



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P WINTER 2014

STRESS IS

2 STUC solidarity

4 pay and pensions

6 10 myths about austerity

7 TTIP and the NHS

8 peace and poppies

10 girls in prison

11 Iran

# STUC women's solidarity in action

ANN HENDERSON, STUC ASSISTANT SECRETARY, REPORTS ON THE NOVEMBER 2014 STUC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE: WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

**T**HE 87th Annual STUC Women's Conference was held in the Perth Concert Hall, Perth, on Monday 3 and Tuesday 4 November 2014. The theme was "A Just Scotland for Women" and the conference was chaired by Ann Joss, RMT. 125 delegates (representing 20 trade unions and three trades union councils) and over 100 visitors were in attendance. Thirty organisations took stalls at conference, including the National Assembly of Women. Delegates spoke passionately about the experiences of their members facing a continuing decline in living standards, and the impact of public spending cuts on essential services in communities across Scotland. The Independence Referendum result in September had resulted in the Smith Commission being established, and at the time of Women's Conference, the report was awaited on future proposals for enhanced devolution.

Many delegates referred to the significance of the increase in political engagement in Scotland, with women at the forefront, and a turnout in the vote on 18 September of 84.5%. The STUC Women's Committee had worked on its "Women's Votes, Women's Voices" campaign throughout the previous year, and participated in numerous events, including those organised by the Scottish Women's Convention across Scotland.

Conference was addressed by a number of guest speakers, including Dame Anne Begg, MP for Aberdeen South and Chair of Westminster Select Committee on Work and Pensions. Anne Begg outlined some of the intended and unintended consequences of welfare reform, and encouraged delegates to get involved in the discussions about rebuilding a welfare state that meets the needs of the people, recognising how complex this will be. With the support of Unison, conference was also able to hear from Maggie Kathewera Banda, the Executive Director of the Women's Legal Resource Centre in Malawi. Maggie had been attending a conference in Glasgow looking at women's representation in elected politics, and spoke on that topic, as well as on the work the Legal Resource Centre undertakes in supporting women in Malawi. Common themes emerged with the longstanding campaigns and experience of the STUC Women's Committee in challenging violence against women, and domestic abuse, and it is hoped we will be able to maintain contacts.

Other topics debated during

DONA FELTHAM AND JANETTE FERGUSON ON THE NAW STALL



conference included:

- the impact Maternity Leave has on women's pensions
  - a call for a campaign on Living Pensions
  - Women's Health, Safety and Well-being in the workplace
  - concerns over the impact of any agreement on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
  - Gaza
  - Global Equality in Education for Women and Girls
  - Women and Transport
  - Women's Access to Justice
  - Equal Opportunities Monitoring in the Arts
  - Gender quotas on governing stereotyping of toys
  - Proportionality
  - Women paying the price of austerity
  - Childcare in Scotland; and
  - Women and Employment.
- Emergency motions were also debated
- criticising Labour's stand on freezing Child Benefit
  - supporting the Women 50/50 Campaign
  - support for FBU strike action
  - highlighting the backlash against women's rights in Central America, and the importance of the Central American Women's Network
  - Solidarity with Kobane, and
  - issues in the current Scottish Universities Pensions Dispute.

Commitments were given by the Scottish Government Minister for

Transport to the conference for an early meeting to discuss concerns raised by delegates on women and transport, safety and employment.

Conference also watched a Justice for Colombia film and video message from Lilianny Obando in Colombia, which was introduced by Agnes Tolmie from Unite and the STUC Women's Committee. Lilianny is under house arrest in Colombia, and spoke powerfully of the struggles facing trade unionists and their families. Conference gave a standing ovation (pic below), and the message of international solidarity has been conveyed to Colombian women and unions.

At this year's Conference a lunchtime fringe meeting was held each day: on the Monday the Scottish Labour Party ran a meeting on "Older Women and the Workplace", which was chaired by Agnes Tolmie, Unite and Member of the Labour Commission on Older Women and Work. Speakers included Jackie Baillie MSP and Margaret Curran MP.

On the Tuesday the STUC Women's Committee ran a meeting on "Women's Votes – Women's Voices", with speakers: Maria Fyfe, former MP; and Eileen Dinning, Unison and past Chair of the Women's Committee, speaking on the 50/50 Campaign.

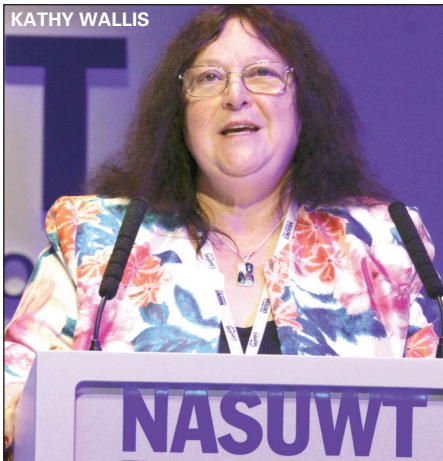
On the Tuesday, delegates and visitors received a presentation on the Scottish Working Women's History, through the National Library of Scotland's Collection. The STUC Women's Committee is keen to build in these links and will be participating in lectures and workshops using the archives, next year.

Anne Dean, GMB Scotland, was elected Chair of the Women's Committee for the year 2014/15. The decisions from the 2014 STUC Women's Conference give us a good basis from which to plan a busy year of campaigning, seeking to involve all those who got involved in political activity in the Referendum campaign in Scotland, and working with sisters nationally and internationally, as we organise against austerity and for progressive policies in the 2015 General Election.





