



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P AUTUMN 2013

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WOMEN'S
SISTERS

it's grim down south

MEGAN DOBNEY (NAW EC) QUASHES SOME MYTHS AND REDRESSES THE BALANCE



AS we know, averages can be misleading. If you have £999,998 and I have £2, we have an average of half a million each.

On average, the workers in the TUC's Southern & Eastern Region (East of England, London, and the South East) are paid more than those in the midlands or the north.

But the key to clarity is that our regions are not homogenous and include peaks and troughs of poverty and wealth.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the Department for Communities and Local Government's "English Indices of Deprivation". The 'top' ranking for the most deprived English local authority area goes to the London borough of Hackney (followed by Newham and Tower Hamlets). In fact 10 of the 20 most deprived authorities (of 326) are London boroughs.

Hastings in the South East ranks 23, and Great Yarmouth in the East of England is 57. Compared of course to Hart District in Hampshire which is the least deprived area in the country, and the South Cambridgeshire District – the least deprived in the East.

unequal pay

In spite of higher than average wages in much of the south, the details are telling. Nomis, the official labour market statistics website, says the average full time weekly wage in the UK was £508 in 2012. But...

■ The South East's average wage is

£555.80. In Hastings it's £419.30.

■ The East of England's average wage is £531. In Great Yarmouth it's £468.20.

■ London's average wage is £613.30 but in Hackney it's £594.10. The figures for London are, of course, distorted by the extremes – the soaring pay in the banks and corporate headquarters, and the one-in-five of Londoners now getting poverty pay – that is, less than the London Living Wage of £8.55 an hour.

rocketing rents

There's not a lot left though when you consider rents. One of the major rental agencies shows on its website the cheapest two bedroom flat available in Hastings as £450 per calendar month, in Great Yarmouth as £350 pcm, and in Hackney as £260 per week.

Whereas they offer a 2-bed flat in Liverpool for £220 a calendar month, or in Nottingham for £140pcm, or in Hull for £325pcm.

What this shows of course is that the north-south divide is, for working people, a great big fat myth.

In pound note terms, there may be more of them for the government to take away from workers in the south. In reality, all workers are suffering the pay freezes, the price rises, and the service losses.

The subtle suggestions that workers in the south are well off is a classic divide and rule tactic. The challenge is to focus on what unites us, not on our differences.

union strength

Another real challenge facing all is the level of collective bargaining. Whilst trade union density across England is 24.7%, the percentage of workers covered by a collective agreement is only 27.6%. There are wide regional variations in both these figures (density: from 21% in the south east to 32.5% in the north east, collective bargaining: from 22.6% in London to 33.9% in the north east).

However, even here the stats need a bit of drilling into. Significantly, companies (private or public) with more than 50 employees have a much higher density of 34.7% and collective bargaining coverage of 41.6%. And 62% of Britain's employees are in companies with more than 50 employees.

Britain needs a pay rise

One of the TUC's campaigns is under the slogan "Britain needs a pay rise". There has been a continuous shift in the amount of Gross Domestic Product – the sum of the value of all goods and services produced by Britain's workers – from workers' wages to profit. Nearly 12% of increasing GDP has gone from us to them over the past 30 years and

this great wages grab will only be challenged and changed collectively.

Whilst employment has risen since 2010, it's a false dawn. A stunning four out of five new jobs are in industries (such as retail and residential care) where the average wage is less than £8 an hour.

Given that over the last two decades around two thirds of UK growth in demand has been down to household consumption, here surely lies the answer to the conundrum of increasing job numbers and a continued economic stagnation. If workers haven't got it, they won't spend it.

All workers are under attack, from Surrey to Sunderland.

And never has "united we stand, divided we fall" been more relevant.

put the children

SIOBHAN ENDEAN REMINDS US HOW MUCH OUR CHILDREN ARE SUFFERING AS THIS CON/DEM GOVERNMENT STUMBLES FROM ONE FAILED POLICY TO ANOTHER



I have survived week three of the school summer holidays by selecting my holiday read list. I stress it is only a wish list. I aim to revisit feminist tomes and top of the list is *Frankenstein*, closely followed by *A Room of One's Own*, and to finish *Mad Woman in the Attic*.

