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women can make a real difference



SALLY HUNT IS A MEMBER OF THE TUC'S GENERAL COUNCIL AND IS THIS YEAR'S CHAIR OF THE TUC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

SHE HAS BEEN GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE UNION (UCU) SINCE 2007

am incredibly proud and honoured to be the chair of this year's TUC Women's Conference. With less than two months to go until the Westminster election, there is much we have to debate and some serious issues we have to address.

The election and what the parties are offering women deserves special scrutiny, but so does how women have reacted to the coalition's policies, what the parties are offering in the run up to the election and the importance of voting.

Throughout history, women have had to fight for their political voice, sadly not least within trade unions themselves. Amazingly, women have still only been eligible to vote in parliamentary elections for less than 100 years. Unfortunately, though, not enough women are making use of that hard won vote today.

In recent general elections, turnout amongst women has been disappointingly low. Politicians and politics must take some of the blame. We still have mainstream politics run by and for middle-aged white man in suits, which means that politics has an image problem.

Women are still massively underrepresented. Despite making up over 50% of the UK population, only 22% of MPs are female. David Cameron's "women problem" has been writ large in the media. Before the last election he committed to making sure that a third of his cabinet would comprise women. He has not even managed that as just one in five of the front bench are women.

The prime minister's high profile fall outs with Nadine Dorries of his own party and Angela Eagle from the Labour Party highlighted his lack of understanding of the issues facing women in the workplace or even in general. Although a patronising video aimed at women by the cross-party pro-union campaign during the Scottish referendum did little to suggest that any of the main parties really have any idea how to speak to women.

While we need to be highlighting these incidents, we also need to be doing more to challenge them. Too often people say that they are switched off from politics because nobody is listening to them or fighting their corner. And, when you consider the way in which the policies of the

coalition government have systematically disadvantaged women across the UK, it's little wonder that women may turn their back on politics.

Cuts to public services, welfare, education and the NHS have all hit hard, stripping away vital safety nets, and in many cases it's women who've lost the most. Too many women find themselves in low-paid, insecure jobs, struggling to make ends meet as the cost of living rises.

Many women aren't engaging in politics because they don't feel represented by those in leadership positions, but there's little incentive for politicians to cater to people who don't turn out to vote.

That's where female trade unionists come in. We need to set an example for how women can make a real difference if they stand up for what's important

We need to be leaders in the fight to ensure that women's issues are represented. And we need to encourage as many women as possible to register and vote, so that politicians can no longer ignore our needs.

I look forward to the conference, where women trade unionists from across the UK will decide on the priorities for the year ahead and consider how we can work together to help shape what happens at the ballot box on Thursday 7 May.

As part of UCU's work to celebrate International Women's Day, we have produced a film and postcard looking at women in trade unions and their vital role. The film *A woman's place is in the union* can be viewed at www.ucu.org.uk/equality where you can also download the accompanying postcard based on the Rosie the Riveter poster.



the agenda

AUSTERITY IS AT THE HEART OF THE TUC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE AGENDA

THE TUC is the voice of Britain at work. There are 54 affiliated unions representing nearly six million working people. It campaigns for a fair deal at work and for social justice at home and abroad. Women now make up just over half of all union members and are a powerful force for change.

The annual TUC Women's Conference brings together women from all walks of life and from all levels in the trade union movement. The conference provides an opportunity for women to share their experience and celebrate their successes.

This year the 47 motions cover a range of issues, most notably the struggle against austerity and its impact on women. A significant number of motions address the issue of gender inequality at work and focus on restoring the real value of the National Minimum Wage; the gender pay gap and the campaign against zero hours contracts. These are areas which hit women the hardest. The Office for National Statistics reports that over 2.7 million people are on precarious contracts and the TUC research shows that 55% of zero hours contract workers are women.

