



SOME OF THE  
DELEGATES AT THE  
NAW AGM IN APRIL.  
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REPORT

JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P SUMMER 2010

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# isters

# she **was** in evin prison

## from the Editor

I look around me on this quiet Sunday as I write this on my laptop, normally I write about the issues of the NAW, what we have attended, what we still have to do, sometimes there doesn't seem to be enough hours in the day, but we usually find that bit extra. I don't have anyone standing looking over my shoulder telling me what I can and cannot do. I am free to come and go as I please.

So I have to remind myself that this is July 2010. Because...

On the other side of the world there is a place called EVIN PRISON and in that prison there was a woman called SHIRIN ALAM HOLI being held captive, some days she was tortured, some days they asked her questions in a language she didn't understand, the only thing she understood was that they ask her to renounce being a KURD, but why should she, when they had already told her that no matter what she says she would never be released and she may even be executed.

So, as I finish this article I will reflect on my freedom of speech, freedom of choice, freedom to come and go as I please, in the knowledge that I will never again take any part of that for granted, and live in hope that no other human being has to pay with their life, just because of the country they were born in or the religion they were born into.

And that we can all learn to live together, to enjoy the diversity that different cultures can bring to our own lives, and never again feel the need to destroy it just because it's different from our own culture.

I must say I am born as a Kurd, and because I am a Kurd, I have suffered many deprivations. My tongue is Kurdish, and through this language I have made contact with my family, friends and acquaintances. I have grown up with it, and my language is the bridge connecting all of us. But I am not allowed to speak with my own language, to read it and to use it as a medium of education, and I am not allowed to write in my own language. They tell me "come on, deny that you are a Kurd", but if I do so I have denied my self.

Your Honourable Judge, Mr Interrogator, during the time you were interrogating me, I could not even speak your language and during the two years' imprisonment in the women's prison, I have learned the Farsi language from my friends, but you were interrogating me with your own language and put me on trial in your own language and passed my sentence. But it meant that I did not properly understand what was happening



## I am a hostage a letter from Evin Prison by Shirin Alam Holi, executed in May 2010 by the Iranian regime

I am in my third year in prison which means more than two years of a terrible life behind the bars of Evin Prison. For two years of my imprisonment I did not know what was happening – no solicitor, no written charges. During these two years, I had dark days with the revolutionary guards and after that, the interrogation started in the [infamous, tr.] Ward No. 209. After passing the time in 209 I was sent to the public section of the prison. I made many requests out of this limbo so as to clarify my situation, but no answer.

Finally, the unjust sentence of execution was passed on me. Why have I been imprisoned? Why should I be executed? Is it because I am a Kurd?

around me, and I could not defend myself.

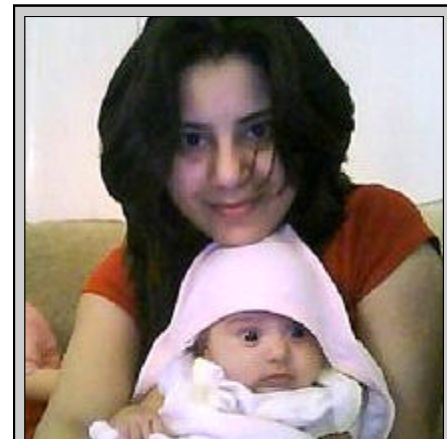
The tortures that you used on me have become my nightmares at night and my pain and suffering during the day, and for that reason I am passing the days by suffering from the torture I have suffered.

During the torture, I was beaten on my head which has damaged my head. Some days I have terrible headaches, so terrible that I don't know what is happening around me. For many hours I am oblivious to my surroundings, and my headaches culminate in nosebleeds. After that I gradually go back to my normal being and become conscious again. Another gift they have given me is the deterioration of my eyesight which is getting worse. I have asked for glasses but I have been ignored.

When I came to the prison my hair was completely black, now that I am in my third year of imprisonment, day after day my hair is getting grey. Of course I know that you haven't done

these things only to me and my family, you have used this kind of torture on the children of Kurdistan including people such as Zeynab Jalalian, Roonak Safarzadeh and .... The eyes of Kurdish mothers are, day after day, full of tears as they are awaiting their children to go back to them, they always worry about what is happening to them. When the telephone rings, they fear the worst, namely the news of their loved one's execution.

