

FRANCES O'GRADY  
TAKES OVER AS  
GENERAL SECRETARY  
OF THE TUC



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P SUMMER 2012

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## from the editor



Hello Sisters, once again it is time for another edition of *sisters* and sadly we have to report that in this our 60th year we have had to postpone a couple of the events we had planned. The first was our conference scheduled for July and also due to unforeseen circumstances (the weather) the South Yorkshire Festival, held at Wortley Hall, Wortley in July also had to be cancelled for the first time ever, but the good news is that our conference has been rearranged for later this year (details are on back page) and the South Yorkshire Festival will go ahead next year, hopefully with the NAW 60th anniversary as its theme.

To continue with the good news we have some very good articles telling us what our sisters are doing for themselves and for us.

Sandy Broadhurst of RAPAR tells us about the voluntary organisation she works for and what they do, also an update on Mary Adenugba who came with Sandy to our AGM this year, where we heard from Mary herself about what happened to her when she was a victim of trafficking into the UK.

Frances O'Grady the newly elected General Secretary of the TUC, and a Vice President of the NAW, talks about some of the issues which will be debated at September's TUC Congress. The time to start is now if you haven't already done so by joining in the march and rally being organised for the 20 October in London. Sign up at <http://afuturethatworks.org/> and keep up with transport arranged at <http://falseeconomy.org.uk/oct20>

Ruth Winters, NAW member, talks about the decisions taken recently at her union conference and as the late NAW past President Terry Marsland was heavily involved with the FBU at this time this is very disappointing for us indeed.

Vera Baird QC, Labour candidate for Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner and a Vice President of the NAW tells us about the elections to be held later in England and Wales in November.

And much much more. Enjoy!

BY JANETTE FERGUSON



**R**APAR is a human rights charity based in central Manchester. Started in Salford in 2001, it operates today, as then, on a completely voluntary basis. Unlike some of the other organisations working with refugees and people seeking asylum, RAPAR does not take Home Office funding. This is very important to us because it enables us to be totally independent and so able to ask questions and challenge policy when necessary

The philosophy of RAPAR is very strongly based on **participation** and **empowerment**. Many of our volunteers are people who in the past have come for support, who are now helping others and their communities.

RAPAR works with **individuals** and families on any human rights issues, ranging from asylum claims, access to education or health care, trafficking, forced marriage, housing and so on. We carry out **research** connected to these human rights issues, investigating issues, causes and responses with a view to increasing understanding of the problem and finding solutions where possible.

We work with disadvantaged and marginalised **community groups** empowering them to be proactive in society and in the process aiding

community cohesion and integration.

BY SANDY BROADHURST  
WWW.RAPAR.ORG.UK



## a personal thank you from Mary Adenugba

It was wonderful coming to the NAW meeting in April to tell my story of trafficking and imprisonment. Everyone I met was so caring and supported me so much. It was **amazing** and **gave me great strength**. You are all my mothers and sisters.

Being trafficked is a very dehumanising experience. I lost my name, my freedom, my identity. I was treated and fed like a dog, passed from man to man like a parcel. I stopped living and just existed, trusting nobody. You can imagine the long term effects on my well being and mental health.

Meeting people like the women at NAW and being believed and accepted is so important for me. It restores my faith in people and helps me to trust again. It makes me feel human and rebuilds my confidence, making me strong enough to help myself and others. **Thank you all so much.**

My asylum claim is continuing. After being granted judicial review, the UKBA has agreed to look at my case again and I am awaiting a result. To know more about my story or the case please visit [www.rapar.org.uk](http://www.rapar.org.uk)



# A FUTURE THAT WORKS

FRANCES O'GRADY WILL TAKE OVER FROM BRENDAN BARBER AS GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE TRADES UNION CONGRESS AT THE END OF THIS YEAR. HERE SHE OUTLINES SOME OF THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

**A**NYBODY would think that the government had a problem with women. Austerity cuts in public sector pay, pensions, jobs and services have all hit women hardest. But while the evidence of near zero economic growth and high unemployment points to failure, so far the government refuses to even listen to an alternative.

Women's unemployment is at a record high, reducing the tax take, adding to the benefits bill and starving businesses of desperately needed consumer demand. And over two million workers have been forced into temping or juggling two or more part-time jobs, when they would prefer a full-time secure one, making women's lives even more complicated.

