

NAW PRESIDENT DONA FELTHAM
(RIGHT) WITH TATIANA
DESYATOVA FROM THE ALL
RUSSIAN WOMEN'S UNION



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P SUMMER 2014

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national assembly of women

THIS year's NAW AGM was held in May at Wortley Hall, Wortley, near Sheffield.

Our President Dona Feltham welcomed everyone (some 'new' faces and some 'old' faces who had been before) to the AGM and we all introduced ourselves (which always helps a bit with who is who).

The business side of the AGM has to be dealt with first, Apologies, last year's Minutes, electing Tellers and discussing the Annual Report.

Treasurer's Report Eleanor Lewington explained the report which had already been circulated to members, and answered any questions.

Sisters Report Janette Ferguson thanked all who had contributed to *Sisters* with articles, reports and stories which were all greatly appreciated, and also reminded members to keep sending, anything that would



help or benefit or interest our members and readers.

Website Report Barbara Switzer gave an update on the website, where we are with it at present and also where we are going in the future. The website is updated on a regular basis, to help keep our members informed.

Facebook Report Pam Flynn gave an update, reminding everyone to not only to read items on it but to 'like' and 'share' everything, and encourage friends to do the same so that more people see it. The Facebook page is also updated on a regular basis.

This was followed by a lively discussion about all of the above. 'Twitter' and 'Skype' were discussed, but it was pointed out there would be a subscription charge for this. Some concerns were raised about both, mainly privacy and security. Several members reminded us that there are still a lot of people in our society who by their own choice, or by circumstance do not own a computer or have access to one either. So, letters, telephone calls or direct conversation are still very important. The NAW EC is also keen to look at the way we communicate and are interested in all members' ideas.

Dona told us that she attended a Steering Committee in Russia recently as part of our affiliation with the WIDF (Women's International Democratic Federation). Unfortunately the President of the WIDF Marcia Campos, was unable to attend due to ill health, but she sent in a letter detailing both the ethos of, and also work carried out by the WIDF since their last meeting which Dona read out to AGM and from the work done in Russia we now have a declaration from WIDF which was agreed at that meeting. More information is on page 7. Enquiry was made about who makes decision about who attends such events.

women against pit closures

Betty Cooke (Women Against Pit Closures) was our first speaker, she told us about this, the 30th anniversary year of the fight against pit closures,



and how she herself, and many others changed from full-time employment, to part-time employment, to enable them to take a fuller part in the campaign. She told us that pit closures don't only happen in the UK, but in other parts of the world too, and about the Reunion Conference arranged in America and how she "spent her son's inheritance so that she could go" and why it was worth it. She has also been invited to speak in Cork, this year.

She said, "The Thatcher legacy is still with us", women have to work two part-time jobs even when their husbands are working full-time. Children are applying for job vacancies and not even getting a confirmation. Adults with any kind of special needs, lose their jobs with no hope of getting another one". She told us that "the FBU regularly phone the women for support when they have a picket in a local area and that theirs is a close knit community, who all work together". Betty told us "that if women had been given the choice they would not have ended the strike they would have con-

tinued it. Betty has also been invited to speak in local colleges, to make sure the students are told what really happened, and has also attended college as a student where she gained a degree herself.

Memorial Gardens have been built, with the names of all miners killed in mines. The fight is still ongoing, pits are still being closed, health and safety at work, which has been relaxed, must be re-instated, Betty is also not to be impressed with UK Coal's record, since her own son was injured at work.

Betty assures us that the Women Against Pit Closures will fight on, she says "there is still a lot of work to be done".

women's votes women's voices

Ann Henderson (Assistant Secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress) was our second speaker. Ann told us



that the STUC Women's Committee theme this year has been "Women's Votes - Women's Voices", and that women have to decide the issues, how to tackle them and prioritise. The Women's Fight Against Austerity has had meetings all over the country, and the importance of unity has never been more vital.

She also talked about the Referendum later in the year, when Scotland will decide what they want the future to hold for them and also about the underestimations, by a lot of people, of how it will seriously affect the rest of Britain.