# strong women = stronger unions



KATHY WALLIS, NASUWT JUNIOR VICE PRESIDENT, REPORTS FROM THEIR RECENT WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

**STRONG** Women make Stronger Unions – this was the theme for my union's annual Women Teachers' Conference a few weeks ago.

The NASUWT Women Teachers' Conference has now become the largest gathering of women teachers across the country and I am proud to be part of a union that takes seriously the experiences of women teachers. We have made it our job to give voice to the call of gender equality in our schools and education systems.

As the largest union representing teachers and headteachers across the UK NASUWT brings a perspective to equality issues which is informed by the practical experiences and opinions of our members and our commitment to the pursuit of equal rights and social justice in schools and in society.

Trade unions have a strong tradition of collectively challenging issues such as gender discrimination, violence and sexual assault against women in the workplace, on the streets and in the home.

There are now vast amounts of evidence to demonstrate that progress on women's equality has drastically declined since the Coalition Government has been in force. The recession and government-imposed austerity are having deep and damaging effects on every aspect of women's lives. With women making up the majority of the public sector workforce, the savage job cuts in education, health, local government, civil service and emergency services fall disproportionately on women workers.

Research by the Fawcett Society shows that over time, it will be less common for women to hold down jobs and successfully balance home and family life – with the consequence that women will be more likely to live in poverty.

Women are now facing a "triple jeopardy" being on the front line of

job cuts in the public sector, cuts to public services and as frontline users and women teachers are disproportionately hit by the two year pay freeze and subsequent one per cent pay restraint. It is almost 40 years since the Sex Discrimination Act was passed, yet there is very little progress on women's equality.

The Coalition Government continues to view equality, including women's equality, as an unnecessary, bureaucratic, expensive and dispensable area of policy.

These attacks on the state education system and on teachers' working conditions are also damaging children and young people. My union has undertaken research which shows that teachers are giving increasing numbers of children food, money, clothes and school equipment, often at their own expense. Child poverty, homelessness and deprivation are issues which are not antithetical to education. Teachers

are being left to pick up the pieces of failed government education, social and economic policies.

So, coming from a long line of feisty women including my Grandmother who was a very active Suffragette and involved in the Oxted Railway Station incident, I am very proud to be part of a union that is leading the field on equalities.

My father brought me up to understand that it was my responsibility to speak out and defend that which was not right. With both of these elements in my family it was inevitable that I should be an active trade unionist. I am very proud to have been involved in promoting the role of women within my union and will continue to do so on my Officer journey which will see me becoming the NASUWT National President at Easter 2016. I look forward to using this opportunity to continue to champion the NASUWT's work to campaign for the rights of women.

## stand up for school

**E**ducation International has launched a petition called Stand Up for School on the 25th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The petition is being supported by the NASUWT, NUT and other education trade unions. The campaign acknowledges that although there has been progress over the past 25 years, it is still the case that there are 58 million children out of school and there are increasing attacks on schools, school children and teachers across the world.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was a defining moment in history, when for the first time all children around the world were viewed as human beings with their own set of rights, including the right to a quality education.

The Stand up for Schools petition is designed to put pressure on world leaders to get children into school in 2015 as part of the Millennium Development Goals. The petition is therefore designed as a final push to get leaders to keep to their promises.

[WWW.AWORLDATSCHOOL.ORG/UPFORSCHOOL](http://WWW.AWORLDATSCHOOL.ORG/UPFORSCHOOL)

### what is education international?

Education International represents organisations of teachers and other education employees across the globe. It is the world's largest federation of unions, representing 30 million education employees in about 400 organisations in 170 countries. Education



International unites all teachers and education employees. Education International:

- promotes the principle that quality education, funded publicly, should be available to every student in every country.

- promotes and represents the interests of teachers and other education employees on the international level.

- assists the development of independent democratic organisations to represent teachers and other education employees and builds solidarity and cooperation between them.

- advocates for equity in society. It combats racism and xenophobia. It challenges discrimination on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and racial or ethnic origin or characteristics.

- works with other global federations of unions and other kindred organisations to promote and achieve solidarity.

[WWW.EI-IE.ORG/EN](http://WWW.EI-IE.ORG/EN)

# equality, what equality?



ELEANOR LEWINGTON, NAW TREASURER, REPORTS ON THE SHEFFIELD BRANCH OF THE NAW'S RECENT CONFERENCE

**S**HEFFIELD NAW held a conference at Wortley Hall on 8 November to consider issues of women's equality. Pat Peters, secretary of the Sheffield NAW branch, opened the conference and thanked Unite the Union's Sheffield branch for their sponsorship.

Linsay Hopkinson, a local health worker, spoke of the poor morale in the NHS, at a time when the government cannot even agree a 1% payrise for health workers, whilst giving MPs 11%. There is great concern over the complete computerisation of data being rushed in, with massive redundancies in clerical/admin staff and huge retraining needs. Many patients are not happy to have all their records on computer, concerned that their information might be sold on to companies.

Sheffield Labour councillor Jackie Drayton spoke of the effect of poverty on women caused by government enforced budget cutbacks. She described women in Sheffield as the shock absorbers for their families, earning less and having to manage without the services from the Council which they need. The severe cuts in government funding prevent the Council from providing services needed for the poorest, widening the divide between rich and poor. The cuts will amount to 50% over the life of the coalition.

