



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P WINTER 2013

2 STUC reports

3 stop the war!

4 women against austerity

5 Renate Simpson

6 the spirit of '45

7 Iran

isters

STUC: **unity** is strength

A WONDERFUL EXAMPLE OF SCOTTISH WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER
STUC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE 2013
BY ANN HENDERSON, STUC ASSISTANT SECRETARY

BRINGING together over 200 delegates, visitors, and exhibiting organisations, this year's STUC Women's Conference in Dundee was bigger than for many years. This undoubtedly reflects a growing confidence amongst women shop stewards and activists across all industrial sectors, public and private, covering the whole of Scotland.

Debates on the economy highlighted concerns about the stress that many women are now experiencing, with less job security, casual contracts, and increased workloads as staff are not replaced. Examples were given of how performance management is being used to put additional pressure on older women and women with disabilities, forcing many out of the workplace, instead of supporting them to stay in work.

The STUC Women's Committee has been working with the Women in Scotland's Economy project at Glasgow Caledonian University, to build up women's understanding of economics, and developing confidence in the arguments for an alternative. A successful women's weekend training school was held in the autumn of 2012, and plans are in place for another school to run at the end of February 2014.

Particularly powerful speeches came from delegates during the debates on violence against women, on trafficking, and on Female Genital Mutilation. As always, women gave testimony of their own experience in the workplace and at home. A Unison delegate, a practising midwife, spoke passionately about the complexities involved in bringing FGM to an end, and stressed how important it was that health service workers were appropriately trained to understand how best to support women who had undergone this practice elsewhere.

The STUC Women's Committee had participated in the Women's Trade Union Council of the Isles, only days before the Dundee conference. Meeting with members of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, North and South; the TUC, and the Wales TUC, in Dublin, decisions had been taken to campaign collectively on violence against women; and on women's access to safe, legal, abortion. The Women's Conference in Dundee therefore considered and agreed an emergency motion on Access to Abortion in Northern Ireland, condemning the UK government's continuing failure to comply with the United Nations recommendations on the Convention on

the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to which the UK is a signatory.

One afternoon at conference was given over to a Question and Answer panel session *A Just Scotland – Women and the Independence referendum*. Panellists included Anne McGuire MP (Better Together campaign); Mary Lockhart (Yes Scotland); Smina Akhtar (Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre); and Alison Hosie (Scottish Human Rights Commission). Professor Fiona Mackay University of Edinburgh chaired the session. This built on seminars which the STUC had supported earlier in the year, looking at women's equality and constitutional change. The discussion made very clear that women will be involved in the discussion in the year ahead, but that substantive answers are needed on the economy, on equality and the constitution; and on wealth redistribution; before decisions are made on how to vote.

The Conference saw the launch of the new STUC campaign *Women's Votes, Women's Voices* as we do all that we can to ensure that women we work beside, and in our communities, are registered to vote. It was also made very clear that voting itself is not enough – alongside it comes the demand for women's representation and for accountability. On 26 November, the Scottish government published its White Paper for Independence. Trade union women will be fully engaged in the debate, before and after the Referendum on 18 September 2014.

More information about the decisions of Conference, and some of the speeches and other reports, can be found at <http://www.stuc.org.uk/events/7/stuc-women-s-conference>

BELOW: NAW EC MEMBER
JANETTE FERGUSON WITH
NAW PRESIDENT DONA FELTHAM



EILEEN DINNING, CHAIR OF THE STUC
CONFERENCE 2013
INSPIRING WOMEN IS AVAILABLE £7.99 AT
[HTTP://WWW.WORD-POWER.CO.UK/BOOKS/
INSPIRING-WOMEN-19780992739201/](http://www.word-power.co.uk/books/inspiring-women-19780992739201/)

IN opening Conference, Eileen drew attention to the strong tradition of women and the labour movement in Dundee, citing the struggles of the jute workers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century in particular. She then went on to outline the realities for working women today saying "we recognise the sheer exhaustion and frustration that confronts women on a daily basis, and the ongoing struggle for equality. The STUC represents over 300,000 trade union women in Scotland. Women are the majority in a number of our affiliated unions, in some cases 60 to 70%. The majority are low paid".

"Many are struggling under the UK government's austerity programme. Or, let's call it what it really is – a direct attack on the poor, a protection racket for the rich, and an outright contempt for the working class".