Today is the second of May 2010, and after a long time again I have been taken for interrogation to Ward 209 in Evin Prison. Again, they are repeating their baseless allegations. They asked me to cooperate with them so that my sentence of execution be annulled. I don't know what this cooperation means, when I don't have anything to say more than what I have said already. Finally they asked me to repeat what they told me and I did not do it. The interrogator told me "We wanted to release you last year but your family did not cooperate with us that's why the situation is what it is". The interrogator confessed that I am only a hostage in their hands, and until they have reached their goal they will not release me, or at the end I will be executed but in any case I will not be released.



**Sehar Shebaz** is a 25 year old woman from Pakistan. She came to the UK on a student visa for an arranged marriage. She was forcibly removed on 22 May from Heathrow.

After their wedding her husband became abusive and threatened violence against her. She fled from his house in Lancashire and came to Glasgow at the end of last year. Her husband followed her and made more abusive phone calls so she was forced to move house again.

There is a very real danger in Sehar Shabaz, as a single woman with a young baby, being flown back to Pakistan.

We must ask: what criterion was used to justify her deportation?

# our newly elected councillor



**NAW EC MEMBER BARBARA WHITE IS A NEWLY ELECTED LABOUR COUNCILLOR IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF REDBRIDGE.**

I have always been a trade union activist and at the same time an active member of the Labour Party. I am Chair of our Local Government Committee so it wasn't really a surprise when it was suggested that I should try and stand for a seat on our local Council.

A Labour councillor had been deselected by the London Region so he immediately joined the Lib Dems who arranged for him to stand in his old seat. This was the ward that I was selected in so I didn't think that I stood much of a chance as the previous councillor was well known in the area

even if he had changed political parties. Much to my surprise I did win the seat for Labour.

Being selected and campaigning is one thing but the realisation that you have been elected is rather frightening. It suddenly hits you that you've had no training for what will be expected of you. It is at this time the Council Officers are invaluable when you realise that they have prepared a programme of events tailored to meet the needs of newly elected councillors. The induction is welcome as is the knowledge that you know where to go to get advice and support.

I hadn't really met the opposition until my first time in the council chamber. It was quite formal as it was the meeting where the new Mayor and Deputy Mayor were elected. Sitting there I was so proud to be Labour when I noticed that our members were of varying ages and ethnicities. They truly represented the diverse area that we live in. I couldn't say the same about our opponents.

I live in the London Borough of Redbridge and represent Goodmayes Ward. Unfortunately Redbridge mirrors our current Government and we too have a "Con-Dem" coalition. Like all councils our budget has been cut and savings have to be made. A recent idea was to cut the councillors refreshments. I didn't really know what was meant by refreshments but presumed that it was the tea, coffee and biscuits

that we received whilst attending a meetings. I was quite upset about this because until I mentioned it nobody had said a word about the two or three women who provided this service. Would they be made redundant was the question I asked. I couldn't stand the thought of headlines in the local paper saying that councillors had given up their tea and biscuits and knowing that job losses wouldn't be mentioned. Quite possibly there will be job losses with the cuts that have to be made but why pick on the lowest paid of the workforce?

As a councillor you are appointed to various committees and I am pleased to say that I have been appointed to several organisations that I am particularly interested in such as Redbridge Music Service, Redbridge Drama Service, Redbridge Arts Council and our local theatre. I also sit on the committees for Conservation, General Purposes, Licensing (no samples I'm sorry to say!) and Regulatory. I can assure you that all of this plus working in my own ward and being Deputy Chair of the Labour Group is keeping me more than busy.

I am enjoying it as I hope that I am helping to ensure that Redbridge becomes a better place to live in plus doing my very best to fight for our front line services and see the minimum amount of cuts to services for the elderly and of course education.

# the women's parliament



**T**HIS was my last TUC women's conference, having attended as a lay delegate for almost 30 years and having served on the TUC women's

committee for roughly the same time. I am grateful to my union, UCU and its predecessor, NATFHE for electing me to represent them for so long.