Eleanor Lewington, NAW Treasurer, outlined the last decade of changes to pensions and how the NAW has campaigned for pensions system designed for women, that recognises caring, and broken employment records as the norm, not the exception. The government is now rushing through changes to taxation of pensions, to allow people over 55 years old to take out some or all of their pension pot, rather than take action to improve the pensions of poorer people.

Siobhan Endean, Equalities Officer for Unite, highlighted how austerity is creating a low wage economy, but the



unregulated press continually blames the poor for the state things are in, not the government.

She spoke on the importance of women's structures in unions, and the need to address equal pay.

The minimum wage should be equal to the living wage. The framework of employment rights needs to be strengthened, and ground breaking employment appeal tribunal ruling, that holiday pay should include overtime, shows the importance of strong trade unions. Unite and NAW have been key organisations in building the People's Assembly and the Women's Assembly, which need to be supported.

## ten point action plan

The conference agreed a ten point action plan:

- 1 Keep the NHS public
- 2 Oppose the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the EU and USA
- 3 Campaign for Council House building
- 4 Affordable rents
- 5 No child brought up in poverty
- 6 Abolish tuition fees
- 7 Decent jobs/pay
- 8 State pension no less than European Poverty level
- 9 Stop golden handshakes
- 10 Stop demonising migrants

## the gender pay gap widens

November 4 was equal pay day – effectively the last day of the year that women are paid for their work, thanks to the gender pay gap.

The World Economic forum had revealed that the UK gender gap was widening – The UK fell out of the top 20 most gender-equal countries in the world for the first time this year, dropping to a ranking of 26 in the 2014 Global Gender Gap Report.

This year's equal pay day comes three days earlier than 2013's. The frightening reality is that economic gender inequality is getting worse not better – and has been doing so since the coalition took power in 2010. Women earn on average £2.83 per hour less than men – and £5000 a year less than their male counterparts for doing similar jobs.

The fact that for 57 days of 2014 women will work for free puts into perspective the gravity of the situation we find ourselves in, 40 years after Dagenham and the Equal Pay Act.

As Lotie O'Connor writes in the Guardian, "Gender inequality affects everyone, not just women. It makes workplaces less productive, creates workforces that are out of touch with the dynamics of the real world and robs talented women of rewarding, fulfilling roles".

Gloria De Piero MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities said: "Women are working an extra three days for free this year because the pay gap is back on the rise. Women shouldn't have to wait another 50 years for equal pay."





# pensions going **backwards...**

**NAW TREASURER ELEANOR LEWINGTON BELIEVES SOME IMPROVEMENTS WERE MADE UNDER LABOUR BUT TORY CHANGES IN PENSIONS ARE TAKING US BACKWARDS**

**I**n the fight for women's equality the National Assembly of Women has a long history of campaigning for better pensions, above all for a decent basic state pension, based on residency rather than NI contributions. In the Labour government years we were heavily involved in responses to Green and White Papers, and submitted arguments to the Pensions Commission – a body set up to develop a long term consensus.

The Thatcher years brought the breaking of the link between state pensions and earnings, the scandal of personal pensions in place of state second pensions, and initiated vast pension contribution holidays for employers by threatening taxation of pension fund surpluses, thus dismantling collective pension provision whether state or in the workplace.

Those years epitomised the neo-liberal belief of individual responsibility and that competitive markets would provide the best answers.

The state pensions system, put in place after the Second World War, had the key building block of the male breadwinner-led family, with the married woman depending on her spouse for a pension

So when Labour came to power in 1997 a significant improvement in the level of the state pension, without dealing with the issue of low pay, broken employment records and caring responsibilities would still leave many women to retire in poverty.

It was soon clear that Labour would not restore the earnings link, but it introduced the means tested Pensions Credit, and although it improved living standards for many pensioners, why should pensioners have to "Parade their Poverty"?

The most significant action was to set up the Pensions Commission, chaired by Lord Turner (ex CBI), with Jeannie Drake (CWU trade union) and John Hills (LSE academic). Its first report in 2004 highlighted four options:

- poorer pensioners
- spending a higher proportion of GDP on future pensioners
- more pensions saving
- higher retirement ages

Its second report in 2006, rejected the prospect of pensioners being poorer, recognised the current system disadvantaged women, that state spending would have to increase and that tax relief disproportionately benefits the higher paid but recommended that:

- basic State Pensions increase with earnings



- future entitlement should be based on residency
- limited means testing
- a second pension with improved credits for caring
- auto-enrolment of everyone either into a workplace or national pension scheme.
- increasing state pension age to 66 in 2030 and 67 in 2040.

The Pensions Act 2008 brought in the higher retirement ages, changes to S2P to include carers, a reduction to 30 years contributions/credits to be entitled to the full pension and the auto-enrolment scheme.

## **the con trick**

In 2011 the Tories accelerated the increases in pension age for women up to 65 by as much as 18 months, an increase for men and women to 66 by October 2020 (rather than 2030) and 67 between 2026/7 (rather than 2040). Now, the Pensions Act 2014 brings in the Single Tier Pension, only for people retiring after April 2016, replacing the Basic and Second State Pension with one amount, just above the Pension Credit level (£148 per week) and increasing the number of years to qualify for the full pension from 30 to 35.

There was no meaningful consultation, and they abolished the National Insurance rebates for contracted out pension schemes, putting more pressure on final salary schemes.

The Single Tier pension is to be cost neutral, and although there will be some better off, the DWP itself estimates that in 2040 just 35% will be better off, 45% worse off and 20% about the same.

So much for the Pensions Commission recommendations!