The inevitable outcome of the casualisation of work is increased poverty and latest figures indicate that 26% of women are now being paid less than the minimum wage compared to 16% of men. Low paid work, particularly low paid part-time work is disproportionately performed by women and is a major barrier to tackling household poverty by working families. The gender pay gap remains high and the UK now stands 26th in the Global Gender Gap League Table, having slipped from 9th in 2006. The gender gap in pensions has also risen.

The savage cuts to services and benefits and the rising cost of child care is forcing more women to stay at home to look after children and care for elderly and disabled relatives often in extreme poverty. It is unsurprising therefore that the use of food banks and number of female suicides has increased.

It is inevitable that the tone and content of many of the motions catalogues the bleak situation faced by many women. Despite this, the call to campaign for equality and justice remains strong and to reject attempts to divide us by our race, colour or religion. This sense of unity of purpose has always been at the heart of the TUC Women's Conference and long may it remain so.

women and health in europe



ANITA WRIGHT REPORTS ON THE WIDF REGIONAL SEMINAR – THE STRUGGLE FOR FREE PUBLIC HEALTHCARE

WOMEN from seven European countries gathered in Brussels at the beginning of February for the Women's International Democratic Federation regional seminar on the campaign for free healthcare. The seminar took place at the prestigious European Parliament building courtesy of the Greek Communist Party Parliamentary Group (KKE).

Mairini Stefanidi from the Greek Women's Organisation (OGE) welcomed delegates and outlined how austerity policies had seriously undermined public health services across Europe. The rise in ill health and morbidity, particularly in working class areas, was a direct result of budget cuts, outsourcing of services and privatisation.

Skevi Koukouma, WIDF President and Cypriot Akel MP said that women's health was different from men's notably because of pregnancy and child birth. She was concerned that the rise of conservatism was having a profound effect on access to free, safe abortion and that poor access to early diagnosis of breast cancer was leading to a rise in deaths. The latest attack on public health care was the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) being negotiated between the EU and USA which would pave the way for the further privatisation of services. In particular it would open the market to the big pharmaceutical companies who already make a huge profit out of ill health.

Throughout the day, delegates presented the situation in their own coun-

try. Ada Donno (AWRM) spoke of the rise in a parallel health market in Italy where 55% of care is operated by the private market and much of the management is shameful and corrupt. She said that this was being justified on the grounds of improving efficiency and reducing wastage when in fact it was an ideological attack and TTIP would make this situation worse. Regina Marques (MDM) explained that although healthcare in Portugal is state funded, universal and free at the point of need it is slowly being eroded with a significant increase in hospital beds now under private control.

Blanca Rivas Gonzalez (AFS) said that women's health has become increasingly medicalised and the pharmaceutical industry is capitalising on this. She also stressed that the Catholic Church is influencing the debate on abortion rights and blocking a woman's right to choose. She reported a 21% rise in mental illness in Spain and that the increase in waiting time for a hospital bed has led to a rise in deaths. Cise Midoglu (UWEF) said that in Turkey extensive privatisation is making health care inaccessible. The society is beset by superstition and religious dogma which is restricting the role of women in society and making them more isolated.

After a fruitful discussion the seminar endorsed a statement to be handed to the European Parliament Committees for the Women's Rights and Health. In closing the seminar, WIDF Regional Co-ordinator, **Christina Skaloubaka** (OGE) called on delegates to view the fight for free, public healthcare as the fight for life itself.

the Women's International Democratic Federation's European Region demands for a free, publically owned healthcare system:



- A fully funded universal healthcare service exclusively public and free of charge at the point of use for all the people
- Preventive medical tests for women and children free of charge
- Medicines supplied free of charge
- Free of charge maternity care and specialist support for pre and post natal care
- Hospitals and health centres should be fully equipped and staffed to meet the people's needs. Staff recruitment with full-time, permanent and exclusive contracts
- Universal access to free of charge reproductive, gynecological, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) and abortion services
- Healthcare at workplaces, schools, playgrounds, gyms etc by occupational health specialists and safety experts that are employed by the state instead of private
- Public home care services free of charge
- Abolishment of all fees and every business activity in health-care-welfare-medicine, as this is the only way to achieve contemporary, high-standard, global and free of charge health services for all the people and especially for women and children that need them the most