I was very pleased to Chair the conference, not just because it was my last one, but because it marked two important anniversaries: the centenary of International Women's Day and the 100th anniversary of the Women Chain Makers' strike. As a labour historian who writes and lectures about women's labour history, this meant a lot to me and much of my opening speech was devoted to the historic struggle of working class women. Their contribution is often forgotten by male labour historians.

I have always been a great fan of the women's conference – it is the parliament of working women and I shall miss it. What was very evident to me was the powerful sense of sisterhood and solidarity which I experienced personally with the many good wishes

and cards I received, but I think all delegates experience this. It is what strengthens us in our work for genuine equality as expressed in our Charter for Women. This will be all the more vital as this dreadful ConDem government pledges, by attacking the public sector, to increase the feminisation of poverty and reverse the very limited gains made on the equality agenda.

**BY MARY DAVIS, CHAIR OF TUC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE 2010**

This issue has been edited by  
Janette Fergusson.

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.

# the NAW visits our **Portuguese** sisters

THE NAW RECEIVED AN INVITATION FROM MDM (MOVIMENTO DEMOCRATICO DE MULHERES) TO ATTEND THE 8TH CONGRESS IN LISBON IN THE MAY 2010.

NAW PRESIDENT DONA FELTHAM, WITH BARBARA SWITZER, ATTENDED ON BEHALF OF THE NAW. WITH THE THREAT OF THE ASH CLOUD LOOMING OVER EUROPE, THE PREVIOUS WEEK, IT WAS TOUCH AND GO WHETHER THEY WOULD GET THERE!

**DONA FELTHAM REPORTS:**

**T**HE MDM Congress of members from all over Portugal and Madeira is held every four years. Its agenda covers employment issues for women in industry, trade workers, culture and entertainment and all cultural, philosophical and social issues in Portugal.

The Movement of Democratic Women is the only national organisation of its kind in Portugal that highlights all the issues from personal to political in the context of the severe economic and financial crisis across the country and the world, which is causing ever deepening social inequalities and obvious setbacks in the social and economic status of Women.

Regina Marques, President of MDM, opened the 8th Congress by welcoming women from Portugal and international guests of which Barbara Switzer and Dona Feltham, NAW President were representatives from the NAW (the only WIDF affiliate in the UK).

Other International guests were from Italy, Cape Verdi, Fatima Medhi (Secretary-General of the National Union of Women Sahrawi), Haddu Ahmed Fadel MP, member of the Political Commission of the Parliament of the SADR (Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic), Angola and Brazil. Apologies were received from OGE Greece, and Skevi Koukoumus European Vice President (WIDF), and from Marcia Campos, President of the WIDF who was unable to attend due to elections in Brazil.

## **objectives of Congress:**

- update the analysis of the social, economic, political and cultural experience of Portuguese women and the world, particularly in the context of Europe and WIDF
- raise the national and local profile of the MDM in the struggle for women's and feminist demands in the areas of labour, the economy, art, culture and politics
- mobilise women to campaign for a greater participation in the fight for their specific rights and a better life
- consider ways of organising women to support a feminist platform for the struggle for emancipation of women which best meets the challenges of time which we live
- strengthen the fight for solidarity



**TOP: DONA FELTHAM, MDM RESEARCHER MARIA VARANDA, BARBARA SWITZER**

**BOTTOM: INTERNATIONAL DELEGATES WITH THE MDM PRESIDENT REGINA MARQUES SECOND RIGHT, AND NEXT TO HER ON THE RIGHT, ARTIST DILIA FRAGUITO**

with women's organisations that, in their country, fight for the cause of liberating people by improving their living conditions and peace

- develop a Charter of Women's Rights and lobby those in power to respond to the urgent proposals of the right to work and economic indepen-

dence, defence of the status of social, welfare and quality of women's lives

- elect the National Governing Council of the MDM for the next four years.

## **saturday's events**

On the Saturday much of the Congress was taken up with internal matters where documents were approved unanimously by delegates. Unfortunately there was no simultaneous translation for this day. However, we would like to give our sincere thanks to Maria Varanda who works as a

researcher for MDM and, although not a formal translator, assisted us greatly with her précis of the proceedings and explaining in English what the debates were.