## **the next wheeze...**

Now, the latest Tory wheeze, branded as "Choice" allows people to treat

their pension pots as savings, rather than money earmarked for their retirement. So anyone over 55 will be able to draw out some or all of the capital from a money purchase scheme, have one quarter tax free and pay tax at the appropriate rate on the remaining three quarters.

The "justification" for these proposals is both the failing annuity market, so that a fixed pension pot buys less pension and "choice", but many people could find themselves without any income in old age.

There are many pitfalls. The pressure to use the money to pay off debt, whether for themselves or one of the family, could be enormous. The potential for scams and fraudsters is worrying.

Who benefits? There is a predicted £1.6 billion tax windfall for the government from people taking cash from their pension pots.

The other side of the coin is the continued tax evasion potential for the high paid:

- already 8% of taxpayers, earning more than £50,000 receive almost 50% of pension tax relief.
- tax free lump sums cost £4 billion each year, more than a quarter of which goes to just 2% of individuals.
- tax relief on contributions cost £26 billion in 2010/11, estimated to be enough to increase the basic state pension by 40%!

## **so what is the problem!**

The Tories are now turning pensions into individual saving schemes, where what is needed is more collective provision. We should not go back to the 80s, when the Tories had similar slogans of choice and individual responsibility but in reality led to a collapse in pension savings.

Now is the time to abolish the higher rate tax relief on pensions, and use the revenues to increase the state pension.

# 10 MYTHS ABOUT AUSTERITY

## 1: austerity has worked

**TRUTH** Austerity was meant to reduce the deficit – the gap between government spending, and what it gets from taxes. In fact, the deficit has grown 10% in the last year to over £100bn.

## 2: the British economy is stronger than other big economies

**TRUTH** The majority of developed countries have grown faster than the UK since 2010.

## 3: we are creating jobs and prosperity for all

**TRUTH** Average pay, taking account of rising prices, has fallen every year for six years. This is the worst decline living in standards for most people since official records began in 1856.

## 4: we are all in it together

**TRUTH** While most of us have seen falling pay year after year, the wealth of the richest 1,000 people in Britain has doubled since the financial crash.

## 5: we are rebalancing the economy by creating jobs outside of financial services

**TRUTH** Only one out of 40 new jobs is proper full-time employment. Most new jobs are forms of fake self-employment without enough work to

pay the bills, part-time or temp jobs, or zero hours contracts.

## 6: austerity has reduced the government's debt

**TRUTH** Because austerity has failed, this government has borrowed more in four years (over £430bn) than Labour did in 13 (£429bn).

## 7: the NHS has been ring-fenced

**TRUTH** NHS spending has been capped. It has not kept pace with inflation and a growing population, and therefore is falling in real terms. That's why waiting lists are rising.

## 8: the government has invested in growth

**TRUTH** Government investment was slashed from 3.5% of GDP to 1.5%.

## 9: we must kerb benefits to stop benefit tourism

**TRUTH** Britain has the lowest wages in Northern Europe, and one of the lowest levels of immigration. Recent migrants contributed £20bn more in taxes than they took in public services over the last decade.

## 10: we must stick to the course

**TRUTH** Austerity has lowered living standards, cut public services and not reduced the deficit. More of the same will produce the same result.

## don't buy the austerity lies!

For more information about the campaign against austerity go to [www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/](http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/)

## the Women's Assembly Against Austerity 2015

In February this year the National Assembly of Women worked with other leading women from the People's Assembly Against Austerity to organise a hugely successful *Women's Assembly Against Austerity*. Over 300 women from a number of anti-cuts campaigns, trade unions, peace and environmental groups came together to discuss the impact of government policies on their families and communities.

The event was so uplifting that it was decided to hold a second women's event, a decision that was sup-

ported by delegates to the national conference of the People's Assembly in March 2014.

Women have an important role to play in the run up to the general election in May 2015. We need to set out our demands clearly and be able to challenge candidates to show their commitment to progressive policies that will improve women's lives. This is why we have decided to hold our second Women's Assembly Against Austerity on **Saturday 14 February 2015** in London. Let's make sure our voices are heard and our vote counts.

# named and shamed... the NHS sell-outs

**A**S thousands of health workers take to the streets in the fight for fair pay, to protect jobs and to save the NHS, Unite the Union has published a study exposing the connection between Conservative and Liberal MPs and private health providers.

Many of the MPs named in the document have directly received donations from business leaders or firms with links to the private health industry. Although there is no suggestion any of the politicians or donors acted illegally it shows the close ties between members of the Coalition and the private health industry.

David Cameron and Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt are among 64 Tory MPs named in a study along with Lib Dems Nick Clegg and Vince Cable.

One in five Coalition MPs have links with private firms who could profit from the Government's NHS reforms. All 71 MPs named in the dossier voted in favour of the government's controversial Health and Social Care Act in 2012, which opened up the NHS to more private firms.

Andy Burnham, Labour's Shadow Health Secretary, said of the Tories: "They were bankrolled by private health in Opposition as they drew up secret plans to put market forces at the heart of the NHS".

## cameron

David Cameron handed a life peerage to nursing and care home tycoon Dolar Popat, who has given the Tories more than £200,000 in donations.

