting back and are mobilising to improve health care, education and peace, yet men remain the chief decision makers. Marie-Claire asked us how we would feel giving birth to a child that we knew we could not afford

to feed or clothe and that we would watch die. (I don't believe that many of us know how that feels). Marie-Claire became very emotional at this point and I am sure that if she had cried many of us would have joined her. She told us that African women do not want 'Aid', they want to be allowed to make their own decisions and to be taken seriously.

Jean Lambert MEP talked about the issues faced by women in Europe, particularly in relation to trafficking. Jean talked about the common immigration and asylum policy that is being considered by the EU. The perception of an illegal immigrant differs depending upon where they originally came from. Women's groups throughout the EU are campaigning for women to have the right to settle in the EU (if they are here due to violence or the threat of violence) and to have the right of independence and equality in the workplace and when accessing public services. One of the most disturbing facts that Jean told us is that women and girls who have been trafficked are classed as illegal immigrants.

Ann Hamilton who is a board member of the Zero-Tolerance Trust talked about the problems faced by British women, particularly the challenges of tackling domestic violence, prostitution and trafficking. She considered the views of various organisations to prostitution and mentioned the web site used by men to discuss prostitutes. She said we need to criminalise the 'buying of sex' as in Sweden where men are the criminals not the prostitute. This has resulted in a reduction in prostitution and trafficking.

points from the workshops Sheffield

■ We must be proud to use the feminist label.

■ Networking and events like this conference are important and we must use them and the resources they give us.

■ Maintaining a dialogue between different generations is important as well as both genders to build respect and value for the individual. For example Sheffield 50+ and the Youth Parliament are working together.

■ We need to consider the broader learning and education environment (ie. home, school, community) to avoid gender stereotyping.

Africa

■ We need to promote the Voices of African Women declaration wherever we can (using networking)

■ We need to tackle the issues behind why asylum seekers are displaced

from their own countries and the role of our Government within that.

■ We should continue to support WILPF action and the declaration by using our own forums.

■ We should harness consumer power to raise awareness of unethical exploitation/resource production.

EU and UK

■ We need to push for more information on trafficking/prostitution, consent, mutual pleasure, respect and relationships in sex education classes (contact MPs and pressure groups to get the law changed).

■ We need to lobby to get trafficked women separate status from migrant women.

■ We need to challenge attitudes towards prostitution amongst friends and colleagues.

■ There needs to be greater visibility of campaigns in the UK on these issues (End Violence against Women Coalition, The End Prostitution Coalition)

■ We need to talk about the issues more and involve men.

■ In education we need to provide good role models, positive body image and promote gender equality and respect for each other.

■ There needs to be free English language tuition for newly arrived asylum seekers as in other EU countries.

■ We need to treat trafficked 'sex' workers as victims not criminals.

■ We need to lobby MPs and MEPs for an EU wide target for a reduction in CO2 emissions to ensure global temperature is below 2 degrees C.

At the end participants were asked to provide feedback (anonymously) on the conference. The majority of comments were positive and many emphasised that the day had been inspirational.

BY PAT PETERS
NAW SOUTH YORKSHIRE BRANCH

COVER PHOTO: IN 2009 THE NAW HAD A STALL AT THE SCOTTISH TRADES UNION CONGRESS' WOMEN'S CONFERENCE FOR THE FIRST TIME.

IT WAS GOOD TO MEET SEVERAL MEMBERS AND TALK TO THE DELEGATES. CONFERENCE WAS ADDRESSED BY THE PALESTINIAN FIREFIGHTERS FOLLOWING A REPORT FROM THE STUC DELEGATION WHO VISITED PALESTINE AND ISRAEL IN 2009.

THE PICTURE SHOWS NAW SECRETARY VAL DUNCAN AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER JANETTE FERGUSSON WITH MEMBERS OF THE PALESTINIAN DELEGATION.

sylvia pankhurst

artist and political campaigner

A REPORT FROM 2009 SYLVIA PANKHURST MEMORIAL LECTURE

ONCE again the Library at Wortley Hall welcomed a capacity crowd, including Richard and Rita Pankhurst for the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Lecture, jointly sponsored by the NAW, the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee, and Wortley Hall.

This year's lecture was given by Dr Jacqueline Mulhallen who is both a writer and actor and who illustrated the talk with items from her personal collection. Living in East London, Jacqueline became interested in Sylvia because she lived in the part of East London where Sylvia was a significant figure and also because she believes in the importance of recovering women's history, often unreported.