Even for those lucky enough to hold on to their jobs, life is tough. While average wages have been stagnating for seven years, prices continue to rise. Food, fares and the cost of care, not just for children but for elderly relatives too, are going through the roof.

And as more young adults can't afford to leave home, family budgets are under ever greater strain.

With the threshold for receiving tax credits set to increase from 16 hours to 24 hours, those women stuck involuntarily in part time work are set to lose out yet again. How the government expects individuals to persuade employers to up their hours remains a mystery. At the same time, the government is making it easier to sack workers and introducing fees for employment tribunals that will price most ordinary people out of workplace justice.

Women could be forgiven for thinking that this onslaught amounts to a deliberate 'back to the kitchen sink' policy, akin to that our mothers and grandmothers experienced in the 1950s and 1980s. Perhaps some in government believe that women's participation in the labour market is a bad thing or, at best, a low economic priority? In fact the opposite is true.

Economic growth depends on helping women into productive employment. Investment in vital public services, like wrap around childcare, can make it possible for women to put their skills and talent to work and raise

living standards across the board.

The fact is that women work not just because they want to but because they need to. Not all of us, of course. It goes without saying that some women will choose not to work if they can afford it, while others will choose to work even if they don't need to through economic necessity. But the reality is that very few families can afford to live on a single income.

But, whatever its motive, the impact of government austerity is to push women out of the workforce or into low pay, and drag the economy down.

The TUC and unions are campaigning for a "Future that Works". From the NHS, to public transport and energy efficiency, there is plenty of useful work that needs to be done which can help grow a fairer, greener economy. And policies for tax justice, fair pay and reform of our banking system should help fund it.

At our national demonstration on October 20th community groups from around the country will join unions to demand that the government stops cutting and starts investing. There is an alternative to austerity and it's time that ordinary women's voices were heard.

## sylvia pankhurst lecture 2012



**S**ARAH VEALE, head of the TUC's Equality and Employment Department, sparked off a lively debate at the

annual Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Lecture on Friday 17 August at Wortley Hall, Sheffield.

She opened by welcoming the appointment of Frances O'Grady as the first woman to become TUC General Secretary but recognised that a woman in a leading position was not reflected generally in the trade union movement or in society. Sarah went on to explore how capitalism sets one social group against another, diverting collective opposition to oppression, in order to maintain control economically and politically. She illustrated how the media fosters these divisions because of its vested interest in capitalism – using race, gender, age, disability, sexuality to nurture conflict – and drew attention to the government's

attempts to undermine human rights legislation. Throughout her lecture, Sarah paid tribute to Sylvia Pankhurst's work and far sighted views on equality and revolution. In closing, Sarah quoted Shelley's poem *Masque of Anarchy* that "We are many, they are few" and called for people to stretch hands of friendship across our differences because united we stand, divided we fall.

For more information and the full text of Sarah Veale's lecture visit <http://sylviapankhurst.gn.apc.org>

Next year's Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Lecture will be held on Friday 16 August 2013 at Wortley Hall.

REPORT BY ANITA WRIGHT



SARAH VEALE, HEAD OF THE TUC'S EQUALITY AND EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS DEPARTMENT, EXPLAINS THE DETRIMENTAL EFFECT OF GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS TO CHARGE FEES FOR EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNAL CLAIMS

**A**LMOST all employers, employees and public interest organisations who responded to the government's 2011 consultation 'Resolving Workplace Disputes' were against imposing these fees. The Ministry of Justice nonetheless wants to start charging claimants up to £1,200 to take a claim to a tribunal.

The Coalition Government has made a policy decision to reduce claims to Employment Tribunals: this would be a laudable aim if the intention was better workplace dispute resolution but it isn't; it's intended to lift the "burdens on businesses" which are, according to the business lobby, imposed by employment regulation and, to save money in the courts system. The introduction of fees for using Employment Tribunals is part of a package of reforms which cumulatively will have a devastating impact on low paid and vulnerable workers.

The TUC is wholly opposed to putting a price tag on justice and will campaign against these changes. Apart from the general principled objection there are specific problems.

The remissions system is complex and obscure in several areas; it is based on family income which will mean getting intrusive information from employees and their representatives. Also there are technical difficulties. It is unclear at what point the fee is required and how will that fit with the new ACAS pre-claim conciliation, how will it apply to multiple cases such as equal pay.