## osborne

Chancellor George Osborne received donation through Conservative Campaign HQ from Julian Schild whose family made £184m in 2006 by selling hospital bed-makers Huntleigh Technology

## fallon

Michael Fallon, Defence Secretary: Former director of Attendo AB, a Swedish private health company

## hammond

Philip Hammond, Foreign Secretary: Beneficiary of a trust which owns controlling interest in nursing home developer Castlemead Ltd

## davis

David Davis, former Shadow Home Secretary: Received £4,250 for a speak-

ing engagement for health insurance company Aviva

## fox

Liam Fox, former Defence Secretary: Received £5,000 from iIPGL Ltd, which purchased health care company Cyprotex

## redwood

John Redwood, former Cabinet Minister: Advised the private equity company which runs Pharmacy2u

## cable

Vince Cable, Business Secretary: Received a donation of £2,000 from Chartwell Care Services, which is 100% owned by Chartwell Health & Care PLC

## lansley

Michael Lansley, the chief architect of the Coalition's NHS reforms, accepted a £21,000 donation in November 2009 from John Nash, the former chairman of Care UK. Two other Tory MPs received donations from Mr Nash's wife Caroline.

## hunt

Jeremy Hunt, who took over as Health Secretary when Mr Lansley was sacked in September 2012, received more than £20,000 from hedge fund baron Andrew Law, a major investor in health care firms.

## hague

Other Cabinet Ministers to have received donations include Leader of the Commons William Hague, who accepted £20,000 from MMC Ventures, the part-owner of The Practice plc which runs 60 GP surgeries.

## javid

And Culture Secretary Sajid Javid received £11,000 from Moundsley Healthcare Ltd.

## ids

Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith has share options in hygiene tech firm Byotrol, which sells products to the NHS.

THE FULL REPORT IS AVAILABLE AT  
[WWW.UNITETHEUNION.ORG/NEWS/71-COALITION-MPS-WHO-VOTED-FOR-NHS-SELL-OFF-LINKED-TO-HEALTH-FIRMS/](http://WWW.UNITETHEUNION.ORG/NEWS/71-COALITION-MPS-WHO-VOTED-FOR-NHS-SELL-OFF-LINKED-TO-HEALTH-FIRMS/)

# what is TTIP?

WHAT IS TTIP AND WHY IS IT A THREAT TO OUR NHS AND PUBLIC SERVICES

**T**HE Coalition government's 2012 Health and Social Care Act accelerated the sell-off of the NHS to private health firms. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership now threatens to make this irreversible.

The deal, known as TTIP, is being negotiated behind the closed doors of the European Commission, between EU bureaucrats and delegates from the United States. It is the largest bilateral trade deal ever negotiated and threatens to make privatisation of the NHS irreversible by giving the profits of corporations precedence over national lawmakers.

TTIP includes an Investor State Dispute Settlement clause which means that once invited in, private companies will gain the right to sue if services are nationalised.

MEPs will vote on the final package once an agreement is reached. Gail Cartmail, Assistant General Secretary of Unite the Union said: "It is clear this government thought they could do this deal in secret, a deal that would mean the irreversible sell-off of our NHS to America".

"Wall Street financiers like Blackrock and Invesco are already heavily invested in the NHS – over 70 per cent of new contracts are now in private hands. Over £11 billion of our money in the hands of casino capitalists. It is happening – galloping privatisation.

"The campaign is growing, the demand is getting louder. Cameron can no longer ignore voters on this issue. Each one of us must go back to our communities and make the demand – veto health from TTIP. Shame on this government because they have privatised our health care with no mandate but they will not be allowed to sell-off our health service to America."

If this agreement is finalised it will hold a particular threat to our public sector, and ultimately limit the possibility of a future government perusing progressive policies of re-nationalisation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
[WWW.WARONWANT.ORG/CAMPAIGNS/TRADE-JUSTICE/MORE/INFORM/18078-WHAT-IS-TTIP](http://WWW.WARONWANT.ORG/CAMPAIGNS/TRADE-JUSTICE/MORE/INFORM/18078-WHAT-IS-TTIP)



# CND: opposing trident...



OPPOSING TRIDENT AND SUPPORTING A NUCLEAR WEAPONS CONVENTION

NAW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER  
PAM FLYNN REPORTS ON THE CND AGM  
AND POLICY CONFERENCE 2014

**A**N energetic and purposeful AGM of CND convened in London on Sunday 19 October, immediately followed the TUC's Saturday March and Rally against austerity and for a decent pay rise. CND had a strong showing at the march and our **NHS not Trident, Education not Trident, Climate not Trident** placards were well received and could be seen distributed throughout the various march contingents.

The key context for all CND's current work is the run up to the general election in 2015. Over the last year, the Campaign has centred its work on the cost of replacing Trident nuclear weapons. Heather Wakefield, guest speaker from Unison, pointed out that public sector workers now form a large element of the working poor. She said that the £100 billion proposed for Trident "needs to be diverted to the politics of the public interest".

## alliances

Currently, the Campaign is prioritising the extension of its alliances with community organisations, trade unions, anti-cuts groups, faith communities and others. We in the NAW need to consider how best to contribute to the Campaign given that women and girls worldwide are so seriously affected by

conflict and by the ever present stress and threat of nuclear destruction. We will need to think carefully about our role in strengthening women's voice and contributing to the realisation of nuclear disarmament.

In the summer, participation in the *Wool against Weapons* initiative between Aldermaston and Burghfield bases in Berkshire brought thousands of new participants into anti-nuclear activity. The wool will be seen again at the event to *Wrap Up Parliament* planned for 24 January 2015.

The conference observed that although the three main Westminster parties formally favour nuclear weapons at leadership and policy level, there is scope within parliamentary party ranks for diverse and changing views. These views are, of course, affected by pressure from public opinion.