FOR THE FULL STATEMENT SEE WWW.SISTERS.ORG.UK

women's physical and mental health

ANITA WRIGHT PRESENTED THE FOLLOWING REPORT AT THE WIDF SEMINAR IN BRUSSELS IN FEBRUARY 2015

SINCE the elections in May 2010 the Conservative-led coalition government has used the economic crisis to launch an offensive against working class people and their families. They are ruthlessly pursuing policies to restore the profits of the financial sector and to use the British state and government to enforce the interests of big business at whatever cost to the mass of workers and their families.

This has meant unprecedented cuts in state expenditure and the privatisation of the public sector, particularly the National Health Service and education. The result for ordinary families has been lower wages, a rise in unemployment and poverty. These measures have had a disproportionate impact on women as workers, service users and carers and are having serious consequences for women's physical and mental wellbeing.

hospital emergency and maternity services under threat

Cuts to health care services and the introduction of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 have paved the way for greater privatisation of services. This has resulted in staff shortages, longer waiting times, and the downgrading or closure of over 30 accident and emergency units and 33 maternity units.

Community campaigners and trade unions have vigorously fought against these policies, and there have been some successes notably the campaign to save Accident and Emergency and maternity services at Lewisham hospital in south London.

WWW.KEEPOURNHSPUBLIC.COM

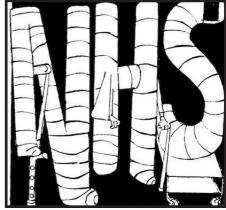
mental health services chronically underfunded

Higher unemployment and poverty inevitably leads to a rise in depression and other mental health problems. Mental health services are already chronically underfunded, getting only 13% of the NHS budget despite mental health problems accounting for 28% of ill health. In March 2014 the NHS England and Monitor, the health regulator recommended cutting funding for



mental health services by 20% more than that for acute hospitals in complete contravention of the government's promise to put mental and physical healthcare on an equal footing. They did this to shift resources and cover up the underfunding in the hospital sector which was putting patients' lives at risk.

Early intervention teams who provide services for children and young people have also seen cuts of 50% in the last year which places a huge burden on families, particularly mothers who are the main carer.



under attack



domestic violence services at breaking point

Over 1.2 million women were estimated to have experienced domestic violence in 2013 and two women a week are killed by perpetrators. The government could significantly reduce the number of women and children hurt and killed by violent partners but has refused to adequately fund the voluntary sector that provides women's refuges. A survey undertaken by Women's Aid last year showed that in one day alone 155 women and 100 children were turned away. Changes to legal aid which limits funding for some cases have also adversely impacted on women's ability to protect themselves and children from violence and harassment.

sure start nurseries and children's centres face more budget cuts

Sure Start nurseries and Children's Centre's were created by the previous Labour government to provide child care and family services to disadvantaged families offering parenting support, help for job seekers and classes to learn English. The funding was ringfenced and administered through the local authority. The current government removed the ring-fencing and because of cuts to local councils this service now faces huge pressures.

Department for Education's data has found that, when compared to spending in 2011-12, there has been an overall cut of 20% over the three years amounting to £830m less than it otherwise would have been. This has meant that many centres have been forced to close or drastically reduce their service. Many councils are consulting on changes, including Newcastle, which wants to close all 20 of its centres; Liverpool, which plans to close 23 out of 26; and Staffordshire, which wants to slash its number from 54 to 10.

sexual health, contraceptive and abortion services under threat

Family planning and sexual health advice services like other health services have faced massive cuts. The Family Planning Association forecasts the impact of further cuts:

■ up to 83,648 additional live births resulting from a rise in unplanned pregnancies

- STIs are currently rising with 5% increase. The restriction of other sexual health services could lead to a further extra 91,620 STIs per year
- an additional £10bn in costs to the NHS and welfare should cuts worsen
- This will increase the UK's future health and welfare expenditure by £136.7 billion; equating to an 8.7% increase in total costs;

This warning came despite well-known insights that investment in sexual health provision actually saves money. For every £1 spent on contraception, the nation saves £12.50.