Although the STUC have been involved in different areas of discus-

the 2014 annual general meeting

sion, they do not hold a specific bias on what the outcome should be, but will stand ready to continue their work for the Scottish people, no matter what the outcome is.

motions

Motion No 1 **Building the National Assembly of Women**, was passed unanimously (all texts are on the website).

Motion No 2 **Nuclear Power Stations** NAW members re-asserted their opposition to nuclear power and condemned the government for agreeing plans for upwards of eight new power stations to be built on the coast along with a subsidy £20 billion. CND activist Rae Street said "We need to learn the lessons of the Fukushima disaster. Sea levels are rising as a result of global warming and this poses a major threat to nuclear reactors on the coast. It was carried unanimously.

Wright (Secretary) and Eleanor Lewington (Treasurer) were all elected unopposed.

The Executive Committee elected comprises Megan Dobney, Pam Flynn, Rose Keeping, Liz Payne, Jo Stevenson, Yvonne Washbourne, and Barbara White.

and finally...

Dona then gave thanks to Ann Munsey on the sale of her knitwear which raised £130, split equally between the NAW and the *Morning Star*.

She also reminded us that the 2014 Sylvia Pankhurst Lecture, which is sponsored by the NAW and Wortley Hall, will be held on Friday 15 August in the Hall.

The lecture will be given by Hester Reeve and is titled *The Militant Suffragette as a Militant Artist*. More information on the campaign website

emergency motion

NAW members added their voices to those calling for the release of the 200 plus schoolgirls who have been abducted by Boko Haram in Nigeria. Anita Wright reminded delegates that reactionary forces throughout the world are trying to turn back the clock on the human rights of women and girl children, and that it is vital that the work with our sisters here in Britain and in the Women's International Democratic Federation to make sure that this happens. The delegates also agreed that we should send a letter to the Nigerian High Commission in London (below).

Your Excellency Dr Dalhatu Sarki Tafida

The National Assembly of Women is horrified by the kidnapping of an estimated 276 school girls in Nigeria and condemns Boko Haram for carrying out this atrocious act.

The scale of this abduction at the Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State, has sent a shock wave around the world because it is a sharp reminder that reactionary forces have such a deep hatred of women that they are prepared to engage in such barbaric acts of slavery and forced child marriage.

We applaud the courage and strong support shown by Nigerian women and their families who are putting pressure on the Nigerian government to search for and rescue the girls and welcome the intervention by former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, UN Ambassador for Education and the international community to provide support to the Nigerian government.

We call on you as the Nigerian High Commissioner in the UK to demand that the Nigerian authorities do everything in their power to secure the girls' release.

As a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All-forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) we call on the Nigerian government to do everything possible to promote the human rights of the girl child and equality for women in political and public life – so that girls and women can pursue their education free from fear.



Motion No 3 **Women and the Fight Against Austerity** NAW members re-affirmed their commitment to fight the austerity policies being imposed by the ConDem government and to mobilise opposition by organising another Women's Assembly Against Austerity in 2015. Passed unanimously.

Emergency Motion **Kidnapping in Nigeria** see boxed report right.

elections

The tellers Barbara Switzer and Margaret Boyle announced result of elections.

Dona Feltham (President), Anita

<http://sylviapankhurst.gn.apc.org/>

We noted that this will be followed on Saturday 16 August by the South Yorkshire Festival held at Wortley Hall.

Thanked everyone for coming and wished those going home a safe journey, and reminded those staying overnight that dinner was at 7.30pm.

BY JANETTE FERGUSON SISTERS EDITOR



Three months on from chairing the TUC Women's Conference, my lasting memories are of three packed days of good humoured, open and honest debate

– in short, sisterhood in action. However, the conference was also tinged with sadness by the news of the deaths of both Bob Crow and Tony Benn during this period.

We got off to a great start with a panel debate, ably facilitated by UCU's Vicky Knight, with contributions from Frances O'Grady, Gloria de Piero MP, Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities, and Alison Garnham from the Child Poverty Action Group. Delegates asked searching questions and shared their own stories, creating a powerful political narrative.