A decision was made to build the broadest possible opposition to Trident replacement via dynamic and creative awareness raising means such as the People's Ballot and Rethink Trident initiatives. The conference heard that the Scottish referendum had been a fantastic near miss in terms of upsetting the Trident and nuclear establishment; the commitment from the SNP to remove nuclear weapons from Scotland was popular.

## NAW engagement

West London NAW member Maisie Carter spoke eloquently in support of a

resolution from Plymouth on building trade union support via trade union branches and trades councils

Rochdale and Littleborough Peace Group were supported by Labour CND in pointing out that NATO is essentially a nuclear alliance; that the UK has a policy of first-use of nuclear weapons because of an obligation to NATO. Just as NATO expansion in Eastern Europe has heightened conflict there, so its further expansion is likely to increase tension and the potential for military conflict in the Asia Pacific region.

NAW member Rae Street moved an emergency resolution from Greater Manchester and District CND noting the rise in nuclear weapons rhetoric from both Russia and Ukraine and resolving to support and co-operate with anti-nuclear organisations and campaigns in both Russia and Ukraine.

Other discussion and policy resolutions covered global disarmament, nuclear power, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, Iraq, NATO and missile defence, the Asia Pacific and the Non Proliferation Treaty. NAW sister, Lydia Meryll, was re-elected to CND National Council

Copies of the very useful CND briefing for the Party conferences held in the autumn can be obtained from CND, alongside the general election campaigning pack featuring the People's Ballot.

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



# poppy attack



LINDSEY GERMAN, CONVENOR OF STOP THE WAR COALITION EXPLAINS WHY SHE'S BEEN CALLED A DISGRACE AND A TRAITOR.

**T**HE poppy campaign reached its heights as 11 November approached. Remembrance ceremonies took place across the country, thousands of poppy wreaths were laid at war memorials, and at Whitehall's Cenotaph royalty and politicians – including the war criminal Tony Blair – mingled with the military to pay their respects to the dead of past wars, especially the First World War, whose hundredth anniversary we mark this year.

What could be wrong with that? Well, some of us are finding quite a lot wrong. Before I go any further, this is not about disrespecting the dead. Every person who lost his or her life in the First World War should be remembered. The war itself should be remembered. Those who want to wear the poppy should of course be perfectly free to do so. But it is increasingly clear that the poppy campaign is not just about remembrance.

That is obvious in the response to those of us who choose not to wear the poppy. I have been called a traitor, a disgrace, as well as other less printable remarks for writing an article supporting the wearing of a white peace poppy.

Those who have the temerity to appear on television without wearing the poppy are attacked in the right wing media and across social media. Many of these attacks seem to come from people who, to put it mildly, do not like people of other races or nationalities.

Attitudes to those who do not wear the poppy vary of course but it is seen by some as a test of loyalty, a definition of Britishness.

How else can we explain the poppy hijab which Muslim women are encouraged to wear? Supposedly to commemorate the Muslim dead of the war, it is hardly surprising that many Muslim women refuse to wear one, and feel that their ancestors, as colo-

nial subjects, often had little choice whether to fight.

While the poppy is marketed as a unifying national campaign, there is no doubting its militaristic and nationalistic connections. You don't have to know that the sponsors of the Poppy Rocks concert, organised by British Legion young professionals, are Lockheed Martin, the major arms company, to know that the military are at the heart of the campaign.

The emphasis on British losses, as opposed to losses on all sides, which the ceramic poppies at the Tower of London highlight, serves to mark not the total loss and suffering of the war, but a one sided view of it.

The Royal British Legion's use of Joss Stone singing 'The Green Fields of France' as the official remembrance song, omitting the final anti-war section, is not only a travesty of artistic integrity, but a reminder of how much the commemoration is connected to a view of the war which says that it was right.

The pressure to wear the poppy is overwhelming. On every mainstream media programme, in every major shop, and sold by teachers to pupils in many schools (no pressure there, then), the omniscience of the poppy is relatively new. When many of those who actually fought in the world wars were still alive, there was not the pressure to buy the poppy in the same kind of way, nor was it advertised on such a scale.

The change has come with the increase in modern wars. They have been much less costly of British lives (although much more costly of their opponents' lives) but they have also been unpopular and contested. In parallel with this development has been the rise of the poppy.



A consequence of this approach is how much is lost from the history of the First World War: those who opposed it, those who died as civilians, those women not in the military whose contribution is barely recognised, and the growing disaffection with the war felt by many soldiers.

That is why it was called the war to end all wars. Tragically, it wasn't. And that is why I am a "traitor" and a "disgrace" for refusing to wear the red poppy.

## white poppies for peace

**T**HE idea of decoupling Armistice Day, the red poppy and later Remembrance Day from their military culture dates back to 1926, just a few years after the British Legion was persuaded to try using the red poppy as a fundraising tool in Britain.

A member of the No More War Movement suggested that the British Legion should be asked to imprint "No More War" in the centre of the red poppies instead of 'Haig Fund' and failing this pacifists should make their own flowers.