There are two main collections of Sylvia's paintings, one with her son Richard, the other with the granddaughter of Ernest O'Brian, the landlord of a hall that Sylvia had rented. In 1991 Jacqueline bought a copy of *The London Magazine* (1908), advertised as containing an illustrated article about women workers by Sylvia Pankhurst. This she found contained seven reproductions from the series Sylvia painted when she toured the Midlands, North of England and Scotland looking into the conditions faced by working women.

Sylvia was a talented artist who had won a scholarship in 1900 to study design at Manchester School of Art and had travelled via a scholarship to Italy in order to study the decoration of large meeting areas. While in Venice she painted street scenes such as one of a woman flower seller which Jacqueline showed. This picture captures wonderfully the feel of the time, its light and subject. However Sylvia's artistic ability often goes unreported although even though she obtained commissions during the time she was in prison and some via her political work (for example in 1909 she decorated the Princess Ice Rink with flags and banners from the 1819 Peterloo massacre).

Jacqueline told how Sylvia's ongoing dilemma was that she was torn between being an artist and a campaigner who wore herself out campaigning and experienced on-going conflict between family, art and politics. But for a brief period, in the series of paintings from which those featured in *The London Magazine* were taken, Sylvia was able to combine her art and politics by being a political artist. She revealed in these paintings the strenuous work carried out by women in a variety of occupations; women who

BARBARA SWITZER WITH CLAIRE HEWITT



were often making an equal contribution to men in their trade but were earning lower wages.

The series starts in the Midlands with women chain and nail makers who toiled at forges in awful conditions and then went back to homes lacking elementary decencies in sanitation. She then visited a shoe factory where she watched women continuously machining toe caps and travelled on to the Potteries in Stoke where women were debarred from the better paid work (slaves of slaves). There were also the health problems caused by the lead and chemicals used in the pottery industry apart from the Wedgwood factory.

Sylvia moved to the coast where she painted the Scottish women gutting herring and followed this by capturing the women farm workers on the Borders. She commented that working outdoors was a healthier option but hard on the skin (chapped hands). One of these paintings was used in a votes for women campaign. She completed this tour with a visit to a Glasgow cotton mill where she shows the oppressive atmosphere and talked of the heat and respiratory problems. She also commented that the Scottish women had lower wages than those in Lancashire.

It is unusual to have a series of paintings like these of working women. Most of the paintings of the times were of high society women or picturesque scenery. Contemporary photographs show the accuracy of Sylvia's illustrations and from the remaining few it is possible to compare the colours she used with the black and white reproductions to get an idea of the colours she probably used and the feel of the original work.

Sylvia left us with political art, not her original plan of public space decoration but possibly more valuable. She had a style similar to some European artists but she gave up at 27 to devote herself to building political organisa-

tions in East London. Hence the artist was lost although she had a brief period devoted to her art when she lived in the countryside. Her family tell us that she wished in her older age that she had been able to devote more time to her art and that she had plans to paint both when in Woodford and later in Ethiopia. However she felt she couldn't achieve her former skills and that the times and causes around her had forced her to choose. Also those who could pay for pictures didn't want the subjects she wanted to paint.

Who knows what Sylvia might have achieved if she had been able to devote herself to her art but her politics influenced her art and gave it an added quality. At least this collection of reproductions used in the 'Lynx Theatre and Poetry' play 'Sylvia' has increased awareness of her qualities as an artist, as did this excellent lecture.

As a fitting conclusion to the lecture Barbara Switzer, from the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee, presented copies of the book *Sylvia Pankhurst, Artist and Crusader* that she had discovered to Brian Clarke, Political Secretary for Wortley Hall, and to Claire Hewitt, Headteacher of Manchester High School For Girls (where the Pankhurst Sisters were educated).

notes

THE 2010 SYLVIA PANKHURST MEMORIAL LECTURE WILL TAKE PLACE ON 13TH AUGUST AT WORTLEY HALL

NAW MEMBERS MAY ALSO BE INTERESTED TO KNOW THAT IN OCTOBER 2009 AN ATTEMPT TO DEMOLISH A ROW OF HISTORIC ART DECO HOUSES IN WOODFORD AND REPLACE THEM WITH A BLOCK OF FLATS WAS REJECTED, FOR THE SECOND TIME. AMONGST OTHER OBJECTIONS IT WAS FEARED THAT THE SCHEME WOULD PUT AT RISK THE HISTORIC GRADE II LISTED STONE BOMB ANTI-AIR WAR MEMORIAL, ERECTED BY PANKHURST DURING THE 1930S

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE AIMS OF THE SYLVIA PANKHURST MEMORIAL COMMITTEE IS AT WWW.GN.APC.ORG/SYLVIA PANKHURST

wnc and the international women's

FORTY women (including Val Duncan and Vicki Gilbert from the NAW) from a variety of organisations met in Newcastle upon Tyne on 10 November to discuss the way in which 'grass roots' experience and views can be included in the input of the United Kingdom to the Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and Beijing +15.