As always, the conference addressed a range of important issues including the varied and disproportionate impact of austerity on women; health inequalities, including pregnancy discrimination; Employment Tribunal fees and the effects of reduced facility time for equality reps; gender stereotyping; discrimination against older women in the labour market.

Delegates spoke movingly, and sometimes from personal experience, in debates on abortion rights, domestic violence, sexual harassment and bullying, and female genital mutilation. As one new delegate from my own union commented, the Women's Conference provides a uniquely supportive environment for sharing these experiences.

The conference voted for a composite motion on lack of affordable childcare to be debated at Congress in September. This will reinforce campaigning work for universal free childcare for all, including people working unsocial hours and shifts, and for decent terms and conditions for childcare workers in schools and nurseries.

There is always a strong international dimension to the conference, and this year's highlight was an emotive contribution from Irmita Salanueva, daughter of Rene Gonzalez – the first of the Cuban Five to be released. The proceeds of a raffle, held during the previous evening's social event at Unison's headquarters, were donated to the continuing campaign for justice for the Cuban Five.

Proving that men can be inspiring too, TUC President Mohammad Taj told conference about his own journey into trade union activism based on a

WOMEN'S lives in Britain were transformed by the two world wars. In 1914 the two largest areas of employment for women were domestic service and textiles. That changed after 1914, as women went into jobs previously barred to them, from bank clerks to bus conductors, from agricultural labourers to nurses at the front. Whilst they rarely achieved equal pay, they often earned considerably more than they had been able to command in their previous work.

Work led to greater independence for young women in particular. This meant changes to their social and sexual attitudes, to fashion (it was during the war that some women workers began to wear trousers) and to women's role. Women became members of trade unions in much larger numbers. In 1918 there were over one million women trade unionists compared with 358,000 in 1914. In 1918 we saw perhaps the first equal pay strike, on the London buses.

The horror of war was concentrated at the front, but there was much suffering at home too. London saw air raids, and the tube stations were first used then as shelters. Women munitions workers were often in danger, having to change into their overalls next to piles of gunpowder, and so having to avoid wearing metal buttons or hairclips, but not always avoiding explosions.

There were food shortages and rationing was introduced later in the war. In other combatant countries such as Russia and Germany these shortages were much worse. Food was expensive. Profiteering was also rife among landlords. This came to a head in Glasgow in 1915, when landlords raised rents because of housing shortages, as engineering and munitions workers flocked into the city. Women were particularly hard hit if their husbands were at the front, since their incomes were so low.

determination to fight corrupt workplace practices. He also highlighted the importance of building strength through diversity and inclusion.

Three fantastic sisters retired from the committee at the end of the conference: Pat Stuart, the Chair of the TUC Women's Committee; Lesley Mercer, last year's TUC President; and Max Hyde, current President of the NUT.

All three have demonstrated chairing skills that I hope I lived up to. It was a great privilege to have chaired the conference and an experience that I will never forget.

SUE FERNS, FROM PROSPECT, REFLECTS ON WHAT BEING CHAIR OF THE 2014 TUC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE MEANT TO HER...



M a r y Barbour organised a rent strike on the Clyde, which was eventually won and forced controls of rents. She was one of many socialist

women who campaigned around issues particularly affecting women. Perhaps the most famous was Sylvia Pankhurst, the former suffragette who organised in east London to provide nurseries, hot food and clinics for some of the poorest women.

The suffrage movement was split by the war, with Sylvia's mother Emmeline and sister Christabel being enthusiasts for the slaughter, while Sylvia and her comrades continued to organise around socialist demands in London's east end. The socialist movement also split, although there was always political opposition to the war, often from women in the Independent Labour Party or other left parties.

The enthusiasm for war which initially gripped much of the working class soon dissipated as the reality of the bloody conflict became clear. Protests and disaffection grew, and when Russian women helped lead the February Revolution which overthrew the Tsar (on International Women's day in the Russian calendar, when they protested over food shortages) they lit a flame which spread quickly to other countries involved in the war. While Britain didn't have a revolution, it did have a huge wave of strikes and soldiers' mutinies in 1919. And of course women won the vote (although it would be another 10 years before they got it on the same basis as men).