The details of any discussion with the British Legion are unknown but as the centre of the red poppy displayed the 'Haig Fund' imprint until 1994 it

was clearly not successful. A few years later the idea was again discussed by the Co-operative Women's Guild. In 1933 the first white poppies appeared on Armistice Day (called Remembrance Day after World War Two). The white poppy was not intended as an insult to those who died in the First World War – a war in which many of the white poppy supporters lost husbands, brothers, sons and lovers – but a challenge to the continuing drive to war. The following year the newly founded Peace Pledge Union began widespread distribution of the poppies and their annual promotion.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PEACE PLEDGE UNION VISIT: [WWW.PPU.ORG.UK/](http://WWW.PPU.ORG.UK/)

# girls in prison

**T**HE Government is proposing to open the first secure college to house 320 young offenders aged between 12 and 17 years in Leicestershire in 2017. Justice Secretary Chris Grayling claims that the pilot scheme will cut reoffending rates and improve the quality of education given to offenders. The proposal was blocked in the House of Lords in October when peers voted by 186 to 185 to back a Labour amendment to prevent the "colleges" from housing girls or children under the age of 15.

Girls make up a tiny proportion of children in custody – currently, there are only 49 girls in custody in the whole of England and Wales, and over the whole of last year, girls made up just 5% of the custody population. Applying these sorts of proportions to secure colleges, we can expect about 16 girls to be held with around 300 boys. This will be very unsafe and hugely intimidating.

## inadequate plans

Government plans to allay the serious safeguarding concerns this poses by fencing-off girls and vulnerable children are inadequate. Girls will still be held alongside boys in the separated area, so safeguarding risks remain. The proposed fenced-off area will be a "prison within a prison", likely to be reminiscent of the claustrophobic girls units in Young Offenders Institutions, which have thankfully been closed down. A fence will not prevent cat-calling and verbal bullying, which will be intimidating and make girls feel isolated and highly visible.

With the population being made up largely of boys, it is inevitable that the culture of the secure college will be masculine and that the regime and services will be designed around the majority's needs. They will not provide the sort of environment that the evidence shows can help girls to turn their lives around. The Government say that they want girls to benefit from the facilities in secure colleges but they will not be able to access them most of the time if the intention is that they should not mix with the majority population.

## a very vulnerable cohort

Girls in custody are an immensely vulnerable group. A Prison Inspectorate survey found that 61% of girls in young offender institutions had been in local authority care, compared to 33% of boys. A Youth Justice Board report found that one in three girls had experience of sexual abuse, and one in five had experienced violence in the home. There are so few girls in custody that they can easily be accommodated in the smaller and far more appropriate Secure Children's Homes.

There is no need to hold them in a secure college.

## latest: some progress

The Women's Resource Centre along with the NAW and other women's organisations urged members of the House of Commons to support this Lords' amendment to ensure girls are kept out of these new institutions. Holding girls in secure colleges would be dangerous, frightening, and work against rehabilitation. The Commons considered the matter at the beginning

of December but rejected it so it went back to the Lords. On 9 December the Lords voted overwhelmingly to keep girls and younger children out of the secure college – by 304 to 240. This is a substantially increased majority compared to the last House of Lords vote on this issue and is a real victory. Let's hope it sends a strong message to the Government that they've got it wrong and persuades MPs to back the amendment.

[THEWOMENSRESOURCECENTRE.ORG.UK](http://THEWOMENSRESOURCECENTRE.ORG.UK)

# human rights day

10 DECEMBER IS HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

**THE WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM STRESSES THAT GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IS AN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION**

**I**N 1979 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, often referred to as CEDAW. In the UK, 35 years later we are still far from full realisation of the principle of this enlightened convention.

The convention spelled out clearly what was meant by discrimination: "Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex", which has the effect of interfering with women's human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field (Article 1).

States party to this convention agreed to "condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, ...to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination, and, to this end, undertake to embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation... and to ensure, through law and other appropriate means, the practical realisation of this principle..." (Article 2).

This would seem a clear and firm enough commitment, but Article 3 made it comprehensive: "States parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men".

This equality was to include (articles 7, 10, 11, 15): "The right to... participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof"; equal rights with men in the field of education; "the elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels"; equality with men before the law; and "in civil matters, a legal capacity identical to that of men and the same opportunities to exercise that capacity"; plus, elimination of discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular:

- The same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment
- The right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion, job security... training
- The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value
- The right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions.

Thirty-five years later, just imagine if these things were the case in practice – if discrimination against women had in fact been eliminated, and women did have the same opportunities as men – what a different place the world would be! In the UK, we are still far from the full practical realisation of the principle of this enlightened convention.

WILPF campaigns on issues of gender, peace and security as well as human rights for women, using an 'integrated approach' because their realisation is interdependent.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
[WWW.WILPF.ORG.UK](http://WWW.WILPF.ORG.UK)  
[WWW.UN.ORG/WOMENWATCH/DAW/CEDAW](http://WWW.UN.ORG/WOMENWATCH/DAW/CEDAW)



# Iran: women out of public life

IRAN – A REGIME DETERMINED TO REMOVE WOMEN FROM PUBLIC LIFE.

STATEMENT FROM THE DEMOCRATIC ORGANISATION OF IRANIAN WOMEN

**F**OLLOWING the spate of organised acid attacks against women in the City of Isfahan and the arrest of women who have protested against these inhumane and violent crimes, the Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women (DOIW) wrote to the Women's International Democratic Federation and appealed for international solidarity with the women of Iran at a difficult time in their struggle.

"We are writing to express our deep concern about the escalation of inhumane state violence against the women of our country. The regime of the Islamic Republic is continuing its reactionary policies in the arena of legislation and policy making and the brutal suppression of women in different forms. In recent weeks this has taken the form of acid attacks on women, followed by the regime's indifference and its protection of the perpetrators of these acts of violence. The aim of the regime's medieval policies is to remove women from the arena of public life, to force them into the domestic arena and to surrender to the ideology of the ruling reaction.