Each objective was introduced by a member of the Governing Council and was followed by debates from the floor which highlighted the circumstances of women in the different area of Portugal. All proposals were accepted unanimously.

As well as the formal debates there was a raffle to raise funds and a ceremony for predominant MDM officials and international guests to paint a small portion of a painting that had been commissioned by the MDM, by the artist Dilia Fraguito, to be given to the President of Portugal.

### on sunday

The Sunday morning of the Congress was the International Session. During dinner the evening before international delegations were asked to participate in a panel discussion. Due to a misunderstanding in translation this was not in fact a panel discussion but an invitation for each of the leaders of the international delegations to address Congress on the issues affecting their specific country and how the different experiences could assist Portugal to further their own and the international agenda for women.

In introducing Dona Feltham, Regina Marques informed the Congress of the NAW's links with the MDM and the WIDF and congratulated the work of the NAW on the European Manifesto which had been summarised by Ute Navidi.

On listening to the debates the previous day it was obvious that many of the issues for Portuguese Women were the same as those in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. MDM were thanked for the invitation to attend the Congress and for its hospitality. MDM and the Women of Portugal were congratulated on their campaign for a Women's Right to Choose, which had resulted in abortion finally being legalised in Portugal. Attention was drawn to the attack on our hard won rights on this issue in the UK and that with the hard work of Abortion Rights (to which the NAW is affiliated) and the Labour government of the day, the attacks were defeated. However, in the light of our disastrous recent General Election, vigilance is paramount as these attacks may well re-emerge.

We sent our good wishes to sisters in Greece in relation to their current economic crisis which is now spilling into Spain and Portugal. A crisis which is not of the making of the workers but the greedy bankers. The demands of the Charter for Women that many unions and women's organisations

have signed up to were highlighted (the official interpreter on this day said he would translate the Charter for Women into Portuguese so that MDM could distribute it to all delegates).

### in conclusion

Finally details of recent General Election in the UK were given and that it was too early to say what the impact would be on stability of the UK but whatever the manifesto pledges implemented by the Conservative-Liberal Democratic Alliance they would most affect women and public sector workers. Our links with our European sisters need to be stronger now more than ever.

Congress was left with the telling comment "let us remember, sisters, the name of the bank that started this economic crisis was Leeman Brothers not Leeman Sisters". **Viva MDM, Viva Sisterhood**

Following the international speakers messages of solidarity were endorsed in support of the struggle in Palestine, Greece, Cuba and the Miami five and sympathy was extended to sisters in Iceland for the disaster that had overtaken their country.

After lunch the Congress ended with a three hour celebration of street theatre and Portuguese music and dance.

It was a very exhilarating and interesting experience, one in which I learned much more about international sisterhood and the WIDF affiliates. I thank the NAW for the opportunity to participate.

## from the archives...

**A**National Assembly of Women leaflet is in one of many boxes of pamphlets and leaflets on women held in the Working Class Movement Library, currently being catalogued. The collection has a wide range of material on women from trade unions and feminist groups

The leaflet advertises an International Friendship Conference organised by the Manchester Committee of the NAW and lists the demands for women – all of which are very familiar. Although there is no year on the pamphlet, it is likely to have been 1955.

The Library has a unique collection capturing the stories and struggles of ordinary people's efforts to improve their world: [www.wcml.org.uk](http://www.wcml.org.uk)

*A different world is ours to win, a world where:*

There will be more Food, Clothes, Furniture, Books, Comfort, Fun;

Every family will have a decent Home at Rents they can afford;

There will be enough good Schools and Nurseries;

There will be all the Hospitals and Health Services to meet our needs;

Women will get Equal Pay and Equal Opportunity for Training and Promotion.