I will take a holiday at home with my son and his friends as we share the childcare load with the other mums in the area. I now get paid holidays from work, thanks to the last Labour government and I am lucky enough to have an employer. In our home, politicians are very definitely not the same.

I think it's worth mentioning the impact of government policy on our kids. Family tax credits, the maternity grant and child benefit have been cut. Our Sure Start centres and libraries are closing, and our local park warden have been sacked. Mums are losing their jobs, having their hours cut or taking lower paid, insecure work and



today's satanic mills

CAROLINE JONES DOESN'T PULL ANY PUNCHES WHEN SHE REMINDS US JUST HOW BAD IT REALLY IS

In recent weeks my Sunday night has been taken over by the Channel 4 drama, *The Mill* – an historic depiction of real working life in the northern cotton mills of 1833. It provides a shocking insight into our recent history and a timely reminder of why workplace regulations were originally introduced.

What kind of society allows young people to be employed as “apprentices” working long days for no pay? Who, if not the state, is going to set and monitor standards of health and safety to ensure workers return home at night with the same number of limbs as they left in the morning?

en in charge!

can't afford the extortionate costs of childcare. Social cleansing is taking place as the benefits cap takes effect and our friends can no longer afford to live in their homes or the same community. The cumulative impact of the cuts means that my child is bearing the brunt of their austerity measures and our child poverty is on the rise.

I occasionally consider how much better government would be if children were put in charge. Comic books would be a right, not a privilege, there would be 24 hour play dates on demand, and coco pops would be free at the point of delivery. I'm sure my son could add a few items to the list, but funding for libraries, community childcare, breakfast clubs in all schools and free school meals would be a good start to meeting his political demands.

All children are born equal, they cry the same tears when they fall down. Good quality community childcare gives all children a fairer start in life. That's why Sure Start is so popular with the middle class mums too.

The Conservative party believes that strong and stable families are the bedrock of a strong and stable society. The Tories may be savvy enough to have stopped saying they blame single mothers for the breakdown of communities and raising “hoodies”, but we are well aware that is what they mean. They have set off a dog whistle of a divide between strivers and skivers, but it has no resonance. The truth is, this government has broken my son's community, wrenched him away from his friends and taken away his places to play.

Fast forward to the modern day and what do we find? Workers who are abused at work, discriminated against by their boss or simply sacked for saying the wrong thing, will now have to fork out at least £1,200 and up to £2,800 to pursue their claim for justice.

That attack on the millions of working people who will now find themselves priced out of the legal system is bad enough. But the backdrop to this modern day drama, paints an even more depressing picture. Ever since Cameron invited Adrian “Wonga” Beecroft to review the UK's employment laws, workers' rights have been falling like ninepins.

Using a narrative that says regulations hurt business and rights cost jobs, Cameron has imposed the biggest changes in employment law since the right to claim unfair dismissal was introduced more than 40 years ago.

Whether it's on health and safety, unfair dismissal, redundancy, maternity or equality issues, this government has ignored all the evidence and side-stepped opposition to force through changes that not only turn back the clock but threaten to destabilise the very basis of our industrial relations settlement.

And there's more to come. In the drip-drip fashion reminiscent of Thatcher's rolling programme of anti-trade union laws, Cameron has three more horrors waiting to take centre stage between now and April 2014.

First, a law allowing employers to hold “protected conversations” with workers will prevent Tribunals assessing the true facts behind a dismissal – a modern day bullies' charter. Second, employers will soon be able to “ask” new workers to sell their rights to unfair dismissal, redundancy and training in return for a handful of shares. Third, the 114 year old law that holds employers liable for breaches of health and safety procedures will be reversed. In future, the burden of proof will be on the handless Tommys of the workplace to prove that the employer was to blame for the loss of their limb.