Eileen went on to outline some of the work of the Women's Committee the previous year. Campaigning on the Women and Work agenda, the STUC had given evidence in Parliament and to government in Scotland.

Eileen emphasised the following: "the outcome of the Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunity Committee Inquiry is a significant political decision, calling for a timetable for a statutory right to childcare that includes children up to 15, and disabled children.

"We have campaigned on this issue for many years and not once have we compromised on the need for childcare to be central to a successful economic infrastructure".

The Conference also marked the publication of *Inspiring Women*. As Eileen said, "This book came from a desire to pay tribute to the many Scottish trade union women, who sacrificed time and family to make this world a better place, women like Margaret Irwin, Mary Barbour and Agnes Mclean".

women of the world: let's stop the war!

A STRONG MESSAGE THAT MUST BE HEARD. WE CANNOT GO ON TAKING WHAT WE WANT, WHEN WE WANT IT, LET'S TRY PEACE AND RESPECT FOR EACH OTHER FOR A CHANGE!!

WOMEN OF THE WORLD, LET'S STOP THE WAR!

BY SKEVI KOUKOUMA

THE drums of war beat in the Eastern Mediterranean. The US-NATO-EU alliance, together with the Gulf monarchies, have thus far instigated the bloodshed in Syria by arming and financing the dissident extremist rebels. Now, they proceed to the next phase of their plans at the expense of Syria: the external military intervention that will lead to the partition of the country, with unforeseen consequences, first of all in Lebanon and then in the whole region. It is obvious that their real goal is to attack Iran in order to get hold their wealth resources. Israel, the real terrorist in the area, is lurking.

They have no difficulty in finding pretexts. They will either manipulate and exaggerate existing issues or they will fabricate pretexts. The so-called "transition to democracy", the "Iran nuclear program", the "use of chemicals by the Assad regime" contain the usual rhetoric that covers up the imperialist designs. Special effort is not needed to overturn these pretexts. Firstly, because the greatest nuclear threat in the region comes from Israel, but the US-NATO-EU keep silent because it concerns an ally and they do not wish to break the nuclear monopoly. Secondly, because the regimes of Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt and the Gulf monarchies were also dictatorial and illiberal, but these had or have very strong ties with the US and other western centres. The "use of chemicals" and "weapons of mass destruction" was the same excuse that was employed in Iraq's case in 2003, which proved to be but a

big lie. The American-British intelligence services, however, are the last who can testify reliably if there was chemical use and by whom. In any case, a military attack against Syria will only cause more blood, violence and havoc for the already suffering people. Peace and a political solution to the crisis is not the preoccupation of the imperialists. Besides, the EU did not hesitate to officially stop the weapons embargo in war-stricken Syria, inciting further bloodshed. At the same time, they pretend not to see the terrible crimes of the extremist dissidents in Syria and the risks for the country in case these obscurantist forces prevail.

The real reason for what is happening in our bloodstained neighborhood is the fact that the Eastern Mediterranean is in the epicenter of competition between the imperialist centres of the world. Their main objective is to ensure the flow of raw materials, energy and products from the region, safeguard their access to energy sources and to the unexploited oil deposits of the eastern Mediterranean and the "modernisation" of bourgeois regimes in the region, so as to become a basis for the actions of monopolistic business groups. Alliances, conflicts, collaborations, confrontations, militarisation and nuclearisation of the region unfold on this background that includes giant plans for the redrawing of borders. Such a plan is the American-inspired "New Middle East" which provides for the total rearrangement of the region in order to advance the multinational energy giants.

One does not need to be a supporter of Assad and the Iranian regime in order to oppose the plans to attack Syria. Besides, we solely identify with the progressive forces in those countries struggling for popular and labour rights, for political and trade union freedom, for democracy, popular sovereignty and socialism. What is at

stake today is not whether we are for or against the Assad regime.

Today, what is at stake is whether we accept the bloodshed and the dissolution of Syria or whether we defend peace, sovereignty and the territorial integrity of an independent state and the right of the people themselves to decide on their future. The cause of democracy and freedom in Syria is a matter of its own people and not of the imperialists. The people who expect the US, the EU or any other imperialist from the East or West, to bring democracy and peace, will be bitterly and irreparably disappointed. Today, the people of Syria, tomorrow the people of Iran and the people of the region will pay with their children's blood the energy conflicts of the world's powerful. We know in fact, that women and children, without being on the battlefield, will again be the vast majority of the dead, the wounded and the refugees.