The NAW was pleased that the Women's National Commission has taken on board the complaints from partners that their events were too southern based and that all areas of the country need to be involved in the decision-making process. We were advised that this was the third meeting in the North East with further conferences scheduled in Sunderland and Middlesbrough in the New Year on 'Women in Public Life'.

CEDAW

Barbara Collins, a director of the WNC, introduced this convention with a brief reminder of its background and the areas it specifically covers. Since it was first agreed in 1979, 185 countries have signed with the UK signing on 22 July 1981 and ratifying on 7 April 1986.

Governments are obliged to submit reports every four years setting out the measures taken to comply with the treaty. The CEDAW Committee assesses the performance and drafts observations on implementing the Convention. The Committee is currently trialling a system by which countries must report back on their progress within a year. The UK is part of this trial process and published its 'one year on' report 31 July 2009.

This report, a 29 page document, was circulated to delegates for them to consider following the conference.

Celia Reed, from the Government Equalities Office, then told the conference how a network of advisors from Whitehall is being brought together to compile the UK input to CEDAW 2011 and that she wants this group to be an ongoing one, not just formed when the four year report is due. There had been video links to the last CEDAW session so that specialists could answer points raised, as the delegation could not have expertise in all areas. This had been successful. The WNC have formed a sub committee of stakeholder members with international expertise to help them focus on some of the issues.

During the discussion that followed a number of specific points were raised that the WNC said they would take forward. These concerned domestic violence in the North East, the lack of focus on lesbian issues, problems with flexible working and some debate



on whether limited funding should go to specific groups or umbrella organisations. One delegate felt that the needs of women and girls with mental health problems were given scant mention.

Delegates also said it could be confusing to see how the WNC and government, CEDAW and CSW fitted together. The reports circulated could be daunting and it was hard to see how individuals might influence policy or be involved in its implementation.

CSW

Barbara Collins again gave some background to delegates about the CSW. 45 member states have signed up to it and they meet annually, usually during the first two weeks of March, in New York, to discuss its progress. Prior to this the WNC takes feedback from civic society which includes women's organisations and meetings such as this one. (The NAW is a partner organisation of the WNC and an affiliate member of the Women's Resource Centre which also provides input to

consultations.) The WNC then compiles a report and agrees a UK position with government for input to the European group. The UK participates in the CSW sessions as part of the EU and as the Presidency is currently with Sweden we have been working with them to produce the first draft of the report. In general the Baltic States have very forward looking women's policies but some other members of the EU are not so enlightened. (This may change when the Presidency moves from being a six monthly rotating position.)

The theme from the 2009 CSW meeting (53rd session) was the sharing of responsibilities between women and men. The main points raised to date concern lack of childcare, lack of understanding of the impact of HIV/AIDS on families, the lack of provision for fathers to do more in family life, and the fact that carers' efforts are not valued and rewarded. It was agreed that policies need to be developed to take into account caring responsibilities. The UK made three

interventions at CSW 53 on the effects of the recession on work, family etc. and asked for changes to parental leave rights (currently UK bill to change some leave from maternity to parental), emphasised the value of caring and asked for fair and family friendly policies.

The 54th CSW session will take place from 1 to 12 March 2010 and will also mark the 15th anniversary of 'Beijing'. Currently the UK is concentrating on targets for the representation of women in public life, raising awareness and tackling violence against women and girls and reducing the rates of teenaged pregnancy.

Beijing +15

Many members will remember the Beijing World Conference on Women and may reflect that the progress made in the 15 years since then has not been what had been hoped for.

The UK has recently submitted a response on its implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that details the achievements in the main policy areas. (See separate article below about the NAW response to the WNC consultation.)

