

WOMEN'S
INTERNATIONAL
DEMOCRATIC
FEDERATION
DELEGATES IN
CYPRUS



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2 trade union women

3 NAW agm

4 save our NHS

5 1955 congress

6 against homophobia

7 sheffield celebrates

isters

TUC... led by **women!**

I was delighted to be invited to speak at the South Yorkshire Festival on 6 July. I have made equality one of the main themes of my TUC presidency and have seized on any opportunity that has come my way to elaborate on why we need to keep up the struggle for equality, from the TUC women's conference in March to the women chainmakers' festival in June.

To be elected last September as the first TUC president to come from a combined professional body and trade union was special in itself. But to take up the post at the same time as the TUC elected its first woman general secretary in its 160 years was even more special. Frances O'Grady joins Bernadette Segal at the European TUC and Sharan Burrow at the International TUC – three incredibly talented women at the top of the trade union movement!

With women now making up more than half of all trade union members, this is only right and proper. Clearly we need to build on the progress and ensure that women can get through to senior positions throughout the trade union movement. But what a contrast with other parts of public life.

Women still make up less than a

quarter of all MPs – a paltry 3.9% increase in the last 12 years. Of all the western European countries only Italy, Ireland and Monaco had a lower percentage of women legislators than the UK in 2012. Women are also badly under-represented on company boards, in the media, the judiciary, the police, and the list goes on. So continuing to press the case for fairer representation in these areas is important too. And maybe, just maybe, it's time to revisit the arguments for and against quotas if this is what is needed to kickstart progress in some areas?

The TUC is campaigning on another area of inequality that my own union, the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, is enthusiastically supporting. The *Age Immaterial* campaign is focused on the position of women in their 50s. Women in this little-talked about age group earn nearly a fifth less than men of the same age if they work full-time, and even less if they work part-time. They are also being disproportionately hit by the job cuts in the public sector. So the new campaign is very timely.

There is no doubt that the challenges facing the trade union movement right now are pretty daunting.



But I firmly believe they are not insurmountable. We have the confidence that comes with being part of a movement of over six million people, the largest democratic grouping in the country. We have the organisation that comes from having a large network of local union representatives. We have the arguments on our side. And we have the staying power!

BY LESLEY MERCER
PRESIDENT, TRADES UNION CONGRESS

feminism and socialism



It is just two months since the TUC Women's Conference met.

It was a lively and packed agenda, at moments very moving as well as inspiring. Among our number were excellent orators and brave sisters who drew from their own experience to support debate on violence and abuse.

Conference wasn't short on laughter or anger – shining through was a determination, no matter how tough the challenge that organised women can make a difference.

The theme, "Women – organise & mobilise" could not have been more fitting.

According to a report published in May 2013 by Church Action and Oxfam, more than 500,000 people in the UK rely on food banks. The TUC Women's Conference debated the impact on families of working for a pittance with purchasing power stagnating or decreasing for the majority while the richest in society grow ever richer.

Fiery speeches slammed the injustice of increasing economic and health inequality not seen in the UK since the depression of the 1930s. Sisters pointed to the post war government who chose to establish the welfare state, the NHS and build decent homes to rent – the alternative to austerity, the cause of immeasurable harm whilst choking economic recovery. And it was my pleasure to introduce the TUC's first woman General Secretary – Frances O'Grady speaks our language and was warmly welcomed.

As chair of the TUC Women's Conference it is possible to scan the room, witness the interaction between delegates – coaxing and encouraging first time speakers, reading through sisters' notes always ready to give warm applause.

The one potentially contentious debate was conducted seriously and with passion yet delegates showed genuine respect for opposing opinions and the outcome was received with dignity all round.

Of course sisters pushed all the policies on – turning motions into resolutions for action, yet it is the conduct of the TUC Women's Conference that makes it such a special event. So much of what delegates say is grounded in what they are doing in their workplaces and communities, solid trade unionism that helps people day in and day out.

The theme of my speech was women's power, feminism and worker's power socialism – the conference left me feeling that one day achieving this dream will be possible – and that both are worth fighting for.