While watching *The Mill* it occurred to me that the programme might give the nasty Tories some new policy ideas. In reality, our workplace rights are already travelling back in time faster than Dr Who's Tardis.

And once they've dismantled the system that protects workers against abuse and holds bosses accountable for bad practices, what's to prevent the downward spiral into yet more abuse and even higher forms of exploitation? Don't be fooled by weasel words. Bad practice trickles down far faster than wealth!

Witness the growth in free interns, “work experience” schemes and zero-



hour contracts. And what is blacklisting if not a cabal of modern day industrialists and their overlookers punishing those, like Esther Price in *The Mill*, for daring to speak up in defence of the workers.

Today's world of work may not look as bad as that depicted in the satanic mills. Nor should it. We live in the 21st century. We live in the fifth richest nation in the world. We are entitled to expect more for ourselves, for our work colleagues and for our children.

Our predecessors fought for the right to vote, the right to demonstrate and the right to join a trade union. It's our duty now to use those rights effectively to ensure that the modern day mill owners – those arrogant posh boys currently setting the political and industrial agenda – are stopped before too much more damage can be inflicted on the workers of the world.

CAROLYN JONES IS THE DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE OF EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS. THIS PIECE FIRST APPEARED ON THE BLOG PAGES OF CLASS (THE CENTRE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL STUDIES)

from the editor...

It's not all good news in this edition of *Sisters*, but we can tell you that our sisters are fighting on against this government and its draconian policies. Our women and children are bearing the brunt of their actions, having to survive on food parcels, help from other family members who are struggling themselves, begging for money in the streets to pay for cancer treatment for children, and the Citizen's Advice Bureau in Stirling is handing out a guide *How to Survive with no Food and No Money*. Our voices must be louder, our actions must be more visible and we must work together.

festival time



LEFT TO RIGHT: SIOBHAN ENDEAN, SKEVI KOUKOUMA
DONA FELTHAM, LESLEY MERCER

A great day for the NAW at the South Yorkshire Festival!

The sun shone all day as hundreds of people gathered in the grounds of Wortley Hall on Saturday 6 July 2013 to enjoy the music, stalls and speakers at the South Yorkshire Festival. The event was particularly significant for the National Assembly of Women because it was an opportunity to celebrate our 60th anniversary. As well as the usual NAW stall selling quality pre-loved goods and clothing, visitors to the festival could find out more about the history of the NAW, its relationship to the trade union and labour movement and its strong international connections by visiting a special exhibition that was on display inside the Hall.

In recognition of the close links with Wortley Hall, the NAW was asked to provide the speakers for the rally. So, for the first time the Festival had an all-women platform chaired by South Yorkshire NAW member Ann Munsey.

NAW president, **Dona Feltham** spoke about the formation of the NAW in the 1950s and outlined how women had come from all over Britain to create an organisation that was committed to fighting for peace, equality and social justice. She re-affirmed the NAW's commitment to these aims and concluded by saying that the NAW

would continue to campaign with others until they were achieved.

Siobhan Endean, Unite equality officer, condemned the Con-Dem government's economic and social policies that are having a disproportionate impact on women forcing up female unemployment, cutting benefits and making life impossible for women with children. In concluding she pledged to continue to fight against cuts to jobs and services.

Lesley Mercer, TUC president and general secretary of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy spoke passionately about the National Health Service and urged everyone to join the campaign to oppose its privatisation. She spoke of her pride in being elected TUC president and noted that for the first time in its history the TUC has a woman president and general secretary.

The final speaker was **Skevi Koukouma**, vice-president of the Women's International Democratic Federation and member of the Cypriot Parliament. She spoke about the formation of the WIDF, created in the post 2nd World War period and the struggle against fascism, the struggle for peace and for nuclear disarmament. Also how the WIDF was and still is the pioneer in the world struggle for gender equality and how this is inextricably interwoven with the struggle of the working class for the abolition of the exploitation and oppression.