The commemoration of the First World War will be one of national unity and glorious sacrifice. We should remember the suffering of the men and women during that war, and the organising of opposition which helped to bring it to an end. As our government demands more money for more wars, most recently with NATO expansion and threats to the Ukraine, we should remember who suffers in wars, and do everything to oppose them.

In September NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, will hold a summit in south Wales. There will be a demonstration there on 30 August and the message will be clear: no new NATO wars, no NATO expansion.

BY LINDSEY GERMAN
LINDSEY IS CONVENOR OF THE STOP THE WAR COALITION. HER MOST RECENT BOOK IS HOW A CENTURY OF WAR CHANGED THE LIVES OF WOMEN (PLUTO 2013)

keep our **NHS** public!

BRONWEN HANDYSIDE EXPLAINS HOW PRIVATE COMPANIES HAVE THEIR GREEDY FINGERS IN OUR PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE – AND HOW ONLY BY WORKING TOGETHER CAN WE DRIVE THEM OFF

BRONWEN IS VICE-CHAIR OF UNITE LONDON AND EASTERN REGION AND A MEMBER OF KEEP OUR NHS PUBLIC

“THE NHS has provided what no other country in the world has achieved at the same cost – universal healthcare in the form of equal access to comprehensive care, irrespective of personal income.” So wrote Allyson Pollock and David Price in *A Duty to Care*. How have we arrived at the point where the NHS, the most beloved and successful institution in Britain, is on the way to becoming a US-style privatised and insurance-based service in the next few years?

It's the result of more than two decades of lobbying and active interventions by private healthcare companies. It is a process in which the vast majority of the mass media has colluded. It arises out of a degenerate political system led by an array of corrupt politicians – from all the major parties – who have voted in Parliament for 25 years for the marketisation and privatisation of healthcare services.

Their reward has come through profitable personal investments and lucrative jobs in the private healthcare companies once their political careers are over. Did you know that 220 of the parliamentarians of all parties who voted on Andrew Lansley's Health and Social Care Act had interests in private healthcare? The very parliamentary system itself is corrupt, since after an MP has declared his or her interests there is nothing to stop them voting for their own personal profit.

Twenty-five years ago, the private health firms knew it would be impossible for any government to simply privatise the National Health Service, in the way other services have been privatised. They launched a long-term campaign to manoeuvre the health service into a state in which it could be privatised – constantly pumping out propaganda through their friends in the media that the perfectly viable and functional NHS was in need of “reform”. The campaign started with the purchaser-provider split under arch-privatiser Margaret Thatcher in 1990. This artificial division between those supplying services and those commissioning them within the NHS first introduced the market into the health service.

The Labour government from 1997 followed through with a raft of backdoor privatisations – the likes of independent-sector treatment centres, financially crippling private finance initiative deals, hospital foundation trusts on the model of private businesses

and the ‘any willing provider’ policy which the coalition government incorporated into the Health and Social Care Act. Following the outcry over the imposition of the Act the phrase was re-spun to ‘any qualified provider’.

The Act, which pretty much completed the 25-year dismantling of the NHS, was provided to politicians by US private consultancy firm McKinsey and subjects a defenceless NHS to the mercy of the privatisation vultures. The Act puts national and regional specialist commissioning into the hands of corporate consultancies like KPMG and McKinsey itself. It puts local commissioning in the hands of GPs, which increasingly means corporate consultancies which ‘advise’ on legal and technical procurement issues and manage the tenders. One in three GPs sitting on Clinical Commissioning Groups has financial interests in private healthcare companies. McKinsey partners and other McKinsey staff regularly take senior jobs inside the British government. Former senior partner David Bennett became chief of policy and strategy for Tony Blair from 2005 to 2007 and is now chairman and chief executive of Monitor, which regulates the new healthcare market and plays a crucial role in offering NHS business to private companies.

McKinsey uses its inside knowledge of the Health and Social Care Act to advise private companies on how to break into the healthcare market.