*In fact, a world where peace is guaranteed so that every Boy and Girl can grow up to enjoy a full and happy future, irrespective of Race, Colour or Creed.*

## Charter for Women conference "Cutting women out of the picture; where are we in the new political landscape?"

Saturday 30 October 2010, 10am to 4pm

NUJ Offices, London

Affiliated organisations may nominate up to 5 delegates at a cost of £20 each (this includes lunch).

further information contact the Secretary, Sharon Allen, at RMT Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD, 07533 125 166, [s.allen@rmt.org.uk](mailto:s.allen@rmt.org.uk)

# naw agm

I can't believe another year has passed, but it must have because here we are on the 17th of April 2010 at our AGM being held at Wortley Hall, with its grounds looking just as good, if not better, than ever, the weather is nice and warm this year so we can enjoy 'outdoors' as well (not always possible). We have our usual attendees who manage to come every year and we have new faces as well, always good to see. We have a full programme over the next day and a half, which our President Dona Feltham will endeavour to ensure we don't miss or forget anything.

Dona started us off by welcoming everyone and explaining the agenda for our Saturday and Sunday morning. Ann (NAW member from local branch) told us about her knitwear items she sells every year for funds which will be split equally between NAW and Wortley Hall. We then moved on to our usual AGM agenda, we covered Minutes of AGM 2009, Eleanor Lewington, NAW Treasurer provided an update on finances and accounts and answered questions asked of her, we also agreed that Brian Clark would continue for another year as our auditor.

Val Duncan NAW Secretary gave us an update on *Sisters* and Barbara Switzer updated us on the 'new look' website, it will be finished soon and will be updated on a regular basis as well. Lydia Merrill updated us on Nuclear Energy about where the money goes and how new projects are being mothballed. Tomorrow Lydia is off to Finland to see what is being done there.

Eleanor Lewington reminded us that

we in the NAW should be looking at reports on the progression of women's issues ie. Universal Pension Credits (as detailed in previous *Sisters*), we should check on the position on Pension Credits, Tax Relief and Poverty after new government elected, so that we can restate the NAW's position on it. We should also remain vigilant on the new government's position on Occupational Pensions, as employers seem keen to claw back contributions, (watch this space!) and also the situation with the current economic crisis and its effects on the public sector, of spending cuts to local amenities and job losses throughout.

EC member Ute Navidi told us that the Violence Against Women campaign folded because major supporters couldn't afford to support it, also that 600,000 children are living in poverty, that's 1 in 4 in the London area. This must stay on our agenda.

Val Duncan then told us about The People's Charter campaign by left groups still ongoing and our members told us that it has been adopted in Salford and Wigan Charter and Tyne and Weir using it as a basis for their local charter.

NAW are at present working with other organisations on a six page document on Venezuela, this will be added to our website when it's completed.

Discussion was held on the situation at Wortley Hall. Barbara Switzer told everyone about where they are with the new upgrades, the alterations to meeting times, that shareholder's forms were available at the reception area and it was felt by our members, that the NAW should promote Wortley



Hall when we attend with stalls at the TUC etc.

The report was accepted and our thanks were passed to Val for keeping us organised.

Dona started our afternoon session by introducing us to Lorraine Fitzsimmons (Hope not Hate), who explained to us that the campaign they were running was to educate as many people as possible about the dirty tricks and tactics used by members of the BNP to get elected in the forthcoming general and local elections.

They always blame someone else she said, or play on people's weaknesses and insecurities. They use the recession to their advantage, blame individual councils and create even more insecurities. Unlike other parties they don't want to work with anyone else. They use fascism, either by denying the holocaust or admiring Hitler, and also consider minorities as second class citizens. They are totally opposed to trade unions who deal fairly for all when trying to address poverty etc. They have links with other fascist organisations and every win for them completely changes the landscape. Our members provided updates of what was happening in their areas.

As we now know, the result of the last election has left the BNP losing a lot of votes and a lot of seats. But, we must remain vigilant here too. Make people in your area aware of the tactics they use, so that they never gain any kind of foothold in our society again.

Eleanor then moved the NAW motion on Public Services. She gave a short talk about the motion, she said the UK loses at least £75 billion a year in tax evasion. In the public sector it would cost more to pay a worker who earns £28,000 a year 'credits' than it would to keep them in work!! She asked why when we own some of the banks are we having to pay their debts twice? Why are the hedge funds not being invested to build and employ,



but are being invested to only make money? Debates should be held using the People's Charter to highlight issues.