To finish off this part of the festival and to pay tribute to former NAW secretary, **Val Duncan**, the Newcastle choir *Making Waves* entertained visitors with a range of satirical and humorous songs and hoped that everyone would enjoy the rest of the day at Wortley Hall.

BY ANITA WRIGHT, NAW SECRETARY

Irish RTA

KELLIE O'DOWD (BELOW) SENT SISTERS THIS REPORT TO LET US KNOW ABOUT THE RTA



AN Irish delegation of activists from Reclaim the Agenda, (RTA), joined members of the National Assembly of Women to take part in this year's Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Lecture in Wortley Hall, Wortley near Sheffield. The lecture by Teresa Moriarty looked at Sylvia's support of the 1913 Dublin Lockout, with over 80 people attending.

Reclaim the Agenda (RTA) is a collective of women's sector representatives, grassroots feminist and trade union activists and interested individuals who campaign on six key themes:

- To live a life free from poverty
- To live free of discrimination
- To have healthcare services that meet our particular needs
- To live our lives free from domestic and sexual violence and abuse
- To live in a society where women are equally represented as decision makers
- To have access to good affordable and flexible childcare provision.

RTA have organised a number of successful protests around the issue of welfare reform; under the working title of *empty purse campaign*, and they also organised the Walk for Women in Belfast in August celebrating the 100th anniversary for 50,000 women walking to Hyde park in London to demand the right to vote.

Coincidentally the Sheffield Walk for Women was organised prior to the lecture so the Belfast Women joined their sisters on their walk. RTA representative and Walk for Women organiser Helen Crickard commented "This year's theme for International Women's Day in Belfast was the 100 year celebration of the fight for suffrage in Ireland, so when the opportunity arose to build on that work and organise the Walk we thought it was a brilliant idea". Lynda Walker added "This summer we wanted to be part of the mass celebration of our brave sisters who campaigned tirelessly, often facing extreme conditions and treatment, to ensure women got the right to vote. Thanks to their determination we can go to the polling stations and have our say during local, council and general elections. The right to vote cannot be underestimated."



all against austerity

ANITA WRIGHT (SECRETARY OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN) TELLS US ABOUT WHAT THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY ARE DOING TO GET ORGANISED AND HOW WE CAN FIGHT TO CHANGE THE FUTURE

IN February 2013 leading members from Unite the Union and the Coalition of Resistance met to discuss if it was possible to bring together unions, campaign groups and a range of individuals who had been fighting against the austerity policies being imposed by the government of David Cameron and Nick Clegg. It was an ambitious plan but it would mark an important step in developing unity between these various forces. A letter in *The Guardian* newspaper signed by 29 organisations and individuals, including the National Assembly of Women, launched the idea of a People's Assembly Against Austerity.

Four months on, and after a significant amount of work the plan became a reality. By early June over 3,000 people had registered to attend the People's Assembly. On 22 June thousands arrived at the Central Hall Westminster where marquees had been erected outside to accommodate the delegates. The opening plenary session was addressed by **Owen Jones**, columnist and author of *Chavs, the demonisation of the working class*, alongside TUC general secretary,

Frances O'Grady and other speakers from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences.

Throughout the day delegates enthusiastically attended a range of workshops on campaign tactics; building the trade union movement; welfare not warfare and a variety of other topics. **Anita Wright**, NAW Secretary was well received when she spoke in the afternoon session entitled "At the Sharp End" alongside disability and black activists who have also been disproportionately affected by the cuts.