The Women's International Democratic Federation was founded in 1945 by progressive women's movements of the world and gave a "sacred vow to fight tirelessly to ensure permanent world peace". At this hour, the primary task of WIDF and all the progressive women's movements of the planet is to contribute so that the whole of humanity raises an antiwar shield to protect the Syrian people. Our debt is to mobilise the women and people of our countries in demonstrations outside the embassies of the US, EU, Britain, France, Turkey etc who lead the attack against Syria. To demand that our countries' governments condemn the crime, defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, and do not cooperate in any way in the raid by facilitating the invaders.

Let us vow and promise to the mothers of Syria who watch for months now their country drowning in blood and now embrace their children in their arms: **LET US ALL JOIN THE STRUGGLE TO STOP THE ATTACK AGAINST SYRIA.**

SKEVI KOUKOUMA IS A VICE PRESIDENT OF THE WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT POGO, A MEMBER OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF AKEL, AND A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF CYPRUS

The National Assembly of Women was saddened to hear that Women's International Democratic Federation President, **Marcia Campos** has been unwell, but pleased to hear that she is out of hospital and back home

We send her our warmest greetings and wish her a speedy recovery

THE LINE UP OF SPEAKERS AT JULY'S SOUTH YORKSHIRE FESTIVAL: SIOBHAN ENDEAN (UNITE), SKEVI KOUKOUMA (WIDF), DONA FELTHAM (NAW), LESLEY MERCER (CSP AND TUC PRESIDENT).



women's assembly against austerity

WOMEN remain at the sharp end of Cameron's vicious economic and social austerity policies. As women's unemployment rises, wages fall, the pay gap widens and household and living costs rise, women face a daily struggle to keep themselves and their families from slipping deeper into poverty. This is particularly true now that one in three families have a woman as the main breadwinner. The introduction of the totally unnecessary and vicious bedroom tax has added insult to injury. During the first four weeks of the bedroom tax coming into force more than 14,000 Merseyside households fell into arrears with their rent. For nearly 6,000 it was the first time they had ever spiralled into rental debt.

Forty five years after the Dagenham women workers walked out in the fight for equal pay and inspired a generation, the gender pay gap in the area is still double the national average at 32.2%, compared with a national average of 14.9% (comparing mean full-time hourly earnings excluding overtime). As Frances O'Grady said on the anniversary of the Dagenham strike "For an awful lot of women, they start off in a low-paid job, and they end their working lives in a low-paid job. Shop work, cleaning, catering: there are legions of working women in low-paid jobs". She argued that while it is important to celebrate the fact that an enormous amount has been achieved since Vera Sime and her colleagues walked out, there's still plenty more to fight for. "Maybe we need a bit of that spirit back." It was with this in mind and following the huge success of the People's Assembly Against Austerity in June 2013, that the National Assembly of Women along with women from the People's Charter and Stop the War decided to co-ordinate a Women's Assembly Against Austerity to take place in February 2014.

The aim is to follow the same formu-

la as the People's Assembly and reflect the cultural and social diversity of the women's movement and show-case the important role women have played in campaigns for equal pay, childcare and historic trade union struggles. It is hoped to create a positive and creative atmosphere with a good balance of speakers as well as a mixture of comedy, poetry and visuals. The only criteria for involvement in the Women's Assembly are that individuals and organisations must be anti-austerity and support the founding statement of the People's Assembly. Planning is in the early stages, but so far the idea has been endorsed by the signatories group of 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 purpose is to:

- give voice to the impact that policies of austerity and privatisation are having on women
- develop thinking about the alternatives to austerity from women's perspective
- encourage women in resisting through linking up and learning from each other, including between women's organisations and women in the labour and trade union movement
- ensure that women are at the front and centre of a movement against austerity and in developing the alternative.

The National Assembly of Women was created in 1952 when women from all over Britain came together to demand peace, equality and justice. It is hoped that this Women's Assembly Against Austerity will re-create the passion and determination to fight for the same aims. It's time for women to get active, get organised and get even with a government that is hell bent on destroying the hard won rights of women and working people in order to maximise the profits of their friends in banking and big business.

BY ANITA WRIGHT, SECRETARY OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN

JOIN US ON TWITTER #WOMENSAAA

Our women everywhere are fighting back. Please read and circulate the letter (to the right) and send to as many women as possible, friends, family and workmates etc.