Meanwhile the mass media and politicians take every opportunity to attack the NHS. Not only do they ignore the catastrophic faults and failures of private companies, they award them even more government contracts. The aim is to break the British public from its allegiance to the NHS and convince people that private is better. Behind the plotting and rapacity of these private companies lies the insatiable drive to recapture for their shareholders the massive \$5 trillion-plus global healthcare budget, which after the second world war and the upsurge of a workers’ movement which was on the offensive was ‘lost’ to the public sector in countries such as Britain.

From April to December 2013 £5 billion of NHS contracts were put out to tender. Fully 70 per cent went to private-sector organisations, diverting NHS money into vast private profits. Now the politicians are pushing through EU and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreements which will enforce open market competition in all NHS services and allow corporations to mount legal challenges to national governments if public services are not tendered.

At the same time a Mori poll shows it is the NHS that makes the public

“most proud to be British”. Two-thirds are in favour of increased spending on the health service. People are prepared to fight and are fighting for our NHS. All of us must focus the willing and the campaigning initiatives to provide maximum unity and strength. There are many ways to resist.

On 21 June, come together on the NHS bloc for the People's Assembly march against austerity – go to www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk or email hackney.csnhs@gmail.com for details. When you get to the march, ask a steward where the NHS bloc is assembling or look for the long blue banner saying Fight For Our NHS and the big Keep Our NHS Public balloon. Join and support the 999 Call for the NHS march which starts from Jarrow on 16 August and will arrive in London on 6 September. It's organised by mothers angry about the destruction of the NHS.

If you're not in a trade union, why not join Unite as a community member and participate with our 1.3 million members in a campaign for the NHS – see www.unitetheunion.org/growing-our-union/communitymembership. Join umbrella NHS campaigning group Keep Our NHS Public and start campaigning – visit www.keepournhspublic.org. No Keep Our NHS Public group in your area? Set one up! Keep Our NHS Public can supply all the information you need to do this. Hold hustings in your local area in the run-up to the general election – make sure would-be MPs pledge to overturn the Health and Social Care Act and will oppose local privatisation and cuts. Ask your local MP to campaign for the repeal of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and to reject the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Ask your MEP to campaign against TTIP and explain why. Write to the media. Demand they provide more – unbiased – reports on what is happening in the NHS, especially on privatisation. Report cuts in local NHS services to your MP and to the NHS Support Federation at www.nhscampaign.org or at 113 Queens Road, Brighton BN1 3XG. Raise specific concerns at public NHS meetings – get details from your GP practice. Join the Patient Participation Group (PPG) at your GP practice and ask it to set up meetings to explain how local patient services are being affected by cuts and privatisation. If there is no PPG, ask the practice to set one up. They're all supposed to have one. Ask for your GP to mark your notes with No Private Providers. Contact your local branch of Healthwatch (www.healthwatch.co.uk) and your local NHS foundation trust to find out what is happening to services and how to get elected to the committee or board.

with the WIDF in Russia

NAW PRESIDENT DONA FELTHAM ATTENDED THE WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION'S (WIDF) STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD IN MOSCOW IN APRIL. SHE TELLS US HERE A BIT ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES SHE HAD AND STARTED BY SAYING A BIG THANKYOU TO OUR SISTERS FROM THE ALL RUSSIAN WOMEN'S UNION, IN PARTICULAR TATIANA DESYATOVA, FOR ALL THEIR HARD WORK IN ORGANISING A FULL AND VARIED PROGRAMME FOR INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

DUE to delays with the renewal of my passport which resulted in a delay in securing my Visa to enter Russia until 5pm on the Friday night it was very much touch and go if I would be able to make the trip, but with bags packed, Passport and Visa in hand, I arrived in Moscow in the early hours of Monday morning.

monday

A Monday morning which saw the start of the two day WIDF steering committee meeting with the morning programmed for the European Regional meeting with representatives from Cyprus, Portugal, Russia, Greece, Israel, and Italy (some reports are available on our website). Monday afternoon we were joined by our Sisters from Brazil, Cuba, Venezuela, Columbia, Mexico, Ecuador, Lebanon, Palestine, Bahrain, Jordan, Angola, Mozambique, Vietnam, Sahara and North Korea.