The concluding plenary, co-chaired by **Steve Turner** from Unite and **Vicki Baars** from the National Union of Students, gave a warm welcome to trade union leaders and activists and a massive applause for veteran campaigner, **Tony Benn**. In closing the Assembly, **John Rees** called on delegates to take the declaration that had been circulated with the agenda which aims to help build a single united national movement against austerity, to discuss it in their organisations and bring suggestions and amendments to a re-call People's Assembly in early 2014.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND THE TEXT OF THE DECLARATION VISIT [HTTP://THEPEOPLESASSEMBLY.ORG.UK/](http://THEPEOPLESASSEMBLY.ORG.UK/)

a women's assembly against austerity

FOLLOWING the success of the People's Assembly the Executive Committee of the National Assembly of Women agreed to work with women delegates from the People's Charter and Stop the War to co-ordinate a Women's Assembly Against Austerity before the end of this year. Planning is in the early stages, but so far the idea has been endorsed by the People's Assembly and met with approval from the Charter for Women, CND and a number of unions. It is hoped that the Women's Assembly will bring together single issue campaign groups, women in the trade union movement and other organisations fighting for peace and equality. The aim is to follow the same formula as the People's Assembly and reflect the cultural and social diversity of the women's movement.

TO EXPRESS AN INTEREST PLEASE EMAIL NAW@SISTERS.ORG.UK



Sponsored by the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee, Wortley Hall and the National Assembly of Women, the 2013 Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Lecture was held at Wortley Hall on Friday 16 August.

Theresa Moriarty (above), an independent researcher on Irish women workers' history and a member of the Irish History Society, spoke on **Women and the 1913 Dublin Lockout**.

In due course the lecture will be published on the campaign website <http://sylviapankhurst.gn.apc.org/>



Following the closure of the Women's Library at London Metropolitan University and the transfer of its contents to the London School of Economics, the maquette of the Sylvia Pankhurst statue has been moved to its new home in Congress House in London.

It now stands outside the General Council chamber, a reminder to all of Sylvia's contribution.

The cover picture shows 2012-13 Trades Union Congress president Lesley Mercer, with general secretary Frances O'Grady.



The picture shows NAW EC member Janette Ferguson with Ann Henderson (STUC assistant secretary) at the 2012 Scottish TUC Women's Conference. This year's conference is in Dundee 11-12 November with a packed agenda including: zero hours contracts, violence against women, public transport and safety, and a panel discussion on women, constitutional change and the 2014 referendum on independence. All are welcome to attend as visitors, contact Ann at ahenderson@stuc.org.uk and see www.stuc.org.uk

challenges for the future

CHALLENGES for the future! So what are they, apart from the obvious one to remove this Con-Dem government who despise the working class and everything we stand for. The Sheffield *Morning Star* supporters group decided that we need to focus on the challenges for the 21st century and what can be done to surmount them. To achieve this they organised a day conference in early June which was sponsored by Unite the Union. There was an excellent turnout despite the English Defence League visiting Sheffield on that day and there were some excellent speakers with some thought-provoking ideas.

Jeremy Corbyn MP for Islington North and regular contributor to the *Morning Star* talked about the challenges facing the Labour Party. He told us about a recent demonstration in Muswell Hill against the burning of a mosque and his pleasure at the variety of people who turned up to show their disapproval of the act. He reminded us that blaming minorities is not new and that we need to make political arguments against the ultra-right.

He reminded us that as bad as things are in the UK, they are far worse in some other European countries. He described what is happening in Greece where health care, education and so on are no longer a certainty thanks to the austerity measures being imposed by the Central European Bank. This can also be seen in Spain where unemployment is high across all age groups. The UK is now in a situation where unemployment and under-employment are increasing and the use of food banks is also increasing. So how do we deal with all this? Jeremy believes by investment in infrastructure and social housing projects. He urged the left to argue for the alternative to the cuts and austerity measures being imposed upon us all.

Jeremy argued that the way forward is for banks to remain in public ownership and that they should work for society not shareholders. Additional monies would be available if we stopped Trident.

Jeremy praised the People's Assembly and said that over 3,000 people had registered and that a marquee would be required for the overflow.

He urged the Labour Party to campaign for social justice for all with activists in the trade union movement and other organisations on the left.

Discussions from the floor ranged from EU policy and its effects on workers, to workers around Europe uniting together as mass movements do change governments.