We must remember Unity is Strength!

open letter

We believe that women remain at the sharp end of the government's economic and social austerity policies. As women's unemployment rises, wages fall, the pay gap widens, benefits are cut and household and living costs rise, women face a daily struggle to keep themselves and their families from slipping deeper into poverty.

It is a travesty that 45 years after the Dagenham women workers fought for equal pay we see increasing parts of our economy fuelled on cheap labour, with one in five workers earning just on or below a living wage, and two-thirds of these women.

In the workplace and in the day-to-day battles against poverty, discrimination, racism, attacks on disabled people, the blight of war and the destruction of the environment, women are fighting back. Women are playing a leading role in the movement against austerity, evidenced by the huge number of women on the 50,000-strong NHS demonstration outside the Tory party conference Manchester last month.

Political leaders should be using the nation's resources in the interests of the majority of the people and prioritise the abolition of poverty, insecurity and the threat of war. Our society is moving in a dangerous direction and now is the time for us to decide how our wealth is used and what values underpin our society.

In recognition of the leading role of women in the campaign against austerity and in articulating a new vision for our society, the signatories of this letter support the call for a Women's Assembly Against Austerity to take place in early 2014. This event will build on the success of the People's Assembly launched in June.

Yours faithfully

Diane Abbott MP; Sarah Veale, TUC Head of Equalities; Vera Baird QC; Natalie Bennett, Leader Green Party; Maxine Peake, Actress and Dramatist; Anne Scargill/Betty Cook, Women Against Pit Closures; Anita Wright and Dona Feltham, NAW; Lindsey German, Stop the War Campaign; Kate Hudson, CND; Anne Scott, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; Rachel Newton, Peoples Charter; Carolyn Simpson, SERTUC Women's Rights Committee; Carolyn Jones, Institute of Employment Rights; Feyzi Ismail, East London People's Assembly; Jude Woodward, Adviser to Mayor of London 2000-08; Liz Payne Communist Party of Britain; Kerry Abel, Abortion Rights; Pilgrim Tucker, Unite Communities organiser; Julia Charlton, UCU

**FOR MORE INFORMATION SEE
WWW.THEPEOPLESASSEMBLY.ORG.UK
OR EMAIL NAW@SISTERS.ORG.UK**

LEFT TO RIGHT: ANITA WRIGHT, MARCIA CAMPOS, DONA FELTHAM



Renate Simpson

A WONDERFUL LADY, GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

BARBARA SWITZER REMEMBERS RENATE SIMPSON

BORN in Berlin in 1923 Renate was a dedicated socialist and campaigner for peace and equality from an early age. She was a member of the NAW and believed passionately in its aims and objectives. Her daughter, Ann, worked internationally with the CGT in France which brought her into contact with trade unionists and political activists in the UK, thus creating many lasting friendships.

Renate's father Robert Rene Kuczynski, a renowned independent economist and statistician fled Germany in February 1933 when the Gestapo knocked at the door. In February 1934, the youngest children, still at home, were exiled with their mother, Berta, to England and the family was reunited in London.

Entering university in 1940, at the age of 16, Renate was evacuated to Cambridge and was able to attend lectures from both universities and learn from many great socialists and thinkers during the war.

After marrying Arthur Simpson in 1945 she moved to several different areas where she became the mainstay of many organisations that were called broad democratic movements. She also started a *Daily Worker* discussion group in Lowestoft in 1946.

Liverpool comrades remember her arriving in the 1950s early on the morning of their *Daily Worker* bazaar, alone and unknown, having travelled from Conway determined to help.

In the 1960s Renate translated the second volume of Karl Marx's *Theories of Surplus Value* from German into English. At different times she held most positions in her Communist Party branches and represented East Anglia District at several national Party Congresses.

Renate's insistence on maintaining class international principles led to descriptions of her role at the televised 1977 Congress as "Red Renate", "the lady from the floor with true grit" and, "Mrs Simpson badgered unmercifully".

Her many publications had a lasting influence in both Cuba and the Philippines. In London, from 1984, she and Arthur were active in Caribbean Labour Solidarity and Renate was moved to join the campaign for the release of Phyllis Coard, imprisoned after the US invasion of Grenada in 1983, which often met in their front room.

