



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P AUTUMN 2014

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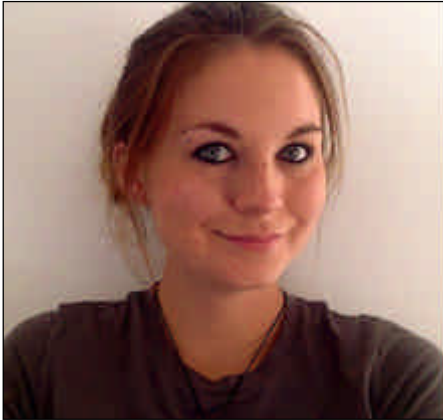
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PUTTING TRADE UNIONS AT THE HEART OF THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY

WITH wages rapidly falling below the rate of inflation, high unemployment and the nature of work becoming ever more casualised and precarious, much attention has been given to the evils of the widening gap of economic inequality. Less attention however has been given to determining the causes of this gap, or how best to remedy it.

An important factor in the growth of inequality is undoubtedly the dramatic decline in the number of workers who have their pay and conditions negotiated by a trade union. Ever since Thatcher's ideologically driven programme of privatisation and anti-union legislation, the erosion of collective bargaining has led to a stagnation of wages at the bottom, while profits soar at the top; a phenomenon which predates the 2008 financial crash.

Time and time again it has been proven that workers in unionised workplaces benefit from better pay (£4,000 a year according to latest figures) and better terms and conditions than those not unionised. And with gender inequality on the rise, the role of women in the trade union movement is central to the debate. A forthcoming report from the Institute of Employment Rights (IER) and Centre for Labour and Social Studies (CLASS) highlights the fact that in 2013, the wage gap between men and women increased, highlighting that the progress previously made towards equal pay appears to have gone into reverse.

The history of women in the trade union movement is a rich and varied one, from the Matchworkers' strike in 1888 (which saw women workers at the front line of the industrial revolution), to the sewing machinists striking against being paid 85% of the male rate at Ford in Dagenham (that led to the 1970 Equal Pay Act). Organised women in every sector have a long history of making significant gains and changing the course of history, despite the forces conspiring to keep them at the bottom of society.



Today there are a record number of women in work. However, the best-paid occupations are overwhelmingly dominated by men, and at one in three, almost double the proportion of women than men are in low-paid positions. This occupational segregation sees a gender pay gap where women who work full-time are almost £5,000 worse off per year, and four out of 10 part-time women workers earn less than the living wage.

So what is to be done to remedy the evils of gender pay inequality at work and economic inequality in society? How can we reconstruct our economy in a way that is sustainable and fair? IER believes that putting trade unions at the heart of any economic recovery would be a start. And history shows us just how effective that can be.

Following the depression of the 1930s the governments of the USA and UK rebuilt their economies by putting into place structures and procedures that brought government, employers and trade unions together around the negotiating table. Those negotiations set the terms and conditions of employment for millions of workers across a whole range of sectors. So, whether you were a care worker, teacher, shop assistant, farm worker or docker, your hours, pay, holidays, training and much more were based not on what the employer could get away with but on terms negotiated at national level with the help of trade unions.

If we are to rebuild our economy, reduce the current levels of inequality and end the scourge of bad employment practices like zero hour contracts and bogus self-employment then we must once again embrace the concept of sectoral collective bargaining.

BY CLAUDIA O'BRIAN (COMMUNICATIONS ASSISTANT) AND CAROLYN JONES (DIRECTOR), INSTITUTE OF EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

[HTTP://WWW.IER.ORG.UK/](http://www.ier.org.uk/)
[HTTP://CLASSONLINE.ORG.UK/](http://classonline.org.uk/)



ANITA WRIGHT, NAW SECRETARY, TAKES A LOOK AT THIS YEAR'S TUC CONGRESS

WITH less than nine months to go before the general election it is vital that the trade union and labour movement articulates alternative social and economic policies to counter the disastrous austerity measures being imposed on ordinary people by the Cameron-Clegg government and lay the foundation for a new progressive government. This year's annual gathering of trade unionists at the TUC Congress in Liverpool has an important part to play in this process, particularly as leading members of the Labour Party will be watching and listening to the debates, and as TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady frequently points out, the trade union movement is the largest voluntary organisation in Britain representing over six million people. Despite this the media will inevitably try and demonise trade unionists – except of course the *Morning Star*, the only paper that is firmly on the side of working people and their families and has daily coverage of the Congress.