Megan Dobney, Secretary of SER-TUC and NAW member talked about the challenges facing the trade union

movement. She told us that despite the rise in unemployment trade union membership has been increasing. There are 2.6 million workers in the private sector who are members of a trade union compared to 3.9 million in the public sector (54% of these are women). A government Bill aimed at stopping a group of workers in a new government rime agency from having the right to strike had only 19 MPs vote against it, and only eight of these were Labour MPs.

Megan asked why the six million trade unionists are not more forcefully demanding from the Labour Party answers on why they are not opposing outsourcing as well as why they are not working with organisations to eradicate inequalities within society, why they are not supporting local communities.

Megan urged us to 'educate, educate and promote the interests of all'.

There was plenty of discussion from the floor, ranging from can we trust the Labour Party when it continually betrays the working class. There was lots of discussion on how we can organise better, there was agreement that we need to be more creative and equally be more demographic, for this we need charismatic leaders. It was agreed that we need to explain what is meant by 'Universal Benefits' if we are going to protect benefits. Blacklisting was discussed and it was felt that the TUC needs to take a lead in stamping this out; it was pointed out that it is not only used in the construction industry. It was pointed out that as well as inequality widening thanks to Con-Dem policies Health & Safety at work is also under attack.

Following a delightful lunch, we were able to promote NAW, where lots of interest was shown in the organisation.

Then **Robert Griffiths**, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Britain discussed the challenges facing socialism. Robert began by asking if there is a crisis in capitalism. He argued that we need to re-evaluate capitalism as a concept; we need to understand what is happening to capitalism and imperialism globally.

Robert reminded us that since the decline of the communist states in Europe the world has lurched from one war to another and finds itself in the worse financial crisis for decades. Despite not causing the crisis it is the workers who have had to bail out the banks and other financial institutions. Capitalism is no longer interested in investing in manufacturing or goods and services that benefit society but prefers to buy and sell financial institutions.

Robert reminded us whose sole aim

is to maximise profits. Western governments are studying China's military capability despite China having no bases outside China. He believes that Western governments are unable to comprehend that a large country like China with a growing economy can survive without a large military expenditure, yet China is surrounded by foreign military bases, especially in Pakistan. In addition, China is often accused of creating more greenhouse gases than any other country, yet the Australian government claims that China is leading the way in reducing greenhouse gases by investing in renewable energy. Robert told us about the five eco-cities built by China that are self-reliant.

Robert informed us that inequality is increasing throughout the world. Two billion people lack sufficient food to survive or adequate sanitation. Multinationals continue to control health care and social provision in many Third World countries. The battle for Africa is restarting for their mineral wealth and food. China is often criticised for its work in Africa, yet it is providing training and social enterprises for the people.

He reminded us that the British ruling classes are ruthless and unprincipled as well as having always lied to the people about major issues (one being that American bases were only here temporarily). Unemployment is required to keep wages low and to reduce the influence of the trade unions.

Robert told us that there are many organisations in Britain that are continuing to fight for peace and social justice; NAW was singled out as one such organisation. He ended by saying that a world without workers is impossible and a world without capitalism is possible. He believes that the left need to promote public sector solutions as opposed to private sector greed. Social housing and transport are needed now; they cannot wait for the fall of capitalism.

Lots of discussion followed on how best to challenge the government and promote better ways of organising to improve lives.

The challenges facing the *Morning Star* were presented by **Richard Bagley**, the paper's editor. He began by saying that the *Morning Star* is the only paper that argues for alternatives to the austerity measures being promoted by the government. He believes that the role of the paper is to educate, inform and stimulate debate. The *Morning Star* is the only national paper that is promoting the People Assembly.