The TUC will campaign against the introduction of fees for Employment Tribunals as well as the other Beecroft (Cameron's appointee to review Employment Law) proposals ET procedures, collective redundancy laws, TUPE and public sector equality duty.

Adrian Beecroft is a venture capitalist whose investments include the controversial high-interest pay-day lender Wonga and a Conservative donor.

# police commissioners

THE FIRST EVER POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD IN ENGLAND AND WALES ON 15 NOVEMBER. WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN?

VERA BAIRD QC IS A LABOUR CANDIDATE FOR NORTHUMBRIA POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER AND A VICE PRESIDENT OF NAW

**P**OLICE and Crime Commissioners are designed to be the elected voice of the people, to consult every part of their community and establish what the public requires from the police and then negotiate those needs into a five year Policing and Crime Plan working with local Chief Constables. They will be elected in all 41 policing areas in England and Wales except London, where the Mayor is the PCC. They will control the police budget, monitor and scrutinise delivery of the plan and have the power to appoint and dismiss the Chief Constable. However, they will not have operational responsibility for the police, which will expressly remain with the Chief Constable. Indeed, on election each PCC must swear an oath to safeguard operational independence.

In addition, PCCs will control funds for community safety, for crime reduction, for victim support and probably, eventually, for the probation service. By 2014, all this funding will be pooled into a single budget, with no nationally imposed ring-fences so that each PCC will be free to distribute it according to her own priorities.

Both local and national organisations are concerned about the allocation of all this funding by one person. For instance, Victim Support currently gets core funding from government which will soon be allocated to PCCs who might choose to spend it on police technology instead. Similarly, local crime prevention groups might find a new-broom PCC re-directing their cash.

PCCs are clearly an important new role with wide power and a considerable budget, albeit police are suffering 20 per cent cuts under the unwise excess of Chancellor George Osborne and are likely to suffer further cuts.

Yet most people have no idea what PCCs are and a few think we are electing Chief Constables. Despite being Equalities Minister, Theresa May has suggested that retired military or police would be suitable PCCs, both male stereotypes. In truth, characteristically female skills such as an ability to interact and learn from the public, to consult and to negotiate, are what are needed to ensure that these posts add value. However, women make up only 19 per cent of confirmed contenders overall, whilst 37 per cent of Labour candidates are women.



If women's interests in the important areas of policing and criminal justice are not to be threatened by this lack of diversity, it is imperative that women's organisations, from mumsnet to the trade unions, engage with all candidates now.

Labour PCCs will fly the flag against excessive Coalition cuts and refuse to privatise core policing which must serve the public not shareholders. Recognising the need to take special care of women's interests, they have also signed up to four pledges that I have helped to draft, on violence against women and girls.

The first of those pledges is to develop and roll out an integrated local action plan to tackle violence against women and girls in the first year in office, appointing a specialist to deliver it.

The second is to tackle the culture of violence against women and girls by working with schools, local authorities and community organisations to change attitudes and behaviour.

The third is to maintain specialist domestic violence and public protection units within the police and the fourth is to ensure that they are well-trained. Further we will protect existing networks of independent advisors for women survivors and start to train those who are commissioning services for survivors of violence.

In addition, I want to pilot a preventative policing project in Northumbria, to monitor and manage serial perpetrators.

These pledges will ensure that, notwithstanding funding pressures, work on prevention and policing of violence against women will continue in areas where Labour wins.

However, the risks from an almost entirely uniformly white and male group of Commissioners require that women's organisations get involved with candidates, across the board as a matter of urgency.

# a betrayal of trust

RUTH WINTERS, AN FBU AND NAW MEMBER, SHARES HER VIEW OF RECENT DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE FBU (WRITTEN IN A PERSONAL CAPACITY)



**I**N June this year, the Fire Brigades Union took one of the biggest steps backwards in its history. It removed the positions of Executive Council Members for Women, Black Ethnic and Minority Members, and LGBT members. It further removed the right to vote from all of the members on Regional and Area Committees who represent these groups.

Not because it was forced to by any anti trade union government policy, not because some regressive and oppressive law forced them to, not because the members were baying for change, and not because these sections were failing.

