



SISTERS

journal of the n.a.w.

30p



**31 years of NAW
special souvenir issue**

FOR PEACE, EQUALITY AND INDEPENDENCE

— a statement by chairwoman Betty Tebbs

LOOKING back over the years to the time of the birth of the National Assembly of Women, it becomes necessary to examine the reasons for its great success in 1952 and its relevance to our struggles today.

Being the child of the International Women's Day Committee the foundations were laid for the broadening out of the Women's Movement which was so badly needed.

The issues which were uppermost in the minds and speeches of the 1,400 delegates attending the N.A.W. meeting in St. Pancras Town Hall in March 1952 are very much the same issues we are fighting today, namely Peace and the quality of life for women and children.

Undeniably the impact of the early years of the N.A.W., where women became enthusiastically optimistic that the power to improve matters lay with them, had a profound effect which led to the re-emergence of the Women's Movement of today. Not for forty years since the Suffragette days had the voice of British Women seemed so determined, forceful and confident of success.

For many reasons the Women's Movement has become fragmented by divisions created by the very nature of our society. Although there has been a decline in numbers in NAW the dedication of our members working in the many and varied fields on women's issues, has broadened out our work to deal with the problems of racism, ethnic minorities, immigration and older women.

Our affiliation to the Women's International Democratic Federation, whose membership cover 130 countries, is a source of inspiration to us and plays an important part in our numerous activities. We take pride in the work with our sister organisations throughout the world knowing the N.A.W. is richer for its understanding of their problems and the support and solidarity we share.

It is with a great sense of satisfaction, that, because of our work over recent

years we are again building N.A.W. groups throughout the country. Our aim is to encourage once again women isolated in their home environment, to play an active part within the Women's Movement. We know our broad organisation can bring together women in the many aspects of struggle for a better life.

The dedication and innovative ideas shown in St. Pancras Town Hall in 1952 were the forerunner of the dedication, determination and courage shown by the women in the Peace movement today.

As chairwoman of the N.A.W. I wish to invite all women into our organisation, knowing that together we can achieve, for all women, our aim of Equality, National Independence and Peace.



NAW members on rally.



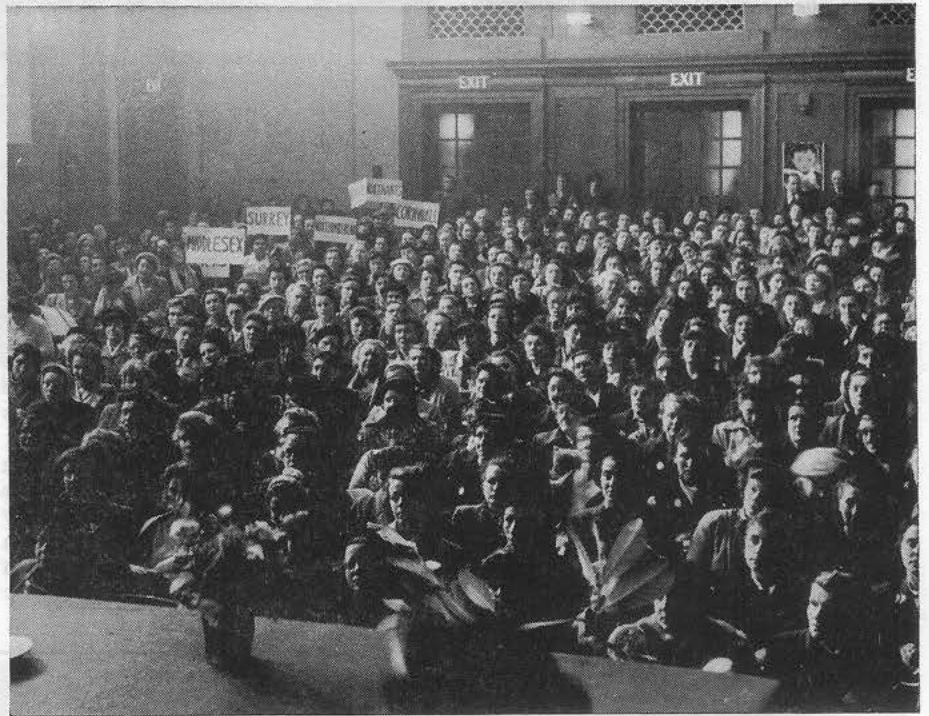
NAW — fighting a familiar battle — against spending cuts.