In 2009, with the help of her three children she was able to celebrate the completion and publication of her book *The Development of the PhD*




Degree in Britain, 1917-1959 and Since: an evolutionary and statistical history in higher education. In 2010 she was given an award for a lifetime of service by the Society for Research into Higher Education.

In March 2013, already living in Mill View Residential Home in Bradford with Alzheimer's, Renate enjoyed the celebration of International Women's Day, probably her last political activity.

Renate died on 18 October 2013 and while these are always sad occasions I am sure Ann and all the family and friends can find great comfort from their memories of a truly remarkable and influential comrade from whose legacy we all benefit.

This is a very brief snapshot of an exceptional woman and readers can read much more by clicking on the link on the News page of the NAW web site www.sisters.org.uk.

Many thanks to Peter Lazenby and Ann and Ludi Simpson for their help in providing information.



The National Assembly of Women and the Tree of Life logo

In the 1950s the NAW decided to commission a logo that could be used on a badge and other publicity materials. Margaret Lloyd, a founder member of the NAW approached Maureen Rothstein, a young professional potter who was just starting her career and asked her to submit some designs. Maureen's original design was of a woman holding a baby in one hand and a spanner in the other – this was rejected by the Executive so Maureen produced a new design entitled the Tree of Life. This has been used since then and appears on the reverse side of new banner commissioned in preparation of the 60th anniversary of the National Assembly of Women.

do they deserve it?

POLITICIANS' PROPOSED 11% PAY RISE. DO THEY DESERVE IT? HAVE THEY REALLY EARNED IT? JANETTE FERGUSON, SISTERS EDITOR, WONDERS...

WE must not forget that the poor old Prime Minister has another BIG decision to make in the coming weeks, which I am sure will be giving him some/lots of sleepless nights. Yes you have guessed, it is the proposed 11% pay-rise for politicians. What can he possibly say to the poor old British public to justify such an affront.

Perhaps he will tell us how they have earned it by... Not cutting the higher tax band by 5%, or Not stopping the greedy bankers bonuses, or Not reigning in the big 6 energy companies, or Not cutting fuel duty, or Not selling off the NHS, or Not selling off the Royal Mail, or Not extending the age of retirement (for everyone else), or Not raiding the pensions schemes of British workers, or Not taking away/tampering with workers' rights, or Not implementing the inhumane and degrading bedroom tax, or Not destroying the entire welfare system leaving people both penniless/homeless, or Not implementing a fairer pension scheme for our senior citizens who have already earned it, or Not, or Not the list is endless.

But let's give us some credit... oh yes, We Have created the highest number of people living below the breadline, or We Have created the highest level of child poverty ever recorded since the 20s and 30s, or We Have created the highest number of adult poverty ever recorded since the 20s and 30s, or We Have created the degrading means testing for physically disadvantaged and chronically ill adults and children by discounting the evidence provided by their own GPs and Consultants and (bringing in our own private company who we are paying millions of pounds to), cutting or leaving them without benefits, or We Have created the 'zero hour contract', and oh yes their pay rise will be a paltry 1%, or maybe none at all, or We Have created the need for food banks, or We Have, or We Have, the list is endless here too.

Oh, wait a minute, what about all the new contracts, which we have paid out millions of pounds even when they failed, or the new contracts which did not complete in time which we paid out millions of pounds for, no better not mention them or that will all make us look like we cannot do the job we were elected for, oh no we better not mention that either, we did not have a majority.

Oh what a dilemma / disaster!!

NHS: the spirit of '45

THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE IS VITAL TO ALL OF US NO MATTER WHICH PART OF THE UK WE LIVE IN, BUT WE MUST NOT ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE COMPLACENT

THE NHS CANNOT SAVE ITSELF WITHOUT OUR HELP, WE MUST FIGHT FOR IT!

THE CREEPING PRIVATISATION OF THE HEALTH SERVICE WILL LEAD TO THE SIPHONING OF BILLIONS OF TAXPAYERS MONEY TO GREEDY SHAREHOLDERS, ARGUES GAIL CARTMAIL, ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY OF UNITE

WHEN the coalition came into power the NHS had the highest ever patient satisfaction rate. You have to ask yourselves how it is possible that in just four years the NHS has been brought onto life support. I am not a gambling woman but I know that if the chances of getting run over are 50/50 I wouldn't cross the road.

Yet one in 10 senior NHS managers rated their chances of meeting the £20bn so called "efficiency savings" as 50/50 according to a recent survey by the King's Fund.

