



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P SPRING 2014

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strong women, stronger unions



SUE FERNS, PROSPECT'S DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND RESEARCH, TELLS SISTERS ABOUT HERSELF, HER UNION AND THE TUC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

IT'S a great privilege for me to chair the 2014 TUC Women's Conference, not least because I am the first woman from Prospect to have this opportunity.

Prospect is still a male-dominated union, reflecting historical occupational gender segregation, though it is good to see that our younger members are increasingly diverse.

We have 116,000 members, most of whom are professionals and specialists. They are drawn from the civil service and key sectors of the economy,

including energy, telecoms, heritage, defence and agriculture.

Today more of our members work in the private sector than in the public sector, in part a legacy of privatisation programmes by successive governments. Around 50,000 of them work in science, technology, engineering and maths based occupations, including 14,000 or so women.

We are determined to raise awareness of the range of roles undertaken by our female members. One way we have done so is in our 2014 *Prospect Pioneers* calendar, which celebrates the contribution of women in male-dominated industries.

To give you a flavour, among the 12 women featured are Sara Scuffell, an air traffic control officer; Jennifer Clark, a systems engineer at EDF Energy; and Kate Moran, an operational analyst at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory.

We are also campaigning for a minister-led commission to increase the 13 per cent of women currently in STEM careers to 30 per cent by 2020.

I've worked for Prospect for 20 years and in January last year I was appointed as a Prospect deputy general secretary and the union's director of communications and research. It's a fascinating, varied and fast-paced job and I love doing it. I'm also a member of the unionlearn board, a TUC Aid Trustee and chair of Unions 21.

I first joined the TUC Women's Committee in 2005, when I was elected to the General Council, though I attended my first women's conference back in 1983. That was 31 years ago

and in an economic and political environment that was challenging for our movement, with the worst of Thatcherism still to come.

Yet it feels as though many of the challenges we face today are even tougher, with key pillars of our society under constant threat.

I have always been impressed by the quality of debate at the Women's Conference and by the supportive environment it provides, especially for first-time delegates.

I've had the chance to work with inspiring women from many unions and on many important initiatives. I'm particularly proud that the Women's Committee took the lead in documenting the impact of austerity on women's lives.

Other highlights have included raising awareness of domestic violence as a workplace issue and campaigning for affordable childcare for all. The committee has also raised the issue of pregnancy discrimination as well as the discrimination faced by older women through the *Age Immaterial* campaign.

It's no surprise that many of these themes feature in our conference agenda this year, alongside the newer threats to access to justice and the attacks on time and facilities for representatives.

Yet we should, and do, remain confident about our resilience. Our 2014 conference theme, **Strong women, stronger unions**, says it all. Trade union women are an energising force to be reckoned with, and I'm looking forward to chairing this year's debate.

from the editor

Have you seen the latest? Ian Duncan Smith is adding more 'groups' into the 'bedroom tax quagmire', bringing more misery, stress and worry to at least another 60,000 people. The good news that ATOS are no longer involved in the despicable and degrading assessments, which our chronically sick and physically impaired men, women and children are being subjected to, is however being tempered by the fact it is still unclear if they will be cancelled completely, or simply carry on under a different guise. And what about the news that the Tory party is claiming to be the "party of the worker", I didn't know whether to laugh or cry... and lastly will the Tories still keep on about a 'Margaret Thatcher Day' or for once listen to what the British people want? You really couldn't make this up could you!!

999: save our services

NAW EC MEMBER JANETTE FERGUSON LOOKS AGAIN AT THE DAMAGE BEING DONE TO OUR PUBLIC AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

THE Emergency Services in the UK are vital for our survival, we all use them, but most of all we all rely on them. Or can we really rely on them?

When is a crime not a crime? When is a fire or road traffic accident not an emergency? When is a heart attack not life threatening? Maybe it is when our governments start to discuss budgets?

So, what do our governments do about it? An enquiry is set up, which takes a couple of years, then the decision is made that the Emergency Services are not being managed properly. Then they decide in this capitalist society we live in that they should be making a profit, so they employ managers who know nothing about the services they are employed to manage and so it becomes more of a business

and less of an Emergency Service.

We hear of closures, the loss of local services, crimes being reported and no-one attending, some Fire Calls, Fire Alarm calls, and Ambulance calls being downgraded. Shortages of staff, patients left on trolleys in corridors for up to 14 hours, patients in hospitals dying of malnutrition, patients waiting two or three weeks for a GP appointment, and support services being farmed out to the lowest bidder.