THROUGH THE YEARS WITH NAW

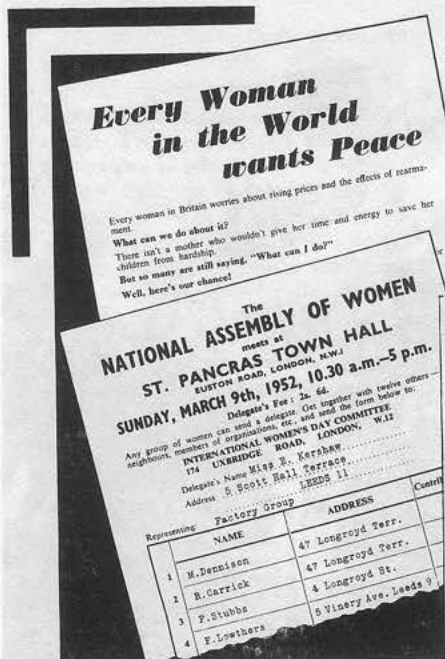
— History repeating itself

BEFORE BETTY FRIEDAN, before the words 'women's liberation' were even uttered women in Britain were already mobilising into a mass movement. But, emerging from the horror of World War II their banner did not just proclaim equal rights and equal opportunity, but also peace and social development.

The National Assembly of Women (NAW), now undergoing a quiet but significant revival in this its 31st anniversary year, is one of many organisations in the modern day women's movement. Some, who like the media date Women's Liberation from the early '60's onwards, may even think of NAW as a new arrival onto the scene. But in the 1950's when it was founded, it was truly a national body of women who came from all walks of life to speak as women on behalf of women. NAW was powerful and unique enough to break through the hazy illusion of post war prosperity and make the headlines in the national press.



The first National Assembly of Women at St. Pancras Town Hall, 1952.



Delegate form

Front cover shows:

Mrs. May Byrne, representing 104 dockers' wives in Bootle, Lancs., speaks at a meeting in Shepherd's Bush, London.

It was formed in 1952 out of the International Women's Day Committee in order to widen the campaign for equality, peace and social improvement. The catalyst for NAW had come from the war itself which had suddenly taken thousands of women out of the home and into the factory, making them a crucial and respected part of the war effort. Nurseries were set up to look after their children and, with the need for war work paramount, the traditional role assigned to women was cast aside.

The story of how women lost their jobs and lost their nurseries is well known. But the independence, self assertiveness and political awareness which became part of NAW is sometimes forgotten. Not all women languished in the role of the bored housewife, falling victim to the malaise described in Betty Friedan's definitive work *The Feminine Mystique*.

local committees after months of intensive activity up and down the country. To say that they came from all walks of life is not just throw away cliché. Any group of twelve women were allowed to elect one representative and by far the largest section were street delegates who made up more than a third of the total gathering.

The response to the first assembly of women was so great that the nearby Woburn Hall had to open its doors to allow more women in. In effect there were two assemblies. Even then, it was reported that 150 delegates could not get into either hall and had to listen to the speeches outside on a public address system. The day's discussions presented a remarkably familiar picture. They were embodied in a declaration read out by veteran suffragette Charlotte Marsh.

"On International Women's Day, 1952, this National Assembly of Women from all parts of Britain, representing many different organisations and activities, sends greetings to the women of all countries.

We are convinced that our country and its people in co-operation with the people of other lands have the power to ensure peace, freedom and justice, at home and abroad; and that Britain has a great future in a world of peace.

Many in fact would have attended NAW's first gathering on International Women's Day, March 9, 1952 held appropriately at the hot bed of radicalism. St. Pancras. Hundreds of women from all corners of Britain converged on St. Pancras Hall in Euston. They were the 1,400 delegates who had all been elected by

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Eva remembers...

A DEAD rat sent to Labour MP Bessie Braddock to draw attention to the plight of women living in a notorious slummy area of Liverpool was one of the ways in which N.A.W. women made sure they were noticed.

Eva Cohen was a member of that Liverpool branch which proved to be one of the most exciting and active in England during the early days of N.A.W.

She recalls that many groups were established on a personal contact basis within local neighbourhoods.