In her speech to the +15 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe meeting in Geneva on 2 and 3 November, Helene Reardon-Bond from the Government Equalities Office said that the UK has made good progress in key areas such as violence against women, women's employment and education. There are now a greater number of women in public and political areas but progress has not been made at the pace that the UK government desired. The number of women MEPs has increased to 33% but the UK Parliament percentage is a disappointing 19.5.

As in most European countries women continue to be under-represented in boardrooms and action is being taken to address this especially with regard to ethnic minority women. The UK government is committed to a fair and family friendly labour market and our Ministers are keen to see voluntary actions and targets set by businesses to address the gender pay gap.

The UK government is leading by example and believes that the Equality Bill will allow for positive measures in employment and public life.

The discussion that followed this felt that the points below needed to be prioritised in striving to make progress on the Beijing Platform for Action. I'm sure that a number of others would have been made if time had allowed.

- The impact of the recession on women.
- The sexualisation of women in the media and the export of this calling it progress.

THE NAW RESPONSE TO THE WNC BEIJING +15 CONSULTATION

IN August the Women's National Commission consulted women's groups across the UK on how well we thought our government was doing to implement agreed actions on the Beijing Platform for Action, 15 years after the Platform was adopted. The WNC asked us to assess progress and highlight our priorities for further activity on each of the 12 critical actions. Margaret Boyle and Pam Flynn worked on the NAW response and are heartened to see many of our priorities picked up in the WNC's overview report to the UK government now that it has analysed all the responses it received.

Examples include:

- We need a national strategy on tackling violence against women so that there will be consistent locally provided refuges and rape crisis centres across the country.
- Women refugees need sensitive treatment and should be treated as victims of violence not illegal migrants.
- Big sporting events have shown a visible increase of trafficking and prostitution. The Government needs to take a proactive position against trafficking and prostitution in the run up

- The poverty trap and working women – loss of benefits and extra cost making it uneconomic to work.
- The way grading systems, job evaluation and job segregation keeps women's pay down.
- Lack of support and the stigma of mental health where there is an 18 month wait for help unless in complete crisis as if mental problems are not a 'real' illness.
- Discrimination in employment and the effect on vulnerable groups when it comes to low pay and sick pay.
- The impact on women and their ability to work when having caring responsibilities.
- The environment is not just climate change. Consider travel, recycling etc.
- In food choices there are significant issues linked to poverty.
- The gender segregation in school and problems with nursery and childcare.
- Lack of flexibility and reduction in adult education.
- Cost of higher education and the problem of paying back loans. The schooling system leads to an elitist society.
- The lack of parenting skills and teaching appropriate roles and relationships within the family. (Raised

to the 2012 London Olympics and the Commonwealth games in Scotland in 2014.

- Pornography is increasingly becoming part of everyday life; pornography is a form of violence against women and this message must be an explicit part of any government strategy.
- Girls often come under pressure to have sex and are exposed to images and messages that encourage "premature sexualisation" and there needs to be more investment, funding and resources in girls youth work.
- The EHRC should be able to make employers publish pay audits.
- Women must not be discriminated against in this recession around pregnancy and maternity.
- The Government should strengthen family friendly policy into effective and enforced legislation.
- The Government must focus on the gender impact of climate change and implement gender action within the Climate Change Act.

We also succeeded in getting extra consultative events across the North following our protest that no meetings had been organised north of Birmingham!!!

**YOU CAN FOLLOW THE DEBATE ON THIS ON THE WNC'S WEBSITE
WWW.THEWNC.ORG.UK**

against discussion of exposure of children to sexual behaviour when very young.)

comments

This was a very interesting conference which demonstrated that there is a significant gap between the experiences of the women delegates and response of the government bodies. One of the groups that bridge this gap is the Women's Resource Centre to which the NAW is affiliated. This organisation takes the experiences of its members and regularly inputs them to the WNC, partly via Vivienne Hayes who is a WNC Commissioner and Chief Executive of the WRC. It is also obvious that there are significant difficulties in agreeing a European position on some issues, reproductive rights being a significant one, even before one considers going forward to the UN.

While it is daunting to work through all of the documentation and to make representation to the groups putting together the UK submissions to the above we need to make sure that the voices and experiences of women represented at meetings such as this are not lost in the bureaucratic process.

campaign success

CAMPAIGN SUCCESS: UN WOMEN'S AGENCY

MEMBERS will recall the report from the 2009 AGM where Susan Nash (pictured right) spoke about ACTSA's involvement in the campaign to set up a UN Women's Agency, with similar powers and budget to UNICEF. (In 2008, the allowance for all four women's entities accounted for less than one per cent of the UN budget – with UNIFEM receiving by far the largest amount (\$215 million) and the others sharing less than \$6 million.) The idea emerged from plans set out in 2006 to reform the UN by Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General and a panel that included Gordon Brown, then British Chancellor, endorsed an agency for women headed by an under-secretary general, one rank below secretary general.