More than half of managers surveyed identified a high or very high risk of missing the cuts target and nearly a third reported a detriment to patient care over the past year.

GPs have warned of impending chaos as they struggle to manage on reduced budgets and A&E departments have given notice of a winter crisis. To make matters worse the government is lining up walk-in centres for closure.

The crisis in health care funding in England is exacerbated by the costly changes introduced by the Health and Social Care Act, changes that ironically open the floodgates to private sector companies who are accountable to shareholders and boards intent on making profits.

Unite, together with War on Want and Change to Win, exposed the level of tax evasion by one private sector player that benefits from NHS income.

In 2007, Alliance Boots left the FTSE 100, went private and is now based in Switzerland. Our research shows that over six years Alliance Boots has avoided paying £1bn in taxes – despite drawing an estimated 40 per cent of its British revenue from services it supplies to the NHS.

To understand the scale of what we lost the £1bn equates to more than two years' prescription charges for all of England, or 185,000 hip replacements.

Not one of us voted for such dismantling of our NHS that seeks to replace cooperation with competition, fragmenting services and pitching one health provider against another.

Our NHS is being frogmarched toward the US model, which squanders a huge percentage of expenditure on complex administration.



Labour in opposition has pledged to repeal the Health and Social Care Act and Unite wants Labour to go further. There is no place in Britain for a "market" in health care, internal or external.

The vision of Aneurin Bevan was a national health service. Bevan knew that a health service for just the poorest in society would be a poor health service. So the NHS was established on the principle that "Everyone – rich or poor, man, woman or child – can use any part of it".

It is this vision and the post-war Labour government's bold economic policy that tackled disease and health inequalities, built decent homes, schools and universities intended for the many not just the few. And all achieved with a bigger debt and deficit than Britain faces today following the global economic crisis triggered by casino style banking in 2008.

That is why Unite is calling for a resurgence of the "Spirit of '45".

It is time to take sides. Unite is for an alternative to austerity that has resulted in health and economic inequalities not seen in Britain since the depression of the 1930s.

The necessity to defend our NHS in this its 65th year has never been more urgent. The TUC mobilisation that circled the Tories in Manchester was great but we need more action. Unite has pledged to defend the NHS by any means possible.

The campaign to defend health services in Lewisham showed what can be achieved when we pull together, trade unions alongside community organisations.

NHS – BBC News?

ON Sunday 29 September about 50,000 people took part in a rally in defence of the NHS.

The mass protest was held in Manchester at the start of the Conservative Party Conference. The protest was mainly made up of trade unionists and health workers doing their best to ensure that everybody was aware of the government's ideologically driven attack on the NHS. The Greater Manchester Police described it as one of the largest protests they had ever policed.

The BBC's coverage largely glossed over the demonstration. If you hadn't known about the demonstration you certainly wouldn't have found out about it from the BBC. Andy Burnham MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Health, was one of the speakers at the rally. After the event he wrote to Lord Patten at the BBC asking why the BBC neglected to cover a major national protest.

The BBC is a statutory British public service broadcasting corporation and we should expect and deserve better than this!

BY BARBARA WHITE, NAW EC MEMBER



BARBARA



JANETTE

NHS Scotland

ALTHOUGH the NHS Scotland still appears to be in public ownership' there are already a lot of the services once provided by the NHS farmed out to private companies. Where this has already happened the NHS and the Scottish government appear to have very little or no control at all over how those services are run.

There is also apparently a concern about a shortage of nurses. Would that perhaps have been caused by nurses being paid off when wards were closed, or a drop in morale when the number of nurses on duty were dropped to dangerously low levels? When that happens they are unable to provide the service they were trained for and are left in untenable situations. Or the subsequent stress levels, or when government continually downgrades the value of the service so they can downgrade their salary scales?

We cannot allow ourselves to become complacent, our NHS Scotland is worth fighting for. No matter which party is in government our NHS is not theirs to sell.

BY JANETTE FERGUSON NAW EC MEMBER

iran

THE women of the world recognise that our children are the future and must be protected from draconian laws, that allow children and young women and men to be used as a commodity to be bought and sold, this must be stopped, all governments of the world must act now. The United Nations must act now.

The Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women calls for the repeal of a new law that threatens the life of children.