tuesday

Tuesday we continued with the WIDF steering committee working late into the night to prepare and agree the Declaration printed on this page and continuing on to page 7.

wednesday

Wednesday we met in the lobby of the hotel at 9am to take a 45 minute coach trip to the centre of Moscow. The first stop was to lay flowers at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, from there we went to Lenin's Mausoleum. Then we went behind the Kremlin Wall to pay tribute to the statues of other heroines and heroes of Russia. From there we entered Red Square where preparations were being made for the following day's May Day Celebrations. Unfortunately as we had to leave our belongings on the coach for security reasons I was unable to get any pictures, although some official photographs will be available on the WIDF and NAW web sites. A coach trip back to the hotel for a quick bit of lunch then the commencement of the International Conference hosted by the All Russian Women's Union titled "Women of the Whole World in Struggle Against Imperialist Aggression, Neoliberalism and Oppression for Justice Socialism and Peace". The

conference was attended by Women from all over Russia including some women who had been in attendance at the World Congress of Women in Moscow in 1987. The theme was "Towards the year 2000, Without Nuclear Weapons for Peace, Equality, and Development". Our conference was opened by Ivan Meinkov General Secretary of the Communist Party of Russia. Only three Russian Women spoke, the rest of the conference was opened to the WIDF sisters to give a picture of the current political impact of policies affecting Women in their countries. The conference finished at approx. 7pm then it was time for a quick wash and brush up then into dinner and a cultural evening. We were entertained by what was described as a group of amateur folk singers. I am no expert in the field of folk singing but they sounded pretty professional to me.

thursday

Thursday, May Day, we gathered in reception, each delegation with their colourful flags and banners and walking shoes on ready to join the comrades of the Communist Party of Russia in their May Day Rally. Our Greek Sisters as European Regional Co-ordinators had brought along a WIDF Regional Banner which they had printed in Russian. What's the problem with this you might think? Well when the banner is 4' 6" high, for someone like me who is only 5' 2" in flat shoes it makes for a great trip hazard. If you see any photos of the Rally I am there honest, the only thing visible is the top of my head or my eyes just popping over the top. On our arrival at the starting point of the march we were taken to the front and were spread out across the road with our banners held high and chanting in full swing. The Women's International Democratic Federation led the 2014 Communist Party of Russia May Day March. After our march through the streets of Moscow and walking up towards Red Square we veered off to an area outside of Red Square to listen to speeches from CP officials and watch entertainment from Children and Youths "the future of Russia". After a couple of hours we returned to the coach to eat our packed lunch, then we went on a whistle stop tour of the sites of Moscow. After our return to the hotel and an early dinner we once again gathered in the lobby and were taken to the Concert Hall (attached to the side of the Hotel) where we were the guests of Honour at a Public May Day Concert. The Concert started off with a 20 minute film paying tribute to Revolutionary Women from around the world we were then treated to an array of music from Opera to Pop and

some ballet dancers and children's choirs. (Hopefully I can get a copy of the film from Tatiana that we can put on our web site). After the concert we gathered in a room for a final drink and to say our goodbyes as some of our Sisters had flights leaving in the early hours of the next morning.

My time in Russia was not only a wonderful experience, but also a great honour and an opportunity to join with the women of the world in unity and peace, I am so glad I did not give up

conference declaration

WIDF STEERING COMMITTEE MOSCOW FINAL DECLARATION

We, the delegates of 20 countries from all continents, members of the WIDF Steering Committee, met in Moscow, on 27 April to 2 May 2014, in an effort to reassert our commitment to the organised struggles of women around the world in order to demand all the contemporary rights which they deserve and the exploitative system deprive them, we declare:

Nowadays, new technologies and science have elevated labour productivity and all women should have a stable and permanent job with a salary which should cover today's needs, with labour and insurance rights, with free public health, education and welfare services and protection of motherhood.

Instead, women all over the world are victims of poverty, violence, trafficking, unemployment, flexible, part-time and unsecured work conditions, reductions of salary and pensions, privatisation of education, health and welfare system.