"In this regard, we draw your attention to the ratification of misogynistic laws going through the parliament recently, including bills such as Support for Enjoiners (enforcers of adherence to religious instructions) and Forbidders of Vice which effectively amounts to the legal sanctioning of terrorising and violent oppression of women by fundamentalists. These measures utilise religious tools and reactionary policies in order to remove women from the economic and social arena and to take control of women's body, life and work. Bills such as Maintenance of Chastity and Modesty (Hejab) promote unprecedented restrictions on women's employment and remove them from the workplace under the pretext of maintaining Modesty (hejab), and implementing policies based on reducing permissible working hours for women, enshrining in law a ban on employing single women, the Bill for the increase in population (instructing women to bear children and making access to contraception close to impossible for women, without consideration to population control and the appalling economic conditions that people face because of the neo-liberal policies adopted by the regime), segregation of the sexes and banning women and girls from entering many courses in university; at the same time passing reactionary laws against women rights (paternalistic laws which allow men to



have multiple wives and even the marriage of a step-father with a child, which is a reminder of the age of slavery) are but a few policies being implemented against women in our country.

In recent weeks a chain of acid attacks on girls have been carried out in the major city of Isfahan. These crimes have been met with silence and indifference by the regime.

The misogynist regime of Islamic Republic has not only failed to condemn or arrest those responsible for these crimes, but it has threatened the people who have protested and demanded that the state should maintain the safety of all in public life. This response betrays the open and hidden support of Iran's rulers for their Da'esh-like (ISIL-like) acts of violence against women.

The arrest of women's movement activist, Mahdieh Golroo and the journalists who reported the brutal wave of acid attacks, indicates the regime's approval of the attacks and has given ground to further unease and insecurity in the society.

The Peking Declaration stated that women are the first victims of violence, especially of state violence. The violence perpetrated by the medieval regime under the disguise of religious belief is nothing new. The acts of criminal groups in Afghanistan, the crimes of Da'esh (ISIL) in the region and the misogynistic policies of the Islamic Republic in the guise of religious teachings, are clear examples of this fact. The oppression of women and use of terror aimed at keeping women in the domestic sphere, started from the day after the victory of Iran's 1979 Revolution. It was aimed at returning this massive force that had entered the social arena, back into the corner of the home; and it has succeeded to a large degree in doing so through its

reactionary and misogynistic laws and policies.

These policies have been determined and led by the Supreme Religious Leader (Vali-e-Faghih) "God's representative on Earth". Brutal acid attacks are part and parcel of the reactionary, patriarchal and inhumane policies that the rulers of the Islamic Republic are imposing on the Iranian society. In recent months, Khamane'i, the Leader, has spoken repeatedly of the need for women to stay at home, raise the children and be a wife; he has directed the executive, legislative and judiciary to this end.

The brave women of Iran, side by side with progressive forces and parties, and other popular organisations, have issued statements and called for an end to this human tragedy and demanded that not only the perpetrators but also their masters should be arrested and punished. They demand that all protestors, including women's movement activist Mahdieh Golroo, should be freed immediately.

The DOIW appeal to you to express your solidarity with the women of Iran who are fighting an unequal battle for their inalienable right to be active in all areas of public life and who face oppression and prison daily; and to publicise their struggle. We call on the progressive forces of Iran and the world, including the Women's International Democratic Federation to express their solidarity with Iranian women and organise international protests at the violent breach of women's rights in Iran, especially the recent crimes against the human rights of women in the city of Isfahan; and by doing so to force the medieval Islamic Republican regime to stop.

[HTTP://WWW.MAZANAN.COM/EN/?P=63](http://www.mazanan.com/en/?p=63)

# NAW annual general meeting 2015

**T**HE National Assembly of Women's 2015 Annual General Meeting will take place on Saturday 18 April 2015 at Unison Centre, 130 Euston Road, London NW1 2AY.

We have been very fortunate in securing the excellent new Unison headquarters in Euston for our 2015 AGM and are immensely pleased that

our NAW Vice President Gloria Mills, Head of Equalities at Unison (right) has agreed to be our keynote speaker.

Please put the date in your diary and make every effort to be there as it's bound to be a lively day of discussion and debate in the run up to the general election and an opportunity to meet other NAW sisters.



Seasonal greetings to  
all **National Assembly  
of Women** members,  
affiliates and  
supporters and let's  
continue the campaign  
for peace, equality and  
social justice in 2015



The National Assembly of Women has had a long and successful relationship with Wortley Hall, Sheffield. We hold many NAW meetings there and are a regular stall holder at the annual South Yorkshire Festival. As a shareholder of the "Worker's Stately Home" we attend shareholders' meetings and support the annual Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial lecture which is held in the Sylvia Pankhurst Library in August. For many years the NAW annual general meeting was a residential event at Wortley which gave sisters an opportunity to spend more time together to talk and socialise. Following the Executive's decision to hold the 2015 AGM in London there was some concern that this opportunity would be lost, so the Executive is looking at the possibility of a residential seminar at Wortley later in 2015. Watch this space for more information.

## what's on...

The next NAW **Executive Committee** meeting (open to all members) is **Saturday 31 January** in London

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](mailto: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 at [www.sisters.org.uk](http://www.sisters.org.uk)

## join the NAW now!

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

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

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Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation \_\_\_\_\_

phone \_\_\_\_\_

email \_\_\_\_\_

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