She said the book entitled *Spirit Level*, which uses the 15 richest countries to show the gaps between the richest and the poorest and also the dis-functionality caused by it, is definitely worth a read.

The future looks grim!! The public sector has to pay for the bankers' greedy mistakes. Hospitals are operating outside the NHS. Schools in north London run by a carpet company. The fight now is to win back what we've lost. And, there are way too many committees who, investigate everything and find out nothing.

The public services motion was passed unanimously.

We finished off the day by having a discussion about the way forward for the NAW. We split into three groups and tried to break this down into what do we want? what do we need? and how do we go about getting it? Everyone took part in this discussion and a lot of good ideas came out of it, they will be carried forward to the next NAW EC meeting, where we will start working on how to achieve them as soon as possible.

Sunday dawned bright and clear (though not as bright and clear as yesterday). Dona introduced our second speaker to us. Linda McAvan MEP who attends meetings in Copenhagen which deal with the Affects of Climate Change for Women in the Developing World. She firstly explained that MEPs are elected regionally by proportional representation. She explained to us about the issues she has to deal with ie. Poverty, Disease and Overseas Development including Fair Trade. She has visited Kenya on the border with Uganda. The local produce of the country appears to be crops and cows and has been for centuries. Their schools are run by Brothers and children are at school for only three years starting at 12 years of age. The age for a girl to marry is normally 18, but it can be as young as 12 to 14 years and if they have children they have to take them to school with them. Their father receives a dowry of cows for their daughters' hand in arranged marriages. Unfortunately climate change has decimated their crops for a number of years. Health problems for women include a hole in the bladder caused during childbirth, this can kill both mother and child, and happens often. Funds are given to hospitals in Ethiopia who treat this health problem. Malnutrition is another problem and 2/3 of girls have HIV which then causes a high level of infant mortality.

The statistics show that although there are 54% of the world's popula-

tion women, there is only 18% holding parliamentary seats?

The European Union works together on policies and when they are complete they are taken to a wider audience. 20% target by 2012 on for example, Waste and Sewage and Renewable Energy which is at present 4% in the UK and 40% in Denmark. As you can see from that we have still a long way to go. Unfortunately Copenhagen has failed to pass any laws enforcing any policies, even although the temperature is now two degrees above pre-industrial times. One of the reasons for this is because the smaller countries feel they should pay less than they do because it's likely to be the larger industrialised countries that have caused more damage and the larger countries like America have too many states with differing policies.

Linda then answered questions which led to our members making a few good suggestions of their own on

re-cycling and using less electricity, gas etc.

Dona then brought this year's AGM to a close by thanking Wortley Hall staff for their help and assistance, our members for their attendance and contributions to debates and workshops and Ann for her sterling (knitting) efforts raising £57 for the NAW funds and £57 for Wortley Hall restoration fund, so, after wishing everyone a safe journey we all headed home.

PICTURES FROM BOTTOM LEFT CLOCKWISE:

IT'S NOT ALL HARD WORK! PRESIDENT DONA FELTHAM WITH MEMBER ANITA WRIGHT

LORRAINE FITZSIMMONS FROM HOPE NOT HATE WITH DONA

EC MEMBER UTE NAVIDI LEADS ONE OF THE DISCUSSION GROUPS ON THE FUTURE OF THE NAW

LINDA MCAVAN MEP WITH DONA



# morning star conference

A delegation of three from NAW (Dona Feltham, Eleanor Lewington and Janette Ferguson), were joined by NAW sisters Megan Dobney, Rose Keeping and Anita Wright at the Morning Star Conference on 19 June 2010 at Congress House, London.

Several subjects were discussed and debated that day, Celebrating 80 years of the *Morning Star*, the economic crisis, and trade versus capitalism.

There were a number of speakers on the day including Megan Dobney (SERTUC), Professor Mary Davis, Matt Wrack (FBU), Bob Crow (RMT), George Galloway (formerly Respect MP), Michael Meacher (Labour MP), Andrew Love (Labour MP) and Tony Burke (Unite Assistant General Secretary).