Local newspapers were once owned locally and served the community which led to local people having a

WIDF: still struggling for **peace**

SKEVI KOUKOUMA IS THE EUROPEAN VICE PRESIDENT OF THE WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION (WIDF), AN OFFICIAL OF POGO, THE GREEK WOMEN'S FEDERATION, AND AN MP FOR AKEL IN THE GREEK PARLIAMENT. SHE WAS ALSO A SPEAKER FOR NAW AT THE SOUTH YORKSHIRE FESTIVAL (SEE PAGE 4)

THE Women's International Democratic Federation was born out of the historic necessity for cooperation between the progressive women's movements around the world, which had just come out blood-stained from the bane of fascism and world war two. Women from all over the world, who were pioneers in the struggle against fascism, were defending democracy, peace and the right to life, and were demanding a say in the post-war era which had just began. The need for unity of action by the progressive women's movements in the struggle for peace and gender equality led to the Founding Conference of WIDF in December 1945, in Paris, where 850 delegates from 40 countries took an oath "...to fight for the cre-

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voice and a route to local government. Now the majority of local papers are owned by global institutions. To be more 'local' the *Morning Star* is recruiting regional journalists to bring a regional perspective to the paper. The challenge for these journalists is that they have to cover such large areas, but it does add relevance for the readership.

The *Morning Star* is a cooperative and is answerable to its readers. Trade unionists understand the political angle of the paper and consequently are able to work with it.

So what are the challenges facing the *Morning Star*? mainly its small readership which leads to lack of money for investment. Richard would like to be able to increase the number of regional journalists as well as increase the size of the paper. There has been a promotion to increase the number of shareholders. The *Morning Star* now has a website which it is hoped will encourage readers to start supporters groups. Basically the challenge is to increase the readership of the paper.

This was a great day with lots of interesting information and discussion to suit everyone. I'm sure that all those who attended went away enthused and encouraged to continue the fight against the policies of the Con-Dems and to ensure that at the next election they are soundly defeated.

BY PAT PETERS, SOUTH YORKSHIRE NAW
WWW.MORNINGSTARONLINE.CO.UK

ation of the conditions necessary for the harmonious and happy development of our children and the future generations. We take the sacred oath to fight ceaselessly to ensure lasting world peace".

At the same time, WIDF was and still is the pioneer in the world struggle for gender equality. In our view, this struggle is interwoven with the struggle of the working class for the abolition of the exploitation of man by man – and this is the substantial difference with other women's organisations. Current conditions in the world remind us that the causes that led us to establishing the WIDF continue to exist until today.

peace is the absence of the causes of war

The fact that WIDF and its member organisations have put forth the issue of peace from the early days is not coincidental. It may have been a demand of the whole world, but we highlight that peace is not just the absence of war. Peace is the absence of the causes of war. And the cause is no other than the predatory nature of monopoly capitalism, the thirst for profit on behalf of big imperialist states, which corresponds, of course, to the thirst for profit on behalf of large business corporations.

In the region of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, we witness the sharpening of antagonisms for control of energy sources and pipelines. In this context we witness the dramatic climax of the militarisation and stocking of nuclear weapons in the region. Regimes are overthrown and popular risings are placed under control, for the purpose of establishing regimes which are ready to show friendship and co-operation with western imperialism. Today, the USA-EU-NATO, with the monarchies of the Gulf are preparing a military intervention in Syria in order to open the route toward Iran and control the country's natural resources. Let us not forget that allegations regarding the use of chemical weapons were also made in the case of Iraq but were never proven. Of course their true concern is not to bring about peace but offer a political solution to the crisis. Let us not forget that the EU did not hesitate to officially stop the arms embargo toward embattled Syria, thus pouring oil on the fire of the civil war. At the same time they pretend not to see the terrible crimes committed by the anti-government extremists in Syria and the dangers in store for the whole region in case these obscurantist forces prevail.

bloodshed or peace?

The dilemma today is not whether we

are for or against the Assad regime or whether Syria needs sound democratic reforms and popular freedoms, which the country obviously needs. Today, what is at stake is whether we will accept the bloodshed and dissolution of Syria (which will lead to a total conflagration in Lebanon and the entire region) or whether we will defend peace and the independence and territorial integrity of an independent state and the right of Syria's people to decide for its future. The cause of democracy and freedom in Syria is the cause of its people and not of any imperialist.