It did it because it could. It was a leadership-led decision based on a document apparently written by the General Secretary and it was apparently led by financial necessity, a poorly thought through, inaccurate and badly written political analysis of why these sections came to be in the first place and where they currently stood. However, don't take my word for it you can read the EC Statement on Reorganisation of the FBU on the FBU website.

I would quote you parts of the debate at the "Special Conference" where this decision was made but unfortunately, Head Office has chosen not to publish the Record of Decisions or Report of Proceedings, as is normal practice, so I can't.

Self-organisation has never been an easy option for those who don't fall into the category for which the organising is required because even those who are supportive are very rarely radical enough to see past themselves or their lack of ability to understand what it means to suffer the discrimination. It never has been. The civil rights movement was not formed by a majority of white men and women who sought to stop the injustice of black oppression. The suffragette movement was not born out of the abhorrence felt by men in society at the lack of a right to vote for women. Stonewall and other LGBT organisations did not grow out of the raging anger from the heterosexual community to give protection and basic human rights to those who were stripped of them. If it were the case then by definition the discrimination probably wouldn't be happening in the first place.

Therefore, when I hear the rhetoric, which is being bandied about in the FBU now that conference has made its decision, that we just have to get on with it and it's democracy, my disap-

pointment and sadness is overwhelming. That statement shows either extreme political naivety or a cynical attempt to blame the general membership for something devised and lobbied for by the leadership.

There was a time when the FBU understood that self organisation was the only real effective way to combat what was happening, that self organisation wasn't started by the FBU or the FBU setting up structures, it was happening anyway. All the leadership did then was to recognise it didn't always know best, that we were better for having these groups amongst us than separate from us and in doing so we asked them to put their trust in us. They did, and sometimes we all got it a bit wrong, but I am proud to have been part of that change as are many others I could mention. That trust has now been betrayed.

There is now no direct voice on the National Executive for women, black and ethnic minority members or LGBT members, and our national committee members have to go cap in hand to the General Secretary when they want to raise issues at the National Executive, the same General Secretary who wrote the paper that went to the conference that removed our vote and our officials.

Progress it is not, and at a time when the economic politics are disproportionately having an detrimental effect on those groups in society too, when money is being used as the excuse, the irony is not lost on us. The historic changes we made in our union were not unique to the FBU, other unions had the debates before us, some changed some didn't but when we did change, we were held up as a beacon in the movement. We were the FBU, we led a positive change in difficult times, we gave people a vote, we gave people a voice and we gave them the structures.

We have gone from the FBU and are in dire danger of becoming the FB Who? Sad times indeed.

## Olympic Suffragettes join the Lobby of Parliament

Fresh from their appearance in front of a global audience of millions, many of the women who performed as suffragettes in the Olympics opening ceremony are to join **UK Feminista's** lobby of parliament on **Wednesday 24 October**.

They'll be joining a host of women's organisations at the lobby, including OBJECT, Abortion Rights, Newham Asian Women's Project and the Fawcett Society, as well as women and men from across the UK. The lobby will call on MPs to stop the attacks on women's rights and start driving forward progress. *A feminist future is possible!*

# abortion

**H**AVING spent much of 2012 attempting to push back against negative media reports and government pronouncements on abortion services, **Abortion Rights** is looking forward to working on some positive and proactive campaigns this Autumn.

The prospect of potentially damaging changes to abortion counselling regulations has been hanging over our heads for almost a year now. Readers may have also seen sensational newspaper reports about 'sex-selective' abortions, followed by highly publicised inspections of hundreds of abortion clinics by the Care Quality Commission, searching for evidence of wrongdoing.

Across all these issues, the Department of Health has displayed an alarming willingness to criticise and undermine abortion services and the doctors who provide them. Abortion providers, and advocates such as Abortion Rights, have at times felt 'under siege' from both the government and the media.

So we were pleased that when the final report from the Care Quality Commission was published recently it found that all but a handful of clinics were working in full compliance with the law and that none had compromised good patient care. We are also pleased that the planned consultation on abortion counselling appears to have been delayed for the time being.

As these issues finally subside, we can now turn to matters which have a genuine impact on women's health and wellbeing. Abortion Rights' current campaign asks supporters to contact their MP to demand action on protests taking place outside abortion clinics by anti-choice groups. With women and clinic staff being harassed, intimidated and in some cases filmed, this is a situation that must be urgently addressed.