Who is responsible? Who is held accountable?

This is when the soft shoe shuffle comes into play, everybody blames everybody else and on and on it goes until we hear the worst possible news, crimes are being decriminalised, fires downgraded and a heart attack is just an inconvenience.

Nurses are run ragged in hospitals because they are so short staffed,

comments on the conference agenda

THE NAW ASKED OUR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER PAM FLYNN TO HAVE A LOOK AT THE PRELIMINARY AGENDA FOR THE 2014 TUC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE AND THE POLICIES OF THE NAW

THE agenda for the 2014 Women's Conference is comprehensive and exciting. It covers areas of great importance to women both in the workplace and the wider agenda including women's health, violence against women and girls, bullying at work, poverty, sexism, pornography, international issues and climate change.

We looked at the preliminary agenda for a match with our own policies. We got no surprises. There is a great deal of fit.

pay policy and equal pay for work of equal value

Unite, FDA and PCS (and others) have resolutions against austerity, condemning our low pay economy, the continued existence of the gender pay gap and demanding a living wage. The recent Women's Assembly Against Austerity is an excellent foundation on which to build and campaign.

anti-poverty and health

Community condemns the cap on in-work benefits including maternity allowance, sick pay, maternity pay and paternity pay. They point out that 3.5 million children live in poverty, two thirds of them in households where at least one person works.

PCS draws attention to the growth in fuel poverty and shows the connections between energy policy, the cre-

ation of green jobs and combating climate change. With many women (for example teachers, care-workers, health workers, emergency services staff) deeply affected by the flooding in the South West and along the Thames Valley, this resolution is especially timely.

USDAW calls for a better deal on women's health, asserting that cuts to health and social care services, the removal of health promotion initiatives together with cuts to social security support have had a disproportionate effect on the physical and mental health of low-income women.

childcare

Several unions including NUT, Unison and PCS, have resolutions on access to universal affordable childcare. Childcare workers, early years' teachers, early years' professionals and nursery staff are a mainly female workforce. Their status is low and there is a myth that the cost of childcare is due to child-adult ratios.

abortion

Unite has a resolution which reminds us that access to comprehensive facilities for abortion is always under threat, with some sections of the media stooping to fiction to try to boost the anti-choice lobby.

violence against women

There is a significant amount of attention to the problem of violence against women. Prospect demand zero tolerance for bullying and sexual harassment in the workplace. Other resolu-



tions examine domestic abuse, closure of specialist rape units due to cuts in police funding, and pornography and its impact on young women's self esteem. RMT has a resolution calling for support for community-based activities to address the criminal practice of female genital mutilation.

other important issues

GMB condemns the Bedroom Tax whilst TSSA asserts that the enforcement of the tax contributes to women leaving safe, secure homes, putting themselves and their families at risk of violence due to increased stress. Teaching unions address sexism and the Musicians' Union highlights the sexualisation of women in entertainment. Other resolutions examine pensions, ageism, lads' mags and sexual stereotyping.

internationalism

The conference draws attention to retrograde developments in Afghanistan and raises issues of concern in Greece and Tamil Nadu. There is a call for from NASUWT for global equality in education for women and girls.

there are less Police Officers on the beat and the Fire Service are employing Fire Officers who have retired, stopping the employment of younger women and men, and still no one is accountable.

Care in the Community was hailed as a success, as the way forward. Care workers and home helps were employed to support people to lead as normal and comfortable a life as possible in their own homes, and although in a lot of cases it is still working, in a high number of cases, again due to budget cuts, this care is being systematically cut down or cancelled completely.

We are being preached at all the time that we are a poor country, (except of course when Governments are forced to admit that we really are a rich country) and the poor of this country are still having to pay off the deficit caused by the bankers, who for

failing so badly still apparently deserve their exceptionally high bonuses. We must act now. We must stop the government, their advisers and the private businesses from profiteering from the failures of disastrous decisions, of contracts made, run over completion dates, with astronomical costs to the British public whilst stealing money from the poor and disadvantaged in our society.

some of the UK government's IT failures:

- Fire Control England (EADS): estimated cost £120m, probable cost up to £500bn by expiry date 2035
- NHS IT System (Accenture): estimated cost £2.3bn in 2002. Still not working five years after it should be. Cost £12bn
- Universal Credit Scheme IT System: Government written off costs of