At the same time as the United Nations declared 11 October the International Day of the Girl the Iranian Guardian Council ratified the Law of the Protection of Children and Youngsters which included the provision whereby a parent can marry an adoptive child provided the court rules accordingly. Although the gender is not specified, this effectively means that a man may marry his adoptive daughter. This reactionary Bill caused a wave of public unease and protest, especially among women and children's rights activists; and law experts correctly identified it to be not only a violation of women's legal rights but also a gross violation of the rights of children. The regime ignored all the protests and used as justification, compliance with Shari'a (religious law) and "with religious rights" and passed yet another misogynist law and a blatant example of legalised violence against children.

Article 34 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, states that "Governments must protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation". The Islamic Republic, despite being a signatory, has breached several Articles of the convention and by ratifying this inhumane law, leading to psychological harm to children and clearing a legal path for the sexual abuse of children by their stepfather.

By legalising the marriage of a guardian with his adoptive daughter, it effectively legalises the abuse and rape of children under 18 years of age, because the Islamic Republic's civil law has set the legal age for marriage at 13 for girls and 15 for boys. Even girls of nine years of age may be forced into marriage with the permission of the father and the ruling of the court. The country's statistics are indicative of the horrifying fact that as a consequence of such policies there has been a massive increase in drug addiction, prostitution and runaway children. In 2012, according to official statistics, 29,831 girls below the age of 18 were married in Iran. Out of these 29,827 girls were 10-14 years old and 1,537 were below ten years, forced into marriage with the approval of the parent (father) and the "approval and recognition of the court". Poverty

midlands TUC pensioners



WHEN the National Assembly of Women received an invitation to attend a meeting of the Midlands TUC Pensioners Network in Derby in November, I was asked to go along to represent us.

When I arrived at meeting I found a proactive group, who are engaged in strengthening their organisation by sending delegates to Manchester Trade Union Council AGM, holding stalls at events such as the Women's Chainmakers Festival, and looking to work more closely with their trade union allies.

They stressed that dependant on the timing of any marches, rallies or lobbies, they are willing and able to attend most events free of charge to the organisers, as a supporting and powerful addition. They are very keen to get involved in events and need invitations in good time.

The subject I covered on the NAW's

plays a role in these developments.

The government has an obligation to protect "children with no guardians or bad guardians" who are the defenceless victims of the economic policies of the anti-people regime. However, the theocratic regime has found the solution in ratifying a law which breaches the human rights of women and girls, and prioritises "religious laws" over the physical and spiritual well-being of children, in complete breach of conventions on the rights of the child, where the family has been defined correctly as the "building block of the society and the place of nurturing and development of all its members, especially the personality of the child".

Women have always played an important role in any effort to promote and realise the rights of children and to create a world without discrimination and violence. In this context, the Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women expresses its deep concern about the gross violation of children's rights and the inhumane and misogynistic policies of the Islamic Republic, and demands the repeal of this

behalf was "the unequal effects on women caused by the changes to pension provision, brought in by this Con/Dem government". I gave a resume of the NAW's history, particularly our long held stance for a decent level of state pension without the demeaning application of means testing, and that the best way to achieve this was to increase the basic level of the weekly state pension to over £160 (see www.sisters.org.uk/5documents.html for our pensions policy documents).

This Con/Dem government has repeatedly failed to honour past promises, and ignore any attempts that have been made to remind them.

Approximately 80,000 women born between April and July 1953 have already had their state pension date moved back three months. If the new system is in place by 2017 they will retire just before, but not be entitled to a single tier pension, unlike a man of the same age.

What is needed is a reform which provides a pension system based on women's needs, that would recognise the role of women generally as the prime carer of both children and dependants, and that a women's work is often part-time, low-paid and erratic.

In closing I would like to thank Midlands TUC pensioners group Chair Yvonne Washbourne for the invitation and wish them all continuing success in the future.

BY VAL SALMOND NAW EC MEMBER

medieval law that threatens the lives of our children.

The Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women also calls on WIDF and other progressive organisations in the world to help protect the violated rights of Iranian children and the struggle of progressive forces by exposing the sick and reactionary policies of the Islamic Republic so that the lives of our country's children and youngsters do not continue to be ruined for the sake of shari'a.

Equality – What Equality!

Come and celebrate International Women's Day with like-minded women at Wortley Hall

South Yorkshire NAW Branch are organising a Conference on Equality or rather the lack of it.