We're also looking forward to raising awareness of the need for positive reform of the UK's abortion law in the coming months. At the end of September we will be taking part in events to mark the International Day of Action for the Decriminalisation of Abortion, when we will be calling for abortion rights for our sisters in Northern Ireland and across the world.

In October we will be joining UK Feminista's Feminist Lobby of Parliament, when improved abortion access will be among a range of demands such as ending violence against women, investment in childcare and rights for women asylum seekers that activists will be taking to MPs.

For more information on all these issues, to register for campaign updates, make a donation and contact your MP just visit [www.abortion-rights.org.uk](http://www.abortion-rights.org.uk).

# Japanese women alert us...

LYDIA MERYLL, SERA NATIONAL EXECUTIVE AND MEMBER OF NAW, REPORTS ON OUR JAPANESE SISTERS ALERT: BEWARE OF SOFT SELLING NUCLEAR ENERGY

**H**OW come we have not been told that 36,000 people remain as evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture and that the deferential compliant political landscape of Japan has changed forever? Why don't we see the huge weekly demonstrations held outside the government offices in Tokyo? These processions of up to 10,000 angry people are led by a new Green Party and by women such as Aileen Mioko Smith, who took part in a three day Women's Sit-in outside the Ministry of the Economy. As a result the Japanese had closed down all of their 54 nuclear power stations. When they re-opened two of the reactors at Oi, there have been fresh mass protests. A July survey by Japan Sustainable Institute shows that over 80 per cent of those polled were against nuclear power. Tomihisa Taue, the Mayor of Nagasaki, remembering the bomb dropped as an experiment on his city 66 years ago, calls upon the Japanese government to "Set new energy policy goals to build a society free from the fear of radioactivity... We cannot postpone the issue of the disposal of the vast amount of nuclear waste generated from operating nuclear plants. It is up to the international community to cooperate and address this problem". (9 August 2012)

Our media ignores the fact that even America is reconsidering its nuclear power policy. I had to look at the *Wall Street Journal* to find the details of a

case brought, in June, by the US Court of Appeals against their Nuclear Regulatory Commission to force them to re-assess environmental risks of storage of nuclear waste. Yet here in the UK, the fingers of the multinational utility company, EDF, backed by the French government, is not just sponsoring the Olympics, but actively invading the thinking of women. After their advertorial in *Good Housekeeping* last year, they have paid for another in *Marie Claire* magazine. "Why I love working for a nuclear plant", is apparently a story about an ordinary high achieving woman, Katie Fish, who came into the industry because of her interest in renewable energy! What is renewable about nuclear energy? No nuclear state in the world has a solution to the waste generated. How can a magazine like *Marie Claire* be conned into promoting a view that nuclear is a "soft" and "clean" form of energy, suitable for women to work in! This is the kind of neo-green fudge which is beginning to emerge in the UK (*Kingsworth Guardian* 1 August 2012). It is perhaps driven by a panic about 2+ per cent mean temperature rise due to climate change.

So what should women do? First of all acknowledge the science. We know that global warming is happening and severe weather creates the need to face disasters. We know that fossil fuels like the oil and coal which Japan now has to import to replace nuclear, is continuing to add to the store of CO2 gases in our atmosphere and to the greenhouse effect. We know that a



mindless "growth economy" will kill our children by drought or flooding. We also know that the risks from, as yet un-built, underground repositories. and of continuing to invest in new nuclear are NOT a green alternative and may have disastrous effects like Fukushima or longer term from leaking waste, accident or attack. We have to back genuine green technology, training and investment in carbon reduction measures, energy saving, insulation, flood defences which defend ALL of our populations, not just those who can afford them! We need to challenge these neo-green advertorials; put pressure on the Left to change their position on new nuclear and get back on the street, like the Japanese women. We applaud them.