The rise in unplanned pregnancies and continued attempts by anti-choice campaigners to restrict access to safe, free abortion services could have a hugely detrimental effect on women's health and their long term wellbeing.

european union and usa trade agreement a threat to health services

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is a comprehensive free trade and investment treaty currently being negotiated - in secret - between the European Union and the USA. The main goal of TTIP is to remove regulatory 'barriers' which restrict the potential profits to be made by transnational corporations on both sides of the Atlantic. If this agreement is finalised it will hold a particular threat to the public sector, including our National Health Service, which the government refuses to exempt it from. It will tie the hands of all future governments - because TTIP includes an Investor State Dispute Settlement clause which means that once invited in, private companies will gain the right to sue if they are ever booted out by a programme of nationalisation.

HTTP://WWW.KEEPOURNHSPUBLIC.COM HTTP://999CALLFORNHS.ORG.UK

Manchester Council to run local NHS: The recently announced deal between George Osborne and Manchester to devolve responsibility for NHS services to the local council paves the way for the further fragmentation of our NHS. The Greater Manchester Devolution Agreement has been pushed with no through democratic engagement or mandate from the millions of people whose lives will be affected. As local council budgets get squeezed even further it is inevitable that like other services the NHS in the area will be outsources or privatised.

HTTP://WWW.THEPEOPLESASSEMBLY. ORG.UK/MANCHESTER

for a peaceful world |21 march:



THE WORLD PEACE COUNCIL –
CAMPAIGNING FOR A JUST, DEMOCRATIC
AND PEACEFUL WORLD. LIZ PAYNE REPORTS
ON THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WORLD
PEACE COUNCIL

THE World Peace Council (WPC) describes itself as "an anti-imperialist, democratic, independent and non-aligned international movement of mass action". It is the largest peace organisation in the world, being based in more than 100 countries and is an NGO member of the United Nations.

While attending the annual meeting of its Executive Committee in Goa, India in November 2014, I was struck by the synergy of purpose between the WPC, which celebrates its 65th anniversary this year and Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) which is celebrating its 70th anniversary. Both organisations were born in the wake of the defeat of Hitler fascism to help bring about a world in which the war and terror it unleashed could never happen again. The WIDF is based on the premise that women can only achieve justice in conditions where peace prevails and that the cessation of war is a pre-requisite of women's equality. In introducing this the 65th year since the establishment of the WPC, its President, Socorro Gomes said, "We will continue to organise and engage in campaigns of great relevance, for the eradication of military bases spread over the world, for the elimination of nuclear weapons, for NATO's dissolution and for a new international system which can replace the current retrograde one".

The WPC also campaigns for the elimination of chemical and biological weapons and the reduction of conventional arms. It supports liberation movements and the resolution of

regional conflicts on the basis of the right of people to self-determination and works in the interests of economic and social development towards the creation of a just, democratic and peaceful world.

All of this was reflected in detail in the report of work presented to the Executive Committee by WPC General Secretary, Thanassis Pafilis. It outlined the issues that the WPC had addressed and the activities in which it has been engaged across the continents, including supporting the protests at the NATO summit in South Wales in September. Imperialism's New Middle East Plan was condemned. One speaker said that the Middle East is being reborn through catastrophe.

Those present stressed that campaigners for peace must counter the ideological barrage from the mass media which presents horrific military aggression as "humanitarian". The final communique of the meeting stated unequivocally that imperialism in all its forms is the enemy of peace and asked that peace organisations to mark the 70th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by demanding the abolition of nuclear weapons and the 40th anniversary of the liberation of South Vietnam by calling for the banning of all chemical armaments.