Speakers have been arranged from Unite the Union and NAW plus others

The Conference will be on **Saturday 1st March 2014**

For more details contact Pat Peters on 0114 281 0012 or peterspat@blueyonder.co.uk

Royal Mail rip-off

THIS is prime example of another Con/Dem disaster. A company in public ownership sold off to the lowest bidder. The British people didn't want it sold, Royal Mail didn't want it sold after working so hard to make it profitable (despite government carving the rest of it up and selling it too).

Shame on the Con/Dem government for not listening.

Banks advising the government on the controversial sell-off of Royal Mail were allocated millions of shares that have shown a profit of at least £29 million since its flotation. The gains come on top of the £16.9 handed over to the banks in fees for their advice on the float and Ministers have revealed that City advisers helping with the flotation were given the opportunity to buy 13 million shares in Royal Mail as investors rushed to buy into the new private company.

Since then, the Con/Dems have been criticised for potentially short-changing the tax-payer by selling the shares at 330p, when they closed on Friday at a new record of 555p, valuing the company at £5.55 billion, up 67% in just two weeks. A spokesman for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills said companies, including Goldman Sachs, UBS and other junior advisers, were not given preferential treatment, but refused to say how many shares were offered to each adviser.

However, Adrian Bailey, the Chair of the House of Commons Business Committee, and a Labour MP, has already raised questions about the process, and plans to grill ministers about how many shares were offered to each bank, their level of fees and their role in the valuation of the company.

The shares were allocated to the banking advisers separately from the



fees and may have been sold or added to at any point since the flotation.

Their allocation emerged after peer Lord Donoughue asked the government, how many shares were sold to the banking advisers who advised on the price flotation.

The news came amid reports that JP Morgan put a possible top-of-the-range valuation on Royal Mail at £10 billion – more than three times the £3.3 billion that it was eventually sold for.

Chuka Umunna, the shadow business secretary, said there are now “a wide range of questions being asked about the government’s Royal Mail fire sale which ministers need to answer. While Vince Cable has claimed that guaranteeing tax-payer value was ‘central’ to his strategy, doubts are emerging on the process ministers put in place. We know that Vince Cable considered and rejected the option of getting a better deal for the tax-payer”, he said.

At a time when the public are seeing services cut back and their living standards squeezed, they will not forgive ministers if they are left short changed. And on and on it goes!!

The news is not good, new revelations are being reported every day, Vince Cable, his assistants and all the advisers are being called in front of all sorts of groups who will tell us what we already know.

The Royal Mail (a public owned company in profit) should never have been sold off in the first place,

BY JANETTE FERGUSON, NAW EC

reader's response

WE ALWAYS APPRECIATE ANY FEEDBACK FROM OUR READERS AND WILL INCLUDE IT IN FOLLOWING EDITIONS IF POSSIBLE

NATIONAL Assembly of Women member Maureen Rothstein contacted us after she read Siobhan EnSean's article in the Autumn edition of *Sisters Put the Children in Charge*.

Maureen says: “Reading the piece by Siobhan EnSean about the problems of bringing up children with our present government in power, prompts me to mention something I have only just realised is very serious for many families.

“For some while I have been contributing to a local food bank in North Portsmouth. The organisers tell me that contributions tend to fall off during the summer months. The food bank is used by many families with children who qualify for free school dinners which of course only exist during term time, causing considerable hardship during the school holidays.

“I have not heard of one, but should there not be a campaign for free lunches for children when the schools are closed?”.

FROM THE EDITOR

The above letter from Maureen prompted me to have a look on the internet where I found mention of a couple of examples of holiday provision. One was in 2011 in Corby and Luton, called “Lunch”, and one this year, called “Holiday Kitchen” in Birmingham.

If you can help, if there is any campaign or scheme already up and running in your area, please contact us at, www.sisters.org.uk and we will let Maureen know.

diary dates

NAW Executive Committee meetings:

Saturday 1 February, Birmingham

Saturday 5 April, London

All members are welcome to attend, but please let Anita Wright, NAW secretary know before the meeting.

NAW Annual General Meeting 2014:

The AGM will 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

join the NAW now!

*I would like to join the NAW. Here is £20 for the annual subscription (£10 unwaged) which includes my subscription to **sisters**, the journal of the NAW.*

Our organisation would like to affiliate to the NAW. Enclosed is: £20 (local organisation/NAW branch), £45 (regional organisation), £60 (national)

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