Although I had been looking forward to it, I had never been to a *Morning Star* conference before so I didn't know quite what to expect.

The first session was about *The Morning Star*, our speakers reminded us about the struggles to keep it on sale over the years, including successive Conservative and Labour governments boycotting it, newsagents refusing to sell it, employees imprisoned, equipment seized and their offices blown up by an incendiary device, but to the Star workers' credit over the years they have not let their readers down by giving up, and they themselves believe the two main reasons the Star has survived is a correct presentation of the facts and a high level of commitment. They publish the stories other papers reject and have always supported the unions and the workers of the UK and other countries. So, let's look forward to the next 80 years by buying and reading this daily paper!

We heard about the struggles of the workers in the public sector, who are being made to pay off the debts of the private sector, caused by the greedy bankers. The cuts to our front line services, Fire, Police, Ambulance, the NHS and other areas, closures of Fire Stations, 18% slower turnout times, loss of firefighters, nurses and police jobs, a local hospital run by a Carpet Company and the private sector being invited to run the public sector. When will our Government and Councillors, our employers, learn that the value of the public sector is in the dedication of the staff, the lives they save, the comfort they give, and not in the managers whose only interest is in money not spent.

We heard the question asked in debate, what is the way forward? And there were quite a varied response from the speakers. Is it with the Labour Party? Is it without the Labour Party? Is it with a newly formed political party? After much debate the conclusion

drawn was that the Labour Party has to really listen to the people of the UK. The trade unions have to work to increase membership, and we the voters also have our part to play, because the Tories did not get a majority, they are being propped up by the Lib/Dems who are doing all their dirty work for them and we have to let them know at every opportunity that we cannot and will not live through another full term of cuts and job losses, and we need a change: perhaps Diane Abbott could make a difference?

Another question debated was trade versus capitalism. We heard from the speakers that the problems being experienced in the UK are being duplicated in Europe and America, but smaller countries are feeling the pinch as well. But the main difference appears to be that most other countries are investing in their people, they are investing in jobs to keep their economies going, and as we heard earlier from Megan Dobney (SERTUC regional secretary and NAW EC member), almost one third of money spent on public service in the UK goes to the private sector so it's not only public sector employees whose jobs are at risk. She pointed out also that the cuts in public service jobs will impact heavily on our communities as public sector workers, who are modestly paid, tend to spend their money in their local economies.

Another serious topic of discussion was "The Energy Debate - Coal, Nuclear or Renewable". Most people have their own views on what is right, what is wrong, what is affordable, and what is not? The one thing no one can argue about is that "we need energy" for electricity, for heat, for hospitals, offices, our homes, to power our transport, we need it in just about everything we do. So, no argument there then, the problem is we have to take so many things into consideration

when thinking about it eg. cost, the environment, waste disposal, storage of any by-products, and also natural energy generated by wind or water and the investment needed to take this forward. Surely it's better being in the lead on this, instead of running to try to catch up, but unfortunately with the Tory/LibDem cuts it looks likely there won't be any money invested in this either.

Bill Benfield (*Morning Star* Editor) likens his job to fighting the bullies in the playground when fighting national newspapers owned and run by billionaires.

I must admit that's how I look at our position now with the cuts and job losses and the fact that this Tory/LibDem government seems to think this is the only answer. They are doing more harm than they can imagine by throwing a whole generation of our young people on the scrap heap while other countries are investing in theirs. This all sounds so familiar!

We could not cover every debate, but have hopefully given you an idea of what took place, *The Morning Star* is celebrating 80 years, so let's look forward to the next 80 years by buying it and reading it. They have recently opened their own website too. [www.morningstaronline.co.uk](http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk)

*A reminder: the 8th Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Lecture takes place on Friday 13 August, 7pm at Wortley Hall.*

## How the vote was won

Speaker: Irene Cockcroft

[www.gn.apc.org/sylviapankhurst](http://www.gn.apc.org/sylviapankhurst)  
[www.wortleyhall.org.uk](http://www.wortleyhall.org.uk)

## 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 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ postcode

Organisation \_\_\_\_\_

phone \_\_\_\_\_

email \_\_\_\_\_

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