Susan reminded us of the unequal status of women in the world and how ACTSA were convinced that there needed to be a Women's Agency with a \$1 billion annual budget. This agency to hold governments to account, support peacekeeping processes and grassroots work and to be accountable to women's organisations across the world with an important seat at the UN table. Its supporters were arguing that only a new agency with increased staffing and budget can effectively address issues of specific concern to women.

Significant progress had been made in the run-up to this year's General Assembly but in early September when it was set to ratify the new agency – which would have a budget of around \$1bn and consolidate four existing bodies that deal with women's issues – Egypt, Cuba, Sudan and Iran mounted a last-minute campaign to delay ratification, Egypt arguing that other issues addressed by Annan's panel have taken a back seat in favour of the women's agency and that its creation should wait until progress has been made on these other fronts.

However, on 15 September, despite these delaying tactics the UN General Assembly adopted the historic resolution to create a strong women's agency, headed by an undersecretary general, the third highest-ranking UN officer after the secretary general and his deputy. This new unit will consolidate the work of four existing bodies and if robustly implemented, promises a politically powerful, independent agency with strong leadership and increased funds to move forward on adopted goals for gender equality and women's empowerment. But the victory did not come easily and much work remains to be done to ensure that a new full-fledged agency becomes a reality.



BARBARA SWITZER REPORTS BELOW ON A DISCUSSION "HOW CAN CIVIL SOCIETY HELP SHAPE A NEW UN WOMEN'S AGENCY" ORGANISED BY THE DFID AND VOLUNTARY SERVICE OVERSEAS (VSO) FOLLOWING THE PASSING OF THE RESOLUTION.

The Spring edition of *sisters* asked members to participate in the ACTSA campaign to lobby Gareth Thomas MP at the Department for International Development (DFID) for Government support to establish a United Nations Agency for Women. To be effective such a body needed to be headed up with a position of authority with sufficient power to make change. In September I attended this round table discussion organised by the DFID and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO).

Presentations were made on "The UN Delivering as One for Women at Country Level" by DFID Consultant Patricia Holden and "Funding, ODA, Governance and Structural Factors Relevant to the Establishment of a New UN Gender Equality Architecture" from Simon Chase of GEAR (Gender Equality Architecture Response). Both Gear and The DFID had carried out extensive research (which had full Government support), both were clear that such an office would need to have sufficient high authority to effect change. One of the obstacles was that all countries would need to be in agreement, not so easy, when some countries do not have women's equality high on their agenda.

On 15 September a breakthrough for equality and the rights of women around the world was announced when the UN agreed to create a new agency dedicated specifically to women. The UK had given its full support to this move; gender equality being an essential part of DFID's work to achieve poverty reduction. A powerful agency headed by an Under

Secretary General, to support national efforts and co-ordinate UN agencies will improve the lives of millions of women and girls.

Included in Gareth Thomas's welcome of the decision he said that for this agency to make a difference it has to be formed quickly, deliver results and have a strong leader. He went on to say "The UK now stands ready to double its funding to the UN on support for women's rights – leading to a better quality of life for millions of women globally who suffer appalling levels of violence and ill-treatment on a daily basis."

The General Assembly and the UN Secretariat have an enormous responsibility in 2009-2010 to fully implement the resolution, resolve all outstanding issues and appoint a skilled undersecretary general to lead the agency. Whether we achieve success and build a UN that truly works for women on the ground depends on how they choose to move forward now. Women around the world are watching, and we cannot afford to wait any longer.

A matter to be monitored by the WIDF and its affiliates.

This issue has been edited by
Val Duncan

Opinions expressed in the articles in
this journal are not necessarily the
views of the
National Assembly of Women.

Sisters is a vehicle through which
women can air their views, but they
must be in consonance with
the aims of the NAW.

farewell Celia Pomeroy

CELIA was a very much loved and respected member of the National Assembly of Women. Her membership spanned more than three decades and included serving on the Executive Committee, becoming National Vice President, Editor of the journal *sisters*, and Secretary of West London Branch of the NAW.