WWW.ASAFEWORLDFORWOMEN.ORG  
HTTP://LIVINGINAIZU.BLOGSPOT.CO.UK/

MARY DAVIS, WELL-KNOWN ACADEMIC, TRADE UNIONIST AND FORMER ELECTED MEMBER OF THE TUC WOMEN'S COMMITTEE, HAS RETURNED FROM A SOLIDARITY DELEGATION TO THE KURDISH REGIONS OF SOUTHEAST TURKEY AFTER A TEN DAY VISIT

**P**ROFESSOR Davis was part of an international delegation which was initiated by CENI – Women's Office for Peace and supported by the Peace in Kurdistan Campaign. Twelve delegates visited a variety of women's organisations, women's rights and human rights groups based in and around Diyarbakir (Amed), to strengthen solidarity with them in the face of increasing repression from the Turkish state against the women's and trade union movements.

The mayor of Sur municipality, Abdullah Demirbas, explained that his council would not tolerate domestic violence. Perpetrators would lose their jobs and any financial benefits. This is surely one of the most progressive policies most of the group had heard of.

The delegation has reported that in

every one of the projects they visited – from the women-run news agency JinHa, to the women's advice centre Dikasum, to the women's section of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) – they were told that the on-going military conflict, state repression, internal displacement and patriarchal violence have continued to exacerbate the oppression of women in the region.

The delegation also travelled to Wan, the site of a 7.2 magnitude earthquake last October which killed nearly 700 people, where they met representatives from the Confederation of Trade Unions for Public Services (KESK). They also met the 'peace mothers': those women whose children have been killed by the Turkish State. The trade union movement in Turkey is also facing a clamp-down on their activities as anti-terror raids have swept through union offices; in October last year, 25 members of Egitim Sen, a teaching union affiliated with KESK were convicted of terrorist offences and sentenced to six years in prison, whilst just last month,

around 70 KESK members were arrested in 20 different cities across Turkey, again on the pretext of anti-terror operations.

News of this attack on unions has begun to reach the labour movement across the world. But as Professor Davis explains "much more needs to be done to draw attention to state repression given that we witnessed a shocking example of this on 14 July when a peaceful demonstration was brutally attacked by the militarised repressive arm of the Turkish state. The plight of the Kurds, especially those residing in Turkey, is little understood in the UK; but it deserves our urgent attention."

She welcomes that in the UK, a motion was recently adopted at the Unite policy conference that condemned the Turkish government for decimating the working class movement and fostering divisions among the people, but goes on to say "we now need an emergency motion to be passed by the TUC in September".

contact details in box on next page

# labouring for **peace**



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**L**ABOURING for Peace is the title of an excellent history of the peace movement within the Labour Party, the story of a quest lasting over 60 years. Published in the autumn of 2011, it is written by NAW member Rosalie Huzzard, together with fellow peace activist Grace Crookall-Greening. This important short book has a foreword by Tony Benn, who describes it as “a must for the growing number of people opposed to the wars waged by Britain and America”. Benn says that the book shows what can be done by committed people in an organisation that does not want to be disturbed by radical thoughts. He is referring to the Labour Party which seemed and seems stuck with ideas pumped out by media and defence department denouncing those who argue that there is an alternative to arms spending and war.

The organisation of socialist internationalists, who opposed the war but wished to continue to work in the Labour Party, emerged in 1940 as the Labour Pacifist Fellowship. It became



**MARY DAVIS**

**THIS DELEGATION  
WAS MADE POSSIBLE  
BY THE GENEROUS  
CONTRIBUTIONS OF  
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the Labour Peace Fellowship in 1953 and was renamed Labour Action for Peace in 1970. Peace, socialism and disarmament had been clear principles and objectives for a substantial proportion of Labour Party members from the First World War onwards. How could the war that had broken out in 1939 be brought to a swift end?

Disarmament has been a constant theme within LAP meetings and literature. Britain has had an unhealthy relationship with the United States for many decades. The so-called ‘special relationship’ needs transforming with a declaration of independence from weapons of mass destruction.

Tracing the history of Labour Action for Peace through from 1940, the book covers the crippling costs of re-arming in the 1950s and later the 1970s. It shows the growth of the so-called European Defence Community, as an outcome of the Cold War with the Soviet Union and it demonstrates the way in which successive governments – both Labour and Conservative – built up nuclear weapons stockpiles and tolerated US bases in Britain even as there were serious welfare cuts and massive balance of payments problems. This is today’s narrative too, although we have more contradictions within it now as Con-Dem coalition ministers cut back on armed forces numbers, yo-yo on policy around re-equipment, and vacillate on Trident. Labour, still trying to find solid ground on which to build its platform for the General Election years down the line, appears to remain stubbornly committed to old ideas around nuclear weapons, Trident and nuclear power. There is little or no discussion of a peace dividend and what to do with it.