The overthrows in the work and social insurance achievements targets to make cheaper workers for the employers thus increasing the profits and the competitiveness of the capital. The capitalist crisis increases this trend for all the working class people and especially the women. Those barbarous anti-labour and anti-popular measures are implemented by either neoliberal or social democratic governments.

The multifaceted discrimination and violence against women is linked with the aggressiveness of the exploitative system and is in the front line of our struggles.

The multinational companies and the policy which supports them destroy the environment and the

foodbank Britain

WE ASKED NAW MEMBER JANET OOSTHUYSEN TO TELL US ABOUT THE **FOODBANK SHE HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN SETTING UP WITH A GROUP OF LOCAL PEOPLE TO MEET THE NEED IN THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY**

ONE of the most obvious signs that we are not all in this together is the prevalence of food banks in almost every town in the country. This is a very personal account of our food bank in West Yorkshire to counter some of the myths surrounding them, and to give facts to those who want to refute them.

The biggest two groups that visit us are young men and older people. Both groups make a regular choice between eating and electricity and we are often asked for food that doesn't require cooking to save on money. Numbers visiting our foodbank go up too in the colder weather, when the choice is much more stark, warmth or food. Senior Citizens are less able to deal with either but young men, clearly at the bottom of the pile in every circumstance, are also a concern.

This is not to say that we don't have other groups using us too: we have many families, single parents, couples and single people of all ages. No one is immune. Some stay for a chat, especially the older people whose care hours have been cut to the bone and

whose carers now have to do all their jobs on the run, some come in and out as quickly as possible so no one sees them. We know we do not meet all those in need, some people just cannot bring themselves to visit.

We are amongst the few food banks who don't ask for referrals or for evidence of poverty. Most food banks do ask, but from the beginning we decided that asking for food was enough evidence of need, as people find it demeaning enough without being interrogated. It must be said too, that the food we give out is not food you would tell lies to get. Value beans, cut price macaroni cheese, flavoured noodles, not a great resale value on any of them. The very few that might take it without definite need have problems of a different sort. (If there was evidence of reselling, those people would be asked to leave. This hasn't happened yet.)

We have an average of about 100 people turning up every week, new ones all the time. That represents at least double the number of people served by the food bank, as many come for their families too. It makes my blood boil when I pack up nappies, or baby food, or tampons with the cheap as chips food. It is in the most basic sense just not right.

Don't believe either that it's only

those on benefits who visit us, many are in employment, or working two jobs and still can't make ends meet. As socialists, we know about the interconnectedness of things. This is not just fuel and food poverty, it's about zero hours contracts, it's about the lack of a working wage, it's about the bedroom tax, it's about cuts to welfare, it's about immigration as the divide and rule policies of this government mean that people are more fearful than ever about the little that they have rather than looking towards the real culprits. It's about the cuts to community care of all sorts that has left the most vulnerable at further risk.

The most popular food we give out is tins of beans, spaghetti, and rice pudding. Why? Because they are filling, they can be eaten cold, and there's no need to keep them refrigerated. That's the society we live in. 85 year olds queue up to get food which they can eat cold because they can't afford their cooking bills.

We had our first anniversary last Saturday. None of us wanted to celebrate, but we marked the occasion. If there is such need, it is good we are there to help. But we would rather not be there at all. In an equitable society we wouldn't be.

future of our children in order to increase their profits.

The difficulties that capitalism faces in order to overcome its crisis aggravate inter-imperialist contradictions and strengthen the aggressiveness of imperialism. The struggle among imperialist centres is focused both on the control of resources (natural gas, oil, water etc.) and the paths and sea routes of goods transport. The danger for more generalised regional conflicts or even a generalised imperialist war is increased.

We, the progressive women of the world voice our deep concern for the wars and invasions adopted by USA, EU, NATO and their allies. They do not hesitate to promote and bring in power fascist forces, as in Ukraine, in order to serve their interests. Historic experience shows that fascism is being used as the weapon of the system against the class and the fighting popular movement.