The All India Peace and Solidarity Organisation (AIPSO), which hosted the meeting of the WPC Executive, also organised a one day seminar on Palestine to coincide with the UN Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Speakers at the seminar included Raja, Annie Secretary of the National Federation of Indian Women and the writer and academic, Githa Hariharan who won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1993 for her first novel The Thousand Faces of Night. Hundreds of local people, including scores of school and college students, packed into a local venue for the final rally in solidarity with the Palestinian people addressed by WPC and AIPSO leaders.

Overall, the five days spent in Goa were for me an inspiration and an affirmation of the strength and potential of international cooperation for a peaceful and just world.

There is currently an initiative underway in Britain to reactivate the British Peace Assembly as an affiliate of the WPC.

This was welcomed by the WPC executive and it looked forward to working with the organisation.

21 march: united nations antiracism day

N 2014, 10,000 people marched in central London for UN Anti-Racism day which commemorates the anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre in Apartheid South Africa. It was part of a series of demonstrations across Europe and around the world.

People are taking to the streets in large numbers to oppose the racist Pegida movement in Germany and the Neo-Nazi Golden Dawn in Greece, and to protest against institutional racism and police violence against Black communities.

People are outraged at the Islamophobic and anti-Semitic backlash after the Copenhagen and Paris attacks, and the mass media silence on the Chapel Hill shootings where three Muslim students were brutally shot dead, so many have mobilised under the slogan 'Muslim Lives Matter'.

Immigrant communities are fed up with being wrongly blamed for an economic crisis they did not create.

On UN anti-racism day people across the world will be taking a stand. A huge demonstration this year in Britain, just a month before the General Election will send a powerful message to all politicians that we are the many and we will stand up against racism.

SATURDAY 21 MARCH 2015

MARCH AND RALLY ORGANISED BY STAND UP TO RACISM, SUPPORTED BY THE TUC

ASSEMBLE 12 NOON
BBC PORTLAND PLACE, LONDON W1A 1AA
(NEAREST TUBE OXFORD CIRCUS)
RALLY IN TRAFALGAR SOUARE



dignity in age

YVONNE WASHBOURNE REPORTS ON THE DIGNITY CODE CAMPAIGN

YVONNE (SECOND FROM LEFT) IS CHAIR OF THE MIDLAND REGION TUC'S PENSIONERS NETWORK AND AN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER OF THE NAW

AS part of the ongoing NHS campaign and promoting the National Pensioners Convention's (NPC) Dignity Code, I helped organise two events in the West Midlands in January 2015, one at the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham and the other in Wolverhampton's Civic Hall. The need to continue the fight against privatisation in the NHS was well received and hundreds signed our petition which will be presented to local politicians.

The petition supporting the Dignity Code, which demands that the rights and personal dignity of older people less able to care for themselves is maintained, also had a great response. Some gave horror stories but many praised Care Workers who were doing a great job on low pay and on zero hours contracts.

The Dignity Code although primarily about older people, recognises that in order to deliver its demands workers need to be treated with dignity too and provided with proper training, good conditions of service and a proper work/life balance.

Some local authorities, GPs and Care Homes have signed up to the Code including the new care minister, Norman Lamb MP. Following a recent meeting with the minister, the NPC is now discussing with the Department of Health how to distribute the Code across every hospital, GP surgery and care home. Already many local authorities have signed up to the Code, alongside a number of MPs, care providers, regulators, academics and charities but more is needed. You can support the campaign by writing to your local council and MP and asking them to add their names

While Care Workers, the NHS and Older People are seen as only a cog in a money making machine the campaigns for Dignity and the NHS must continue as they are intrinsically linked.





the npc dignity code

The purpose of this Dignity Code is to uphold the rights and maintain the personal dignity of older people, within the context of ensuring the health, safety and well being of those who are increasingly less able to care for themselves or to properly conduct their affairs.