"The rat episode was organised by women who lived in Scotland Road after vermin had started to attack their children in their cots", she recalls.

Later they marched on the town hall with banners to protest about their conditions to stoney faced councillors.

But the women's persistence paid off in the end: The following day they read in the papers that the council had decided to give them £1,500 to clean up their flats!

Then there was the Dockers' Wives N.A.W. branch which was formed after women came together to support their husbands' fight for better pay and conditions.

Their demands were embodied in what was called the 'Dockers' Charter'.

"We showed our solidarity by walking from our homes to Gladstone Dock where we spoke at dockers' meetings", said Eva.

Eva also remembers having a cabbage thrown at her while she was marching against the Korean War through the centre of Liverpool.

"Thirty or more women were brave enough to oppose public opinion and demonstrate their feelings."

"Although we were abused and had all sorts of things thrown at us — I had a cabbage — we never flinched and continued our protest."

N.A.W. women were again vilified when they became involved in the Stockholm Appeal against the use of nuclear weapons.

"We had a huge meeting in the centre of Liverpool after months of fund raising activity", Eva recalled.

"It was really successful and inspiring. But the following day the press smeared the campaign with statements like — a woman's place is in the home, look after your children".

When Eva left Liverpool with her young family in the 60's her links with N.A.W. were broken. But now like so many other early members she finds herself suddenly back in the fold witnessing the revival of an organisation which contributed so much to the struggle of women in society.



Bessie Braddock



Yorkshire and Teeside members of NAW demonstrate at Blackpool at the Labour Party Conference in September 1954 protesting against German rearmament.



Delegates at first NAW Conference.

We express our belief that there are no differences between the countries of the world which cannot be settled by peaceful negotiations and that an arms race can only increase the risk of war and endanger social progress.

Recognising that a better standard of life, a happy future for the children, and full opportunities for women can only be realised in a world at peace, we pledge ourselves to make peace our first aim.

No country can make the most of its resources in industry, science and culture, without giving women equal opportunities to take part in all spheres of life. Therefore we call on women everywhere to join together in support on the demands of the International Charter for Women as mothers, as workers, as citizens; and to act together for the defence of peace, for higher living standards and for the right of children to health, education and a full life.

We, in turn, pledge from this Assembly to carry its message of hope throughout the length and breadth of this country, working together with all women for these high aims . . .

FOR LIFE — NOT DEATH. FOR PEACE — NOT WAR. FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR CHILDREN

The following day the Manchester Guardian reported: "They were emphatically for peace, disarmament and the rights of children, in unanimous in condemning the Korean war, in their objections to any tampering with the education services, in their intense dislike of the rise in the cost of living and in their enthusiastic optimism that the power to improve matters lay with them."

But the impact of the first NAW spread beyond Britain's shores. Telegrams from all over the world greeted the delegates including one from Pak Den Ai, the Korean women's

leader and another from the American Women For Peace.

From then on the NAW went from strength to strength. International Women's Day celebrations became one of its key events and it was said no women ever returned from them the same. But it was its early campaigns for peace that certainly captured the imagination of thousands of women who had just got over the atrocities of one war only to see them repeated again in the Korean. With the heavy involvement of British troops in Korea the NAW's rallying cry was "Bring Our Boys Home". It was taken to the streets in almost every town and city where women, respectfully dressed in hats and with not a hair out of place, defiantly marched with their banners, risking, at times, physical attack from the passing crowds.



NAW members take to the street to voice their opposition to the Korean war.

In 1956 a circular from International Secretary Margaret Lloyd and Freda Grimble Honorary Secretary, spoke of the Suez crisis in terms which today must give us a strange sense of *deja vu*: "Women here are angry and distressed at the military preparations for Suez and are demanding a promise that in no circumstances should force be used in a dispute which can be decided peaceably".

A year later they noted that American aircraft based in this country were carrying nuclear bombs on routine flights. "It was decided unanimously at the NAW's annual meeting to protest in all possible ways against the menace to safety."



But the frequent bulletins and circulars also carried news of campaigns around bread and butter issues like rising prices, rents, cuts in social services and education — all of which were linked with the enormous increase on defence expenditure. NAW was also at the forefront of less obvious political issues like the painless childbirth movement. NAW members who were midwives were sent to Paris clinics where it was being developed to spread the word back home.