BY GAIL CARTMAIL
UNITE ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY

inspiring and enjoyable!



MY earliest experience of the NAW was of seeing the heavy door of the NAW Lounge at Wortley Hall in Sheffield close with a thud, and a rise of impassioned but inaudible voices discussing matters beyond my understanding. This would have been 20 years ago, when my main priority would have been securing a steady supply of chocolate snacks and fizzy drinks from the bar and being free to play in the grounds with the other children of my parents' comrades. Returning to Wortley and to the refurbished NAW Garden Room, now dedicated to former member Celia Pomerey, in May this year for the 51st AGM and my first as a new member, I had somewhat different priorities.

Whilst I was raised as a child in a politicised environment, with both parents involved heavily in the Communist Party, the trade union movement, as well as numerous campaign activities, I have never felt politically engaged myself. I was prompted to join the NAW by my mother and felt that it would be a tentative step to engaging more fully with the issues that affect us all but particularly those that hit women the hardest.

As a new member I dutifully read the papers I had received in advance and poured over the motions that were to be discussed. These were wide ranging and international in their impact and felt burning with relevance for someone of my or any generation. However, I was still unclear how this would translate to the experience on the day and felt slightly apprehensive that I would be out of my depth.

On arrival, any nervousness evaporated quickly with the warm welcome from the President and all members present. Members introduced themselves, highlighting the wealth of experience and knowledge held in the membership of the NAW. I was humbled by the breadth and diversity of their backgrounds and encouraged to hear that I was not the only first-time attendee. It would have been easy to feel intimidated by a group of such

accomplished women but instead I felt inspired and eager to listen (and perhaps contribute) to the discussions ahead. I would later find that contributions were welcome, encouraged, and added to the lively and at times lengthy debate.

The highlight of the day for me was the opportunity to hear from the guest speaker Rafeef Ziadah, Palestinian spoken word artist and Senior Campaigns Officer from War on Want. She explained that her initial intent was to bring the many facts and figures relating to war to this meeting but instead decided to bring the effect that war has on women in particular. As a refugee from Palestine, she described her first hand experience of conflict and its impact on the last four generations of women in her family, none living beyond 30 years of age. The impact of war on women stretches beyond the violence of combat itself. Rafeef talked of the rise of poverty, loss of healthcare and education affecting women and children most as well as sexual violence, the use of rape as a weapon and the rise of trafficking and prostitution that all too often spring from conflict.

Rafeef also spoke of the wider implications of war. Whilst the role of large corporations in the running of our countries is often discussed, War on Want's current campaign to *Stop the Business of War* is more timely than ever. Whilst I was keenly aware of the increasing privatisation of public services, highlighted in the current fight to save the NHS against this government's attacks, I was not fully aware of the increasing privatisation of war. War On Want's campaign makes clear our current government's disturbing embrace of private military and security companies to perform operations that had previously been carried out by national military forces. These companies are left to regulate themselves, preventing communities and governments to fully hold them to account. Rafeef's impassioned and inspiring

words drove home the need to raise the awareness of the impact of war on women and highlight those who seek to continue conflict for profit.

Throughout the course of the rest of the day, three motions were also brought for discussion. These included 'The Government Attack on Women', moved by Anita Wright. A motion reiterating the NAW's commitment to peace, moved by Lydia Merrill which built on the Rafeef Ziadah's earlier words regarding the impact that war has on women, and restating the NAW's commitment to peace. The third motion moved by Pam Flynn discussed violence against women and also updated members on Manchester based human rights organisation, RAPAR and their ongoing support of Mary Adenugba and her campaign to stay in the UK after becoming a victim of trafficking.

After a day of intense and active debate, many members stayed on to enjoy an evening meal held in the beautifully decorated FBU Dining Room. It gave all of us a chance to relax and of course continue the discussions, many of which went well on into the night with the help of the bar!

The following morning, with a head swimming with new information and enthusiasm I decided to extend my trip to stay for the Executive Committee meeting. Any interested members could attend and this further experience gave me a better understanding of the way that