It was when I joined the West London branch that I first met Celia and though I knew something of her amazing history - she was an active member of the Philippine resistance against the Japanese in World War Two, a freedom fighter with the HUK guerrilla movement and the Philippino peasantry against the US occupation of her country, had been sentenced to death which was commuted to life imprisonment, then survived a 10 year prison sentence, all the while being separated from her beloved husband, Bill; then on release, at last being reunited with Bill and settling in London - I could not begin to imagine the suffering and hardship she must have endured. So already full of admiration, I was nevertheless very much in awe of this remarkable woman, a woman with a past unlike that of any other woman I had encountered in the women's movement in Britain.

But I need not have worried. Celia certainly did not rest on her laurels as she could so easily have done. Instead she entered wholeheartedly into the women's movement and in spite of her incredible background, she was always very supportive and essentially modest in her approach to people, while continuing to show a steely determination and dedication to the cause of peace, justice and equality for women and all oppressed peoples.

In 2003 Celia was granted life membership and became Honorary Vice President of the NAW. At the age of 87 she had declined nomination for the more full time role of Vice President, as in her words, her health was not good enough for her to be playing such an active part. Before then in 1994 she had been given the honour of having the NAW Study (now the NAW Garden Room) at Wortley Hall in Yorkshire, dedicated to her. Celia showed great humility in accepting both these tributes; she said that the decision to dedicate the study to her had "touched her heart", that she never expected honours or special treatment from the sisters with whom she had always felt the utmost fulfilment of unity in work for peace and the democratic process.

It is hard to find words sufficient to describe this remarkable woman, but it is fitting to use her own words which appear in her biography. She talks about the conscious change she made in her life, at a very young age, to

become part of the liberation movement. She was struck by the unity and kindness of the poor peasants with whom she threw in her lot: these are her words:

"They shared what little they had. I realised my former arrogance and self-interest. The peasants had such barren lives. Things I took for granted, like the zarzuela or the cinema, normal city life, they didn't even know. Yet the peasant leaders I came across impressed me. They were not educated formally, yet they had a wide knowledge of how to improve life for the peasants. I developed a new purpose in life; you must serve society. Working with people with the same objectives, you can get somewhere. I decided to become a full-time revolutionary and to dedicate my life to those working to improve the life of peasants."

These words sum up her philosophy; they will continue to inspire those who knew and worked with her and ensure that she will never be forgotten.

**MAISIE CARTER
CHAIRPERSON, WEST LONDON NAW**



THE PHOTOGRAPH SHOWS CELIA AND BILL POMEROY LAYING A WREATH AT THE LENIN MAUSOLEUM IN RED SQUARE, MOSCOW

Sisters readers with access to the internet (and speakers with their computer) should go to www.youtube.com and put "celia pomeroy" into the search box.

A clip entitled "Bill & Celia Pomeroy, London exiles" is worth watching (although the commentary is in Filipino, it is good to see their history illustrated pictorially and to hear Bill speak).

in addition there is coverage of Bill's funeral on "Bill Pomeroy returns 'home'".

biography

Celia Mariano, political activist and teacher: born Manila 1915; married 1948 William Pomeroy (died January 2009); died 22 August 2009.

Celia Mariano Pomeroy lived the first half of her remarkable life in her native Philippines and the second half in England. Born in Manila in 1915 to a well-to-do family she was deeply disturbed by the poverty she saw in the city's slums. As a student at the University of the Philippines she was drawn to Communism and joined the Philippine Communist Party (PKP) in September 1941. By October 1944 Celia had been elected to the PKP's central committee and in the post-war years she worked full-time for the PKP taking charge for a while of the party's efforts to advance the role and status of women, both within the movement and in society at large.

In 1947 she agreed to act as the guide and interpreter for an American communist, Bill Pomeroy, who had come to the Philippines to write a book about the Huks and in 1948 they married. In 1950 Celia and Bill left their home in Manila and joined a guerrilla encampment hidden in the forests of the Sierra Madre where they lived an often harsh existence for two years, producing leaflets and papers and organising training schools.

In April 1952 Bill and Celia were captured, charged with rebellion "complexed with other crimes" and sentenced to life imprisonment. After a decade behind bars, mostly apart, they were finally freed by presidential pardon in December 1961. Bill was expelled from the Philippines after his release and for two years he campaigned to obtain a passport for Celia. Barred from each other's countries, Celia and Bill settled in England, and lived for more than 40 years in Twickenham.