Even in its lighter moments NAW was making a comment on the everyday struggles of women. In Ilford NAW women would act out a sketch written by members of the tenants association about their struggles against rent increases. In Manchester there was a pageant on the history of the British women's movement.

As the cold war gathered force in the fifties a shadow was cast over the NAW. Because of its links with socialist countries the NAW became identified with communism and many of its members fell away. Later came the rise of the feminist movement which seemed to eclipse NAW. Its leadership became fragmented and in 1960 only three hundred NAW women attended its International Women's Day meeting. **Please turn over**



An early NAW pamphlet exposing the harmful effects of violent American comics on children.



Another key even in the NAW calendar was International Children's Day on June 1st reflecting the organisation's deep concern for child welfare and development. Here a party of Chinese, Malay, Arab, and English children from Liverpool were one of 25 busloads to Chester Zoo on an International Children's Day outing masterminded by Merseyside NAW in 1952.

Resolution on equal pay

"THIS National Assembly of Women expresses its extreme indignation that after more than 30 years of Parliamentary support for the principle of Equal Pay and the expressed adherence to this principle of all political parties, women in industry, commerce and the professions are still exploited as cheap labour.

"It declares its belief that this discrimination undermines the nature of women as workers and constitutes a threat to the living standards of both men and women.

"It expresses its determination to continue to work for the implementation of the policy of Equal Pay and calls upon the Government to take the necessary steps immediately to give equal pay to women in all Government Departments and State Aided institutions, thereby giving a lead to private employers to pay the rate for the job."

FOR the resolution 1,397
 AGAINST 1

It persevered however, continuing to make the fight for peace the centrepiece of its activity. Biafra, Vietnam constantly crop up in NAW's yellowing files. NAW also continued to campaign for women's rights as a member of the National Joint Campaign for Women's Equal Rights as well as becoming involved in campaigns by-passed by the mainstream feminist movement. One of these was for the release of Sudanese women's leaders Fahma Ahmed Ibrahim and Souad Ibrahim Ahmed from prison.

Now in 1983 history appears to be repeating itself. The critical issues which were campaigned 30 years ago have re-surfaced. NAW is moving slowly forward again to take them up with a new vigour, a different style and a wider vision.



Mrs. Betsy Burns of Dundee, member of the Labour Party, speaks to the National Assembly of Women in London. She told the delegates: "On our journey here we got talking with sailor in the train. He was just home from Korea and he wanted to know all about the Assembly. When we told him he said, "Well ma'am, I am going to give you my medals. I am ashamed to wear them. I will never wear them because although I obeyed orders as we all do I know that the war in Korea is a dirty business." I asked him if his mother would approve and he replied, "When I tell her what is happening in Korea she will not want them."

Who's who NAW '83

JOINT PRESIDENTS: Marie Pritt, and Connie Seifert, former chairwomen of NAW.

VICE PRESIDENT: Sybil Phoenix, director of Moonshot Club in Lewisham, London and Methodist lay preacher.

CHAIRWOMAN: Betty Tebbs, early NAW member, former SOGAT official, active member of the peace movement.

VICE CHAIRWOMAN: Irene Fick, active National Child care campaign, member of British and GDR Society.

GENERAL SECRETARY: Dorothy Kuya, NAW member since her teens, leading spokeswoman in the race relations field.

VICE SECRETARY: Barbara McDermott, active member of

Iraqi Women's Organisation CADRI.

Other members of the NAW executive are: Angela Cobbina (newsletter editor), Celia Pomeroy (newsletter), Anne Prestwood (badges), Maragaret Tonge (North London Branch), Mary Wykes (Coventry branch chairwoman), Bandana Ahmed, Jean Tate.

Who was who NAW '52

Mrs. Monica Felton, Chairman of the Assembly, who was a member of the Labour Party since she was a student. Mrs. Felton was formerly Chairman of the Stevenage New Town Development Corporation. She became world-famous in exposing U.S. atrocities in Korea after her 1951 visit there.