As I read this careful account of dedicated men and women daring and striving to “push the boulder up the mountain” I was struck over and over again by the tenacity of activists in Labour Party branches, trade union branches, LAP groups and publications. LAP members worked with and within CND, with WILPF, with NAW. They demonstrated how we might create and spend a peace dividend.

The roll of honour in this book includes Beryl Huffinley, Alice Mahon, Renee Short, Jo Richardson, Audrey Wise, Helen John, Rae Street and the authors themselves. The work of many notable men is extensively covered too – particularly Frank Allaun, Ron Huzzard, Walter Wolfgang, Bruce Kent, Robin Cook and Jeremy Corbyn. If I have a single criticism of this book, it is that – like most history – you have to hunt for the women whereas the men are prominent in publications, resolutions, executives and delegations. As reviewer, I raised this point with one of the authors and received the following



**LAP CHAIR BERYL HUFFINLEY (RIGHT) WITH  
MO MOWLEM MP, SECRETARY OF STATE  
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

response: “I think that although some women were organising at grassroots level in the 40s, 50s and even the 60s, there were still huge barriers for them in the Labour Party’s structure – you only have to see the low proportion of women MPs, the all-male platforms, the way women were banished to the kitchen when men came home from the Forces after the war, to see why women had a comparatively low profile even in progressive organisations like LAP”.

To be fair, the imbalance is partly corrected towards the end of the book, when digital photography has allowed bright records of women’s leadership to be reflected.

It is worth reminding ourselves as the current Labour policy machine vacillates over Trident and NATO how in the past Labour has acted for peace. It was the post war Labour government that signed the United Nations Charter. It was Attlee who prevented President Truman from dropping an atom bomb on Korea in 1950; it was Gaitskell who led a campaign against a Suez War in 1956. It was Harold Wilson who refused to send British troops to fight in Vietnam.

Towards the conclusion of the book, the authors summarise the considerable achievements of LAP as well as some of the setbacks. Their conclusion is worth quoting in full:

“LAP has worked (since the 1940s) to keep peace and disarmament issues to the forefront of Labour’s policy. It has sometimes been more effective than others and has lasted longer than most pressure groups.

“New methods of communication open up huge possibilities for speedy mobilisation and influence. In the wider world, socialists and peace campaigners need to focus on the threat to peace of the growing scarcity of natural resources and climate chaos, the continuing oppression and injustice in the Middle East and North Africa and the changing world order... We hope the dedication and persistence of... those who worked so hard in the past will inspire new, younger socialists to carry the work for peace and justice forward into a sustainable and peaceful future”. NAW fully endorses this hope and is playing its part with others in seeking its realisation. We strongly recommend that you buy this book.

**The National Assembly of Women was founded on 8 March 1952** and campaigns for full social, economic, legal, political, cultural independence and equality for women irrespective of age, race, disability, religion, philosophical belief, sexual orientation or nationality, aims which can only be realised fully in a world at peace.

We are pleased to be organising this women-only conference, hosted by Unison.

**Sixty years on and still fighting strong!**

# Women, power and politics: *sisters fight back*



**11 to 3 Saturday 17 November 2012, Unison Centre, 130 Euston Road, London NW1 2AY**

- The capitalist economy, how it underpins government policies and impact on women
- Representation of women in local government, parliament and trade unions
- Fighting cuts in wages and the battle for equal pay
- Peace, the arms industry and funding conversion of skills
- Women in society, the family and the fight for the rights of children and young people

Confirmed speakers:

**Sarah Veale**, Head of Equalities & Employment TUC

**Gloria Mills**, Unison National Secretary for Equalities

and **Megan Dobney**, SERTUC Regional Secretary

**Barbara White**, Redbridge Councillor & TUC Women's Committee



If you would like to attend, or join the National Assembly of Women please visit

[www.sisters.org.uk](http://www.sisters.org.uk)

The NAW brings together women from a variety of backgrounds to share their knowledge and professional, trade union and life experiences to strengthen the campaign for equality. We are affiliated to the Women's International Democratic Federation which links us with our sisters in struggle around the world.