Today it is more compelling than ever to stand in solidarity with the struggling people of the world. World peace is being threatened. We must join our voices and our efforts. Imperialism shall not pass.

Capitalism, however, is not only responsible for the wars. It is responsible for unemployment, poverty, inequality and crises. It brings privatisations, the breakdown of social welfare systems, austerity, wage and pension cuts. At the same time, an unprecedented accumulation of wealth in fewer hands is being recorded.

renaming the causes

The British people are experiencing these policies, despite the fact that the UK is not in the Eurozone and the country has not entered into any memoranda with the troika like my country Cyprus. Unemployment and wage cuts have been renamed into flexibility and competitiveness. But the figures of poverty and misery are unsparing. And as we all know, when the anti-labour policies hit the working people, they crush the working women. It is quite necessary to guarantee the labour rights of working women, to implement maternity leave, to have in place policies which support working mothers, to implement humane working hours and to ensure a retirement age which will allow pensioners to enjoy some quality of life during their retirement.

unity in struggle

The specific struggles on a national level may have different forms and different short-term aims. But all have in common, is that we're all tied to the struggles with the ideals of social justice, of equality and solidarity.

The last conference of the WIDF has set clear aims and the framework of action which must be adopted by our progressive women's associations and be promoted in society. Aims and demands which correspond to our time. For peace, gender equality and labour rights. These will form the basis for strengthening the cooperation and solidarity between us.

1963: Valentina Tereshkova



ELEANOR LEWINGTON (NAW TREASURER) REMINDS US WHAT HAPPENED WHEN A DELEGATION OF BRITISH WOMEN MET THE FIRST WOMAN IN SPACE...

It is 50 years since Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman to go into space. She set off in Vostok 6 on Sunday 16 June 1963 and landed three days later after 48 orbits of the earth.

On Saturday 23 June she was given a hero's welcome in Red Square and the Kremlin, alongside Valery Bykovsky who had been in space at the same time, in Vostok 5.

In the Soviet Union at the same time was a British Communist Party women's delegation, the first to visit Siberia

(going to Irkutsk and Novosibirsk). They cut short their visit to Leningrad, travelling to Moscow by train overnight, to attend the Kremlin reception.

On Monday 25 June the delegation attended the opening day of the World Congress of Women, which was addressed by both Valentina and Nikita Krushchev. On the Wednesday they met Valentina, Valery and Yuri Gagarin at a Party restaurant in Moscow, where the picture was taken.

Valentina has a bouquet of flowers, and has Gladys Easton, the leader of the delegation on the left. Beryl Huffinley, past president of the NAW, is behind Yuri Gagarin.

In the *Daily Worker* on 18 June 1963 Rosemary Small reviewed the mixed reactions of the British press, and quoted Barbara Castle saying "Valentina's achievement could hardly happen here, women are held back in our society".

We don't know the names of all the interpreters, but left to right it is: interpreter, Pixie Bury, Marion Howarth, Valery Bykovsky, interpreter, Daphne Johnson, Elizabeth O'Byrne, Gladys Easton, Valentina Tereshkova, Ivy Woods, Marion Mellor, Vera interpreter, May Burn, Beryl Huffinley, Yuri Gagarin, Jean French.

diary dates

NAW Executive Committee meetings:

Saturday 2 November, London
 Saturday 1 February, Birmingham
All members are welcome to attend, but please let Anita Wright, NAW secretary know before the meeting.

NAW Annual General Meeting 2014:

Please note a change of date! The AGM will now take place on **Saturday 10 May** at Wortley Hall, near Sheffield

naw@sisters.org.uk facebook: search for National Assembly of Women. NAW, Bridge House, Newport St, Hay on Wye, Powys HR3 5BG

www.sisters.org.uk

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