With Mrs. Felton, the main speakers were Miss Ann Tweed, J.P., Member of Cambridge Labour Party Executive; Mrs. S. O. Davies, wife of the Labour M.P. for Merthyr Tydfil; Mrs. Mary Baxter, Member of Chelsea Labour Party, former magistrate in Aberdeen, and Chairman of Aberdeen Co-operative Committee for many years; Mrs. F. V. Enthoven, Secretary of the National Society for Children's Nurseries, and Dr. Betty Ibbetson, Chairman of the Child Care Commission.



NAW chairwoman Monica Felton laying a wreath on the Cenotaph after a march from St. Pancras Town Hall.

Key dates

APRIL 1st — Greenham Common. Two NAW coaches are already planned. Ring Margaret Tonge 808 8542.

APRIL 4th — Day trip to Calais. Ring Joy McCalman 01-317 8238.

MAY 1st — Labour Day. Join marchers, organise special meetings.

MAY 25th — African Liberation Day.

JUNE 1st — WIDF's International Children's Day.

AUGUST 6th — Hiroshima Day.

OCTOBER 25th — UN Women's Day for Disarmament.

NAW round the country

NAW BRANCHES

Branches are now developing around the country — contacts for these are:

Chelmsford
Freda Wilson

Tel: 0245 420435

Coventry
Mary Wykes

Tel: 0203 712272

London North:
Margaret Tonge

Tel: 01 808 2542

West:
Sylvia Laurie

Tel: 01 385 1985

South West:
Anita Wright

Tel: 01 672 8559

Central:
Avril Noble

Tel: 01 328 2377

Manchester/Lancashire

Veronica Davis Tel: 061 7666080

Oxford

Ann Logan Tel: 0865 240888

Scotland-Dumbarton

Marion Easdale Tel: 0389 63686

Sheffield/Leeds/Huddersfield

Elsie Watson Tel: 0742 686845

Liverpool/Merseyside

Betty Dorman Tel: 051 7089353

NAW DECLARATION

OUR AIM is:

The full social, economic, legal, political and cultural independence and equality of all women.

To make this possible, we campaign

FOR an end to unemployment and inflation

FOR equal pay for work of equal value

FOR an end to low pay in jobs that are usually done by women

FOR equal opportunities in education, training and promotion

FOR statutory provisions of childcare facilities for all who need to use them

FOR freely available contraception, free abortion on demand, and no forced sterilization

FOR the active involvement of women in trades unions and at all levels of decision-making

FOR an end to racism

FOR disarmament, and an end to the manufacture of nuclear weapons

We demand that no new nuclear missiles are deployed by NATO in Britain and Western Europe. There should be negotiations for disarmament, not preparation for war.

We are against all cuts in public service spending. The cuts will force many women out of work and back into the home where, unpaid, they have to do the tasks which should be the responsibility of the social services.

We support the right of all women to paid employment — women's right to work. This means the government must provide the funds for adequate childcare.

Current immigration legislation is racist and repressive, and is implemented in a degrading and dehumanising way. The 1971 Immigration Act should be repealed.

In addition, national and local government should make a strong commitment to implementing the 1976 Race Relations Act fully.

We work with all women in the struggle against economic and social inequality, and against racism, fascism and imperialism.

We support programmes of positive discrimination against racism and sexism.

We also work with other progressive organisations to achieve our common aims.

Through our affiliation to the Women's International Democratic Federation, linking us with our sister organisations in over 120 countries, we work on an international level and support women throughout the world in their struggle for independence and liberation.



"SISTERS" is the journal of the NAW. Our aims are expressed by the words these letters stand for: Sisterhood and International Solidarity To End Racism and Sexism.

It has news on the work of the NAW, plus information on issues that particularly concern women, especially working women and women from ethnic minority groups. It reports on women's struggle for equality and liberation throughout the world.

The National Assembly of Women was founded in 1952. We are affiliated to the National Peace Council, Liberation, the National Campaign for Nursery Education, and the Abortion Law Reform Association.

JOIN NOW!

Application

I would like to join the NAW. Here is £4 for my annual subscription (£1 pensioners and unwaged). (Includes subscription to SISTERS)

Our organisation would like to affiliate to the NAW. Here is £4 (minimum) annual subscription.

I am interested in organising a NAW group.

NAME

ADDRESS

ORGANISATION (if applicable)

TEL:

Send to NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN, 108 TWYFORD HOUSE, ELWOOD STREET, LONDON NW5 2EL
TELEPHONE: 359 6377