Here Celia worked as a primary school teacher (the first Filipina to teach in a British school) until her retirement in 1977. She was an active member of the National Assembly and she and Bill played a leading role in rebuilding the PKP's international links, traveling extensively in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

Celia remained a Communist to the end of her days. Her life had been filled with hardship, turbulence, fear and danger and very personal sacrifice. It is now planned that her ashes will join Bill's in Pomeroy Hall, the PKP headquarters in Bulacan province, with a view of the Sierra Madre Mountains.

in brief

People's Charter

NAW members may recall that the People's Charter was discussed at the 2009 AGM. A motion to support the People's Charter was overwhelmingly supported at the TUC Congress and its policies endorsed by the Labour Representation Committee.

End Child Poverty Campaign

ECPC have expressed their disappointment that the government did not use its pre-budget report to address the urgent needs of the 3.9 million children living in poverty in the UK and stated that without the £3 billion invested in family incomes that the ECPC called for in its budget, children across the UK will continue to face the costs of social disadvantage, exclusion, poor health and inadequate nutrition.

diary dates

NAW meetings

Executive Meetings

- 23 January; London
- 6 March; Manchester
- 14 August; Wortley Hall

Annual General Meeting

- 17 April, Wortley Hall

affiliated organisation events

- Abortion Rights Annual General Meeting, 13 February; London
- Wortley Hall Annual Meeting, 14 March; Wortley Hall

call for Case Studies:

Members will recall that the NAW 2009 AGM agreed that it is a right of women to have their design needs taken seriously and that the gender equality duty is still being largely ignored by planners. Women's needs are different from those of men in relation to the built environment and planning and design that takes women's needs into account would consider functionality, ongoing upkeep and maintenance, visual appearance, access and personal safety.

As part of our work we are asking if any members or affiliates have case studies demonstrating these different needs.

If so please send to NAW at the e-mail or address below:

- 92 Wansbeck Avenue, Cullercoats, Tyne & Wear NE30 3DJ
- naw@sisters.org.uk

what women want in Europe

a summary of the European manifesto

IN July 2009 the NAW agreed a Summary of the European Manifesto *What Women Want in Europe* published by the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) European Regional Office in June 2008. The Manifesto is a joint effort by the following organisations: POGO (Cyprus), Federation of Greek Women/OGE (Greece), Movimento Democratico des Mulheres/MDM (Portugal), Association of Women of the Mediterranean Region (Italy), National Assembly of Women (UK), Women's Union of Russia, Patriotic Front of Women (Turkey), SKV (Sweden), and MFIK (Iceland).

Contact NAW for a copy of the full manifesto (hard copy or electronic version available).

EU must tackle violence against women from equality perspective

On the occasion of the 10th UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, GUE/NGL Vice-President and Chair of the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee, Eva-Britt Svensson called for a European year to tackle violence against women and for the EU to approach the issue from an equality perspective.

"Violence deprives women and girls of their human rights, affecting their daily lives. We must break the silence

and cooperate within and outside of political systems to eliminate this kind of violence.

"Violent relationships, sex trafficking, physical and psychological abuse, rape, murder, prostitution and the use of violence against women as a weapon in war situations - these are questions for all parts of society. This is a structural and widespread problem across the globe. It is a public health problem, a social problem, and it is further evidence of gender inequality. Therefore, we must attack the problem from an equality perspective.

"Parliament's Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee is seeking information on the measures the Commission and the Council are planning in order to ensure that all member states draw up national action plans to tackle violence against women. Will the Commission organise a European year to eliminate violence against women? This is something the European Parliament has requested repeatedly since 1997. It is high time our demand was met!"

Note: The WIDF supported Eva Britt Svensson's campaign to be EU President. In autumn 2009 she was appointed Chair of the EU Women's Rights Commission and spoke on UK *Woman's Hour* on 29 September 2009 about the relevance of the EU to women and parents.

join the NAW now!

*I would like to join the NAW. Here is £15 for the annual subscription (£5 unwaged) which includes my subscription to **sisters**, the journal of the NAW.*

Our organisation would like to affiliate to the NAW. Enclosed is: £15 (local organisation/NAW branch), £30 (regional organisation), £45 (national)

Name _____

Address _____

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Organisation _____

phone _____

email _____

Send to: NAW, 92 Wansbeck Avenue, Cullercoats, Tyne & Wear NE30 3DJ