This Code recognises that certain practices and actions are unacceptable to older people, such as:

- Being abusive or disrespectful in any way, ignoring people or assuming they cannot do things for themselves
- Treating older people as objects or speaking about them in their presence as if they were not there
- Not respecting the need for privacy
- Not informing older people of what is happening in a way that they can understand
- Changing the older person's environment without their permission
- Intervening or performing care without consent
- Using unnecessary medication or restraints
- Failing to take care of an older person's personal appearance
- Not allowing older people to speak for themselves, either directly or through the use of a friend, relative or advocate
- Refusing treatment on the grounds of age

This Code therefore calls for:

- Respect for individuals to make up their own minds, and for their personal wishes as expressed in 'living wills', for implementation when they can no longer express themselves clearly
- Respect for an individual's habits, values, particular cultural background and any needs, linguistic or otherwise
- The use of formal spoken terms of address, unless invited to do otherwise
- Comfort, consideration, inclusion, participation, stimulation and a sense of purpose in all aspects of care
- Care to be adapted to the needs of the individual
- Support for the individual to maintain their hygiene and personal appearance
- Respect for people's homes, living space and privacy
- Concerns to be dealt with thoroughly and the right to complain without fear of retribution
- The provision of advocacy services where appropriate

NATIONAL PENSIONERS' CONVENTION WALKDEN HOUSE, 10 MELTON STREET LONDON NW1 2EJ

WWW.NPCUK.ORG

Barbara White mayor after the elect of Redbridge

few months ago, much to my surprise, a whisper was going around that I was going to be put forward for the Mayor of Redbridge. I never thought that this would happen to me as I have only been a councillor for just under five years. Sure enough my

ed unopposed.

What does the job entail I ask myself. To tell you the truth I don't really know but I have had some training on the local citizenship events where the Mayor plays a leading role.

Something that I have found out about is "Mayors for Peace". With the belief that we must not allow any repetition of the tragedies caused by atom-

the people's manifesto

The People's Assembly Against Austerity launched The People's Manifesto at its national meeting held in Manchester at the end of February. The Manifesto sets out in a clear and straightforward way an alternative economic plan which would build a fairer and just society. The Manifesto also throws down a challenge to all the candidates in the forthcoming General Election to say exactly where they stand on austerity. This is a timely and useful document which deserves a wide distribution.

WWW.THEPEOPLESASSEMBLY.ORG.UK

Mayors for Peace name was put forward and I was elect-

ic bombings, Hiroshima and Nagasaki established Mayors for Peace on 24 June 1982 to realise lasting world peace through inter-solidarity around the globe. Today, Mayors for Peace has grown to more than 6,000 member cities in 160 countries and regions. It goes without saying that I will be urging our council to allow me to join.

I become Mayor of Redbridge on 14 May 2015 so that will be a big day for me. Speaking of big, all of the Mayor's robes drown me and are far too heavy for me to wear so they are having a new robe made for me. As these are times of austerity cuts I did suggest going to Mothercare and buying a little red riding hood outfit as that would be cheaper but they are going ahead with the new robes.

Please send me lots of positive thoughts on the 14 May as I will need

BARBARA WHITE IS A MEMBER OF THE NAW **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

WWW.MAYORSFORPEACE.ORG

general election what now for women?

Saturday 17 October and Sunday 18 October 2015

From 2pm Saturday to 12 noon Sunday

Wortley Hall, Wortley Village, Sheffield S35 7DB

A weekend seminar organised by the NAW with the support and financial assistance of the Raymond Williams

autumn seminar

Time to take stock and plan the way forward. Small group discussions, with keynote speakers announced

All-in (subsidised) fees: £60 twin sharing, £72 single room (includes en suite bedroom, all meals, refreshments and all sessions)

There will be a few bursaries available for those in receipt of benefits, please ask.

Non-residents are welcome – fee £28

Places are limited and will be confirmed on receipt of a cheque for the relevant amount

ENQUIRIES AND BOOKINGS: PAMFLYNN@COOPTEL.NET 0161 249 0943

what's on

NAW **Executive** The next Committee meeting (open to all members) is Saturday 21 March in London

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

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

A colour pdf of Sisters can be downloaded at 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 (notional)

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

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Address	
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