- £40.1m. Project delayed by two years
- Army Recruitment IT System (Capita): Government written off costs £15.5m, project delayed by two years, further estimated costs of £50m to complete
- Swanwick Air Traffic Control System (Lockhead): £150m cost overruns
- Individual Learning Accounts (Capita): went £500m over budget, then scrapped
- NIRS2 (Accenture): Failures in National Insurance computerisation cost at least £150m in compensation and extra staff time
- Child Support Agency (EDS): system arrived late and £50m over budget. £85m contract cancelled in 2004
- PATHWAY, the Post Office benefits 'Smart Card'. Designed to end fraud by confirming identity, (ICL Fujitsu): abandoned in 1999 with £1bn losses.

Madeleine Sharp

THE National Assembly of Women was saddened to learn of the death of Dr Madeleine Sharp on 7 January aged 93.



Madeleine was a much loved sister and member from the mid-sixties. Her work for peace and defence of poor and oppressed people was evident in everything that she did throughout her life. Her knowledge and experiences which she shared with the NAW taught us a great deal and informed much of our campaigning.

Madeleine is best known for her tireless aid work in Vietnam and was honoured with an MBE for her efforts in 2001.

Her journey into medicine was not straightforward – despite her desire to become a doctor, the family could not afford to send her to medical school until the formation of the NHS enabled her to secure a grant to study at Edinburgh University.

a peace heroine

She had initially begun training as a nurse and enlisted in the Queen Alexandra Royal Army Nursing Corps, serving in India. These experiences led Madeleine into spending the rest of her life campaigning for peace and defending the rights of disadvantaged and poor people. Madeleine joined the movement protesting about the American involvement in the civil struggle in Vietnam. In 1965 she became a supporter of the Medical Aid Committee for Vietnam, bringing together both aspects of her life's work.

The following years saw her involvement increase in the charity Medical and Scientific Aid to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (MSAVLC) and her peace campaigning.

She took on the role of Honorary Secretary of MSAVLC from 1987 to 2009, and also became chair of the City of Coventry Lord Mayor's Peace Committee.

Dr Sharp first visited Vietnam in 1989 and made recurring trips back there until her last visit in 2009.

She was awarded the Coventry Peace Prize in 2004 recognising services to human rights and humanitarian causes in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. She also received the Vietnamese Government's Order of Friendship in 1992 and the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Order of Merit in 2013.

CND AGM

THE CND AGM in October 2013 was addressed by North West TUC Secretary, Lynn Collins, who explained the new policy of the TUC about conversion from nuclear weapons production to socially useful green skills and production. There is now a strong Anti-Trident position amongst unions, supported by Frances O'Grady, with particular support from PCS and the Communications Union. Billy Hayes spelled out the "obscenity" of nuclear weapons and Trident replacement compared to the austerity agenda of the coalition government. He also pointed out that although Britain remains one of the only nine nuclear powers, it is not "independent". United States permission (and targeting equipment) is needed before we could use any of "our" weapons.

CND members were encouraged by young speakers to use the existing mechanisms of TUCND and Labour CND to raise opposition to the continued ownership and movement of such dangerous weapons with all our MPs and through union branches. We need to be creative about alternative jobs and skills. (Paul Dunn and Ron Smith from Birkbeck and Imperial Colleges have produced an excellent report on alternatives). But we need to communicate using the new media and take account of young people's over-burdened lives. They said we need to tell young people about Hiroshima. But that they were desensitised by an overdose of apocalyptic news! So a persuasive argument has to show how their student debt could be cancelled for 50 years if we save the £100 million promised for Trident renewal.

Scottish CND pointed out that the presence of Trident submarines on the Clyde is a major part of the independence issue. (*Trident: Nowhere to go*, John Ainslie, March 2013). But the



impact of nuclear weapons is felt as far away as South Korea. We were addressed by Kan Jong, a Peace activist from Je Ju Island, where the US is proposing to install a major nuclear naval base on the Island of World Peace – 200 miles off the coast of China. For this purpose they want to evict local people from a fishing village and destroy a UNESCO Biosphere reserve – a world environmental centre. Their fight continues, but we don't hear about it.

Women have to get our arguments together NOW.

LYDIA MERYLL REPORTS ON THE CND AGM

diary dates

NAW Executive Committee meeting:
Saturday 5 April, London
All members are welcome to attend, but please let Anita Wright know
NAW Annual General Meeting 2014:
Saturday 10 May 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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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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