Seventy-eight motions have been submitted from the 54 affiliated unions covering five areas of debate: Jobs, Growth and a New Economy; Fair Pay and a Living Wage; Good Services and Decent Welfare; Respect and a Voice at Work; and Strong Unions.

They show the full impact on the lives of workers and their families of the totally unnecessary austerity policies perpetuated by the government with child poverty rising; youth unemployment up; mental health problems increasing; more homelessness and real wages worth £1,600 less than in 2010. The motions also point out that the rich are getting richer, noting that Britain is the fourth wealthiest nation in the world with the richest 1,000 people worth over £518 billion – an increase of £70 billion in the last year. In four years Britain has become more unequal, more unjust and more exploitative with wages now only accounting for 54% of GDP compared to 66% in 1975. This is why TUC cam-

defend our NHS

paigns including the fight for fairer pensions, a living wage and "Britain Needs a Pay Rise" all have unanimous support from the unions who will be mobilising for the TUC demonstration on 18 October.

A number of unions including Unite point out that the situation could get worse if the European Union and the United States agree a deal that would result in even greater privatisation of the NHS and other sections of the public sector. Known as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) it gives free reign to transnational corporations to asset strip our public sector, undermine labour standards, pay, conditions and trade union rights and allow them to sue sovereign states if they try to reverse the privatisation process.

In this climate of economic uncertainty we have seen the emergence of new far right parties across Europe. In Britain UKIP has risen from the mire spouting rhetoric that preys on this anxiety whilst disguising their true agenda which would result in the elimination of workplace rights and rampant privatisation of schools and hospitals whilst giving tax breaks to the already rich. Union motions rightly oppose UKIP's politics of hate and call on trade unions to counter voter disillusionment through active campaigning with community organisations like Hope Not Hate and the recruitment of migrant workers into trade unions.

An alternative vision of society is outlined in many of the motions – public services that are built on enduring values of fairness, valuing staff, compassion and social solidarity; education and training that is accessible to all children and young people regardless of parental income; a NHS that is well funded and focussed on the needs of patients; a renationalised and wholly integrated transport system and a fair and accountable justice system. The key to financing these reforms requires a shift of resources and wealth through a progressive tax system and sustained economic growth. Increasing the wage share of GDP is a central element of sustainable economic growth and this can only be achieved if unions can engage in collective bargaining with employers. The demand for free and independent trade unions is therefore paramount in this struggle because stronger trade unions deliver a more just, equal and fair society.

[HTTP://WWW.TUC.ORG.UK/ABOUT-TUC/CONGRESS](http://www.tuc.org.uk/about-tuc/congress)

[HTTP://WWW.MORNINGSTARONLINE.CO.UK/](http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/)



SHARON GRAHAM, UNITE EXECUTIVE OFFICER, EXPLAINS HOW THE GOVERNMENT IS DESTROYING OUR NHS, WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO WOMEN AND WHAT WE CAN DO TO DEFEND OUR NHS

IT is a fact that women and girls – particularly those that are working class and older, are more likely to suffer from serious health problems than their male counterparts. That is why the Government's sinister moves to destroy our NHS should anger all women – we will bear the brunt of the disastrous Cameron and Clegg reforms. We now need to stand up and fight for our NHS before it is too late.

Since 2010, a potentially devastating two-fold attack has been launched against our NHS. First, £20 billion of cuts have led to over 7,000 front line NHS staff being made redundant, chronic understaffing of maternity awards and threats to close local services, including hospitals and GP surgeries. But it is the NHS sell-off, delivered by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 that is threatening the very existence of our universal public health service. All NHS services are now potentially open to competitive tendering and a crack-down on cost is driving privatisation.

Following the introduction of the Act, over 70% of contracts for NHS services have been won by private companies and the first NHS hospital has been privatised at Hinchingsbrooke. With a further £20 billion contract bonanza predicted it is not a surprise that private interests are busy 'lobbying' for political influence. Updated research shows that, six Cabinet Ministers, 17 other Government Ministers, the current Health Secretary and two former Health Secretaries – as well as literally dozens of MPs and Lords – all have financial links to private healthcare.

The influence of private companies does not stop there. Their supporters and former employees sit at the most senior levels of the NHS, including the new Head of NHS England, Simon Stevens, a former Executive Vice President of giant American healthcare corporation United Health.

Private interests are also using their power to influence international trade agreements. American health care corporations, including United Health, want the NHS included in the EU-US trade deal TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) to make it almost impossible for any future Government to roll back privatisation.

If we fail to expose and mobilise, our NHS will be reduced to an American style insurance system within a generation. The sad irony is that the American healthcare system is far worse than the NHS. A recent survey by the Commonwealth Fund ranked American healthcare bottom out of 10 western countries whilst the NHS was placed top. Not only was American healthcare judged to be the worst but also the most expensive.

We know that women are far more likely to live in poverty or be economically disadvantaged than men. American style healthcare would lead to a widening gender as well as class divide on health. Working class women are on the frontline of this emerging crisis but it will affect us all. The Women's Health and Equality Consortium highlighted the facts:

- Women spend more years in poor health and with disability than men
- Recorded rates of depression and anxiety are more than twice as high for women than men
- Women are much more likely than men to suffer arthritis, rheumatism and strokes.

This is why our campaign for the People's NHS is so important for women. Working alongside health professionals and community groups we are standing up for our NHS. From the privatisation of cancer care in Staffordshire to the outsourcing of pathology in Dorset, the People's NHS is exposing the truth behind the Tory agenda. But we can't win unless women everywhere join with us in defence of our NHS.

[HTTP://WWW.PEOPLESNHS.ORG](http://www.peoplesnhs.org)
FOLLOW @PEOPLESNHS ON TWITTER

[HTTP://FAWCETTSOCIETY.ORG.UK/GAP-IN-PAY-BETWEEN-WOMEN-AND-MEN-WIDENS-AFTER-YEARS-OF-SLOW-STEADY-PROGRESS/#STHASH.WDLBJIRE.DPBS](http://fawcettsociety.org.uk/gap-in-pay-between-women-and-men-widens-after-years-of-slow-steady-progress/#STHASH.WDLBJIRE.DPBS)

[HTTP://WWW.WHEC.ORG.UK/WORDPRESS/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/DOWNLOADS/2011/11/WHYWOMENSHEALTH11.PDF](http://www.whec.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/11/whywomenshealth11.pdf)

contact us

by post NAW, Bridge House
Newport Street, Hay on Wye
Powys HR3 5BG

by email sisters@naw.org.uk

by phone 07939 948 404

too old? too expensive?



NAW MEMBER LORENE FABIAN REPORTS ON THE PENSIONERS' PARLIAMENT... CAN WE AFFORD AN AGING POPULATION?

WE seem to be hearing this question more and more. Should we reply WHAT DO WE DO WITH THEM IF WE CAN'T AFFORD THEM? Now there's a debate for you. The word 'workhouse' springs to my mind. There is no doubt that we are living longer but surely this is a good news story.

We are living longer, mainly because the trade union and labour movement fought for structures that benefited workers, the main one being the NHS. However, past governments



have ignored any serious planning needed to provide for the future generations arriving at a pensionable age. If an aging population is seen as a problem because it represents a funding challenge we should find solutions instead of talking about older people as though they were a different species, draining the country of valuable resources. The negative stereotypes of retired people as being somehow the cause of the financial crisis, rather than the neoliberal politics of austerity must be refuted. All generations need to stand together to resist the current attack on any social gains that were made after the Second World War.

Social care, whether in your own home or in a care home, has been completely under-invested. Privatisation of care homes and the outsourcing to private organisations of care workers has had a disastrous effect on older people. We are hearing constantly about the sacking of care home workers following abuse cases but nothing seems to happen to their employers, the care home owners. Community based care workers are often expected to spend less than 15 minutes visiting an older person. This is completely wrong and it's all based around profit.

These and many other issues affecting older people were discussed at the Pensioners' Parliament in Blackpool,

organised by the National Pensioners convention (NPC) which I attended as a delegate.

Concern was expressed at how occupational pensions are being whittled away and the state pension is woefully inadequate. The workshops covered subjects including the privatisation and loss of the NHS; paying for prescriptions; social care for older people; loss of bus passes; wills, probate and powers of attorney and getting more people involved with Parliament and campaigns.

I really do have to praise the work and dedication of the NPC in promoting pensioners' causes but also their engagement with other age groups within our society. Youthful organisations had been invited and were present at this conference including Jay McKenna of the TUC Youth Forum who gave a very progressive contribution. He spoke about bringing youthful and retired generations to a closer understanding. He acknowledged the economic contribution made by the senior generation over their working lives and their continued contribution to society by supporting their developing families and providing help and assistance to their own generation. He considered the current situation of today's youth and the emerging working generation, many of whom were on zero hour contracts, working for poverty wages, knowing they would possibly end up working until they dropped.

In addressing the final session, Dot Gibson, the general secretary of the NPC, endorsed the many contributions made from the floor that unanimously rejected the idea that pensioners were a drain on the country's resources and re-affirmed the demand for a decent basic state pension for all; an NHS and care service free at the point of use and funded through taxation; fuel at affordable prices and a legally binding dignity code to improve the quality and standard of care for older people.

So back to the original question, CAN WE AFFORD AN AGING POPULATION? Those present at the pensioner's parliament think we can and here's a few ideas of how to fund them:

- get rid of trident missiles
- get out of the arms race, and
- let's have a fair taxation system where those who are obscenely wealthy pay more tax.

It frankly is that simple. As pensioners, we need to get angry about low pay, poor conditions and meagre pensions and I would urge you to think about joining your local NPC.

[HTTP://NPCUK.ORG/](http://NPCUK.ORG/)

the **asbestos** fight back

THE FEMALE FACE OF THE GLOBAL ASBESTOS FIGHT BACK

Laurie Kazan-Allen is the Coordinator of the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat

THROUGHOUT the 20th century, thousands of British mothers, daughters, sisters, grandmothers, aunts and nieces died from asbestos-related diseases. Even though the use of asbestos was banned in 1999, hazardous exposures to contamination in the built and natural environment continue. While the majority of those killed by asbestos have been men, there have also been a significant number of women whose lives have been sacrificed to the "Magic Mineral." It is fitting to commemorate the female victims of the deadly asbestos epidemic and to pay tribute to many accidental activists; women who by happenstance found themselves involved in a battle caused by the greed of asbestos industrialists and the impotence of national governments.

In many countries around the world women have risen to the challenge created by the asbestos deaths of their loved ones. Nancy Tait's husband Bill was one of the first people in Britain to be diagnosed with mesothelioma. When his employer denied liability for

his disease, Nancy's asbestos odyssey began. Nancy became a renowned campaigner for the rights of asbestos victims and founded the world's first asbestos victims' group – the Society for the Prevention of Asbestosis and Industrial Diseases – in 1978. Commenting on Nancy's death in February 2009, a long-time friend and supporter wrote:

"What I remember most was her messianic fervour on behalf of asbestos victims and her single-minded pursuit of their cause... To the thousands of asbestos injured people in the UK who needed help she possessed the inestimable quality that the advice she provided was free of cost. Nancy was uncorrupted and incorruptible."

In 1982, Mario Pavesi, an Italian worker at an asbestos-cement factory, was diagnosed with mesothelioma. His wife Romana Blasotti Pavesi supported him during his illness and began a campaign against the asbestos-cement factory in the town of Casale Monferrato. Over the next 30 years, Romana was the inspiration and leader of a grassroots movement which succeeded in getting asbestos banned in Italy and bringing former company directors to court for their role in the Italian asbestos tragedy.

On 11 August 2014, the life's work of

retired Labor Inspector Fernanda Giannasi was recognised at a high-profile ceremony at the Palace of Justice, Brasilia, when she was awarded the country's highest distinction: the Order of Judicial Merit for Labor. This honour comes after decades of battles by this courageous civil servant during which she suffered death threats, lawsuits, political harassment and police intimidation. Ms Giannasi first encountered asbestos during a routine visit to a factory in the industrial town of Osasco, Sao Paulo. Working with employees from the Eternit asbestos-cement factory, she located injured workers; together they went on to form the Brazilian Association of the Asbestos-Exposed, a body which has revolutionised the Brazilian asbestos debate. The fact that Brazil, the world's third biggest producer of asbestos fibre, is now on the verge of banning the production, processing and use of asbestos, owes much to their efforts.

These great ladies paved the way for the global campaign for asbestos justice and a worldwide ban on asbestos which is now proceeding in scores of countries all over the globe. Their work and their dedication remains an inspiration to us all.

[HTTP://WWW.IBASECRETARIAT.ORG](http://www.ibasecretariat.org)

united for better housing

Anita Wright, NAW Secretary, reports on unions supporting the campaign for better, affordable housing

THE current housing crisis is the result of successive UK governments' inability to deliver a strategic housing policy that meets the needs of ordinary families. There are now more than five million people on social housing waiting lists and 1.6 million children living in overcrowded, temporary or badly maintained accommodation. Rents and house prices have gone through the roof whilst the number of property millionaires has increased by 166,000 in one year. The ConDem coalition scrapped all the new build housing plans put in place by Labour and have reneged on the £7.5bn investment which would have meant 112,000 new homes being built.

All the evidence shows that an individual's life chances including their health, education and employment prospects are seriously diminished, if denied a proper home. Since the 1980s every government has attempted to privatise housing, removing the role of local councils in housing provision.

Since the election of the Conservative-led government, the number of affordable housing starts has fallen by 68%. The number of families accepted as statutory homeless has increased by 14% in 12 months and the number of families in bed and breakfast accommodation has risen by 44%. The number of 20 and 30 year olds living at home has grown while many houses in fashionable London postcodes are increasingly used not as somewhere for locals to live, but as a reserve currency for the global super rich.

In 2013 the construction union UCATT and Unison joined forces and committed the TUC to campaign for:

- a huge expansion in the building of council and social housing
- an immediate end to the right to buy and homes that are sold replaced like for like
- the establishment of a comprehensive system of local authority led regulation for the private rented sector, including a statutory register of licensed private landlords
- the introduction of workable rent control measures and reformed tenan-

cy arrangements by local authorities to regulate the cost of private rented sector accommodation and improve security for tenants.

Unite the Union has demanded a national programme of council house building and this year the GMB supported the launch of a Tenant's Manifesto which calls for a "new generation" of council homes to be built. This kind of unity between unions and housing campaigners is vital, particularly in the run up to the general election next year if there is to be a shift in this debate. In the words of Unite's Glynn Robbins:

"The government and opposition are locked into a sterile phony bidding war about who can build more new homes, completely ignoring their shared failures of the past. It's not just about how many, it's about what kind. Simply dumping more homes on an already unbalanced market will only hasten collapse. We need a long-term, national and regional plan – with council housing at its heart – that utilises the millions of acres of surplus public land."



NAW MEMBER RAE STREET EXPLAINS WHY WE SHOULD BE WORKING FOR PEACE

peace and justice

Peace – something which so many across the world yearn for. Let us first establish that we will not establish peace without social justice. Take one example, the Middle East, which, at the time of writing (July 2014) is rent with conflict. At this time there is unimaginable suffering piled on top of years of repression and pain. Every death from military bombardment is to be lamented, but the depth of the suffering for the Palestinians who have lost land, been oppressed by a blockade, seen their children imprisoned, had to have an illegal dividing wall built on their land is totally disproportionate. To achieve peace there needs to be a lifting of the blockades and recognition of a Palestinian state: equal rights and social justice.

resources and power

Our world and innocent civilians suffer from the greed of those states and corporate powers driving for power. Above all the USA, backed by the United Kingdom and other 'western' powers, has built an empire with a chain of military bases (including in the UK) across the world. The purpose of this domination is to secure resource – of fossil fuels, water and rare minerals – for themselves and not to provide security. Militarism brings only insecurity and appalling living conditions especially for women and children. Think of Iraq and Afghanistan now. Security should mean health and welfare.

NATO

NATO – the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation – was formed in the Cold War before the Warsaw Pact. After the fall of the USSR, NATO should have been dissolved. But a new role was

sought pushing western influence further in Europe into central and Eastern Europe. Warnings were given and campaigns set up against NATO expansion but no heed was taken by the US and western powers. Despite objections from China and Russia, NATO expanded right up to Russia's borders. This expansion of the military power of NATO has been partly responsible for the current conflict in the Ukraine. And, yet again, it is innocent women and children who bear the brunt of the hostilities.

NATO is not a force for peace; it has been described as the nuclear military arm of the US Empire. It still claims that nuclear weapons are needed as a deterrent; that they 'preserve peace'. It still retains a policy of 'first use' of nuclear weapons, which the UK follows because of its 'obligations to NATO'. There are two nuclear weapon states in NATO: France and the UK. The Trident nuclear armed submarines are 'integrated' into NATO which means should they be fired even by accident they could annihilate the world. This doesn't lead to stability and security but gives every aspiring state in the world an excuse to develop nuclear arms. NATO is now manoeuvring to make pacts with nation states around the Pacific and the South China seas, in effect, 'global NATO'.

trident

The justification for the Trident project and its replacement by the UK is absurd. The dangers are clear: world instability, accidental firing either within the UK or against a foreign power and last but not least, using a vast amount of money – £3 billion a year to 'maintain' upwards of £100 billion for the replacement. Madness. This in a world where children die from hunger and, here in the UK, families are dependent on food banks.

At the same time military manufacturers make profit. The manufacturers want more and more of our money to develop more and deadlier weapons claiming the arms are needed for 'defence'. No, they are for 'offence'.

do the right thing

How can sisters respond and work for a more peaceful and socially just world? We can support our sister organisations, CND and WILPF; we can speak out; we can write to the local press as we cannot expect these issues to be covered in the majority of mainstream papers and tabloids; support the issues in our trade unions. Above all we can, in the well worn and loved phrase, 'speak truth to power'.

[HTTP://WWW.CNDUK.ORG/](http://www.cnduk.org/)
[HTTP://WWW.WILPFININTERNATIONAL.ORG](http://www.wilpfinternational.org)



NAW EXECUTIVE MEMBER LIZ PAYNE REPORTS ON WOMEN AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In April 2014 the Steering Committee of the Women's International Democratic Federation made a declaration reasserting its commitment to the organised struggles of women around the world for their just rights. This article explores what such a renewed commitment might mean for the NAW in respect of the struggle of our sisters in the Middle East.

As this piece goes to press, there is a bloodbath in the region. Israeli forces have made a terroristic assault on Gaza. Thousands have been killed and injured. Civilians are murdered in 'safe houses' while they sleep. Schools and hospitals have been shelled, medical staff and patients killed. In Syria the civil war continues. Cities, towns and communities have been laid waste and there is no end in sight. The Islamic State, formerly ISIS, controls swathes of Syria and Iraq and has now invaded Lebanon. It terrorises and murders its opposition and minorities are fleeing for their lives. Backed by the US, reactionary regimes across the region suppress every progressive voice. They bankroll the forces of political Islam, unseating governments and stirring up sectarian strife. Hard-won rights and even life itself are threatened everywhere. The clock is turning back.

For women the situation is terrifying and desperate. Their lives and potential have been ruined. According to Michelle Bachelet of the UN "Violence

against women and girls [in the region] remains at almost pandemic levels". Women and children form the majority of refugees and displaced persons. They account for almost 80% of those who have fled Syria since the war began. The region has the lowest level of female participation in the labour market in the world and women have little say anywhere in public life. Long years of campaigning for rights and justice are being undermined as reactionary Islamists impose religious codes on women, destroying their independence, respect and human dignity and opening the door to oppression, gross exploitation and barbarity.

This tragedy, and the decades of misery and conflict that preceded it, are the direct result of the West's determination to control and plunder the region's oil, gas and other rich resources. This means insuring that no democratic government ever comes to power and no progressive movement flourishes. Nothing must stand in the way of the US, Britain and their allies! It means manufacturing division – the relentless promotion of sectarian strife, racial conflict and gender inequality. It means installing, protecting and perpetuating the most reactionary and oppressive regional regimes to do imperialism's bidding. It means ensuring that there is always instability, always room for intervention from outside, always conflict – whatever the human cost.

The imprisoned Iranian journalist, Jila Baniyaghoob recently recorded the words on her cell wall in Evin prison. "God, help me or give me death" a woman inmate had scrawled. Below it another had written "Wait a little, spring is on its way".

The NAW has a distinct and crucial role to play in ensuring that the spring does indeed come. This is to challenge the British government for its role as US ally and supporter of reaction across the Middle East. The NAW will consistently campaign for foreign policy that facilitates genuine long-term solutions and lasting peace in the region, allowing its peoples to build for themselves more equal, just and democratic societies. Our demands must focus on the disastrous impacts of current policy on women and reiterate that there can be no equality and justice while there is war. The NAW will continue to do everything to support the brave struggles of the women's movements of the countries of the region, working in cooperation with sisters in their British-based organisations, and, at the same time, bringing women in Britain in their unions and communities into solidarity with their struggling sisters that reaches beyond charity to true internationalism.



LINDSEY GERMAN, CONVENOR OF STOP THE WAR COALITION, EXPLAINS WHY THE NATO SUMMIT IS A THREAT TO WORLD PEACE

THE barriers are going up across South Wales. Huge steel fences block off buildings, including Cardiff castle. Roads are closed. Children are promised a shorter working day or maybe no school at all. Rail services are disrupted.

All so that a group of politicians and military men can meet in a country hotel outside Newport to plan more of the military intervention that has contributed to a world now more seriously threatened by major wars than at any time since 1945.

Nato might regard this summit as an occasion for reflection on what exactly has gone wrong with its policies. There is plenty to choose from. Afghanistan may be preparing for the exit of most Nato troops this year, but the news that the Taliban has once again taken control of Sangin province (site of the majority of British casualties in the country) hardly looks like success.

It pales into insignificance next to Libya, though. Here two lots of militias are fighting one another. One has taken control of the airport at Tripoli and destroyed it. Meanwhile planes from the UAE, operating from Egyptian bases, have just bombed the Islamic militia. Europeans have, by and large, fled the country, bombed only three years ago in the name of humanitarian intervention.

Those who might expect a word of contrition over these interventions obviously don't realise that Nato doesn't do apologies. Looking back at past disasters only hinders the need to move on to pastures new.

My heart always sinks when I hear the Nato Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, as I did on 26 August on the BBC *Today* programme. Rasmussen seems incapable of opening his mouth without urging more conflict.

He boasted of the extensive military exercises taking place throughout Eastern Europe this summer, as Nato makes a show of strength against Russia. When asked a question about the war in the Ukraine, Rasmussen responded by saying that if any Nato member were attacked it would be defended by Nato as a whole, as agreed in its charter.

Except that Ukraine is not a Nato member, so the terms of Nato membership do not apply. In reality this is all about Nato's conflict with Russia, its historic cold war opponent.

Nato's strategy since the end of the Cold war has been one of enlargement in the former Warsaw Pact areas of Eastern Europe. Its member states now stretch right up to the Russian border; its manoeuvres there are aimed almost exclusively at rehearsing future conflicts with Russia. Nato membership is regarded as *de rigueur* for those who have joined the European Union over the past decade.

The association agreement signed between the EU and Ukraine is rightly seen as a prelude to closer military alliance. Nato talks about stopping a Russian invasion of Ukraine, but says nothing about the Ukrainian government's refusal to accept a ceasefire, despite well over 2,000 dead already, nor of its use of 'volunteer' (read far right) militias who are carrying out a lot of the killing of ethnic Russians in Eastern Ukraine.

Rasmussen went on to say that at the Nato summit in September, the military organisation would take further measures to strengthen its presence in Eastern Europe. He also told the *Financial Times* that additional NATO forces would remain in Eastern Europe "as long as required" adding, "you will see a more visible NATO presence in the east in the future".

The conflict in Syria and Iraq has been much worsened by western intervention, both overt and covert. The same is true in Afghanistan and Libya. We are seeing now just what a terrible price is being paid by the people of the region. Nato is promising us more of the same, this time in the heart of Europe. That's why many thousands are turning out to protest against Nato. It's the humanitarian thing to do.

FOR MORE STOP THE WAR NEWS AND VIEWS [HTTP://WWW.STOPWAR.ORG.UK/](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/)

Sylvia Pankhurst memorial lecture

THE 2014 LECTURE "THE MILITANT SUFFRAGETTE AS A MILITANT ARTIST" WAS GIVEN BY HESTER REEVE, MULTI-DISCIPLINARY ARTIST (PICTURED BELOW LEFT, WITH COLLABORATOR OLIVIA PLENDER). IT WAS FOLLOWED ON SATURDAY 16 AUGUST BY THE SOUTH YORKSHIRE FESTIVAL HELD IN THE GROUNDS OF WORTLEY HALL EVERY YEAR. THE DAY WAS FINE AND THE NAW STALL DID BRISK BUSINESS!



what's on...

The next NAW **Executive Committee** meeting (open to all members) is **Saturday 8 November**

The 2015 **Annual General Meeting** will be held on **Saturday 18 April** at the Unison Centre, London

Contact NAW Secretary Anita Wright on naw@sisters.org.uk or at NAW, Bridge House, Newport Street, Hay on Wye, Powys HR3 5BG

A colour pdf of Sisters can be downloaded from www.sisters.org.uk

The TUC's national demonstration "Britain Needs a Pay Rise" is on **Saturday 18 October**

<http://britainneedsapayrise.org/>

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