We, the women of the world, express our continuous, firm solidarity with the people and women of Cuba, Venezuela, Latin America and Caribbean. We support the popular struggles for progressive change within this continent, and especially to Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Chile,

Nicaragua, and Brazil. We continue our struggles for the liberation of the five Cuban Patriots and we take relative initiatives all around the world.

We continue to defend uncompromisingly the struggle of Palestinian people against the Israeli occupation and demand the vindication of the struggle of Palestinians for an independent and sovereignty Palestinian state with the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and the implementation of all relevant UN resolutions. We demand the release of the Palestinians prisoners from Israeli jails.

We condemn the imperialist threats against the Syrian people by the US, Israel, NATO, Turkey and their allies.

We express our solidarity with the Syrian people who should be left to decide themselves only for their present and their future. We express our solidarity with the people of Lebanon suffering from a constant aggression by Israel. We condemn all interventions in its internal affairs.

We condemn the Turkish invasion and occupation in Cyprus and we demand the just solution of this issue for termination of occupation, demilitarisation of the island and the reunification of the country. For Cyprus a Bizonal/Bicommunal Federation with single sovereignty, a single citizenship and

a single international personality with political equality of the two communities as defined in the UN resolutions.

We will remain by the side of the peoples of Europe who resist the threats of EU and struggle for the disengagement from this imperialist mechanism and its ally NATO.

We stand in solidarity with the people of Western Sahara who live under the Moroccan occupation since 1975 and we reaffirm our support in their struggle for sovereignty.

We support the right of DPRK to defend the sovereignty and dignity of their people from the constant war threats by US and to reunify the country independently by the Korean nation itself.

We are in solidarity with the African women in their struggles to face poverty, diseases, illiteracy and imperialist invasions for the exploitation of their recourses.

We reaffirmed our decision to call the women of the working class and the popular strata to reject fatalism and compromise, call them to up rise and get organised, trust their power and join WIDF movement targeting to open the path for a society without exploitation which is the only one that can guarantee the women's equality and emancipation.

the women **chainmakers**



THIS YEAR WAS THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WOMEN CHAINMAKERS' FESTIVAL IN THE BLACK COUNTRY. JOANNE STEVENSON REPORTS

MIDLAND'S trade unionists marched through the working class town of Cradley Heath on Saturday 7 June with banners flying to mark the bravery of Black Country women more than a century ago.

The TUC's 10th Chainmakers' Festival held in Bearmore Park, West Midlands, was a fantastic family day out despite the constant rain. There were a wide range of stalls: PCS, Unite, NUT, a variety of trades councils, and other labour movement organisations as well as craft stalls including one with cupcake bath bombs that looked good enough to eat and a tombola where you won a teddy every time!

TUC Assistant General Secretary, Kay Carberry spoke at the festival which also featured a family tent, music and entertainment including a play by Open Door Theatre Company who performed the comedy "Robby Nudd" loosely based on a story of green-clad folk in a Midlands wood.

The exhibition in the main marquee depicted the struggle of the 800 local women chainmakers who, in 1910, went on all-out strike for 10 weeks until they finally won the battle for equal pay and better working conditions.

[HTTP://WOMENCHAINMAKERSFESTIVAL.BLOGSPOT.CO.UK/](http://WOMENCHAINMAKERSFESTIVAL.BLOGSPOT.CO.UK/)

what's on...

The next NAW Executive Committee meeting (open to all members) will be in London at 11am on **Saturday 5 July**. Contact NAW Secretary Anita Wright on naw@sisters.org.uk or at NAW, Bridge House, Newport Street, Hay on Wye, Powys HR3 5BG.



ABOVE: THE NAW STALL AND DISPLAY AT THE TUC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE IN MARCH WITH BARBARA SWITZER AND ANITA WRIGHT IN CHARGE OF PROCEEDINGS

THE FULL AGENDA IS AVAILABLE ON THE TUC'S WEBSITE HERE
WWW.TUC.ORG.UK/EQUALITY-ISSUES/GENDER-EQUALITY/TUC-WOMENS-CONFERENCE

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)

Name _____

Address _____

postcode _____

Organisation _____

phone _____

email _____

Send to: NAW, 1 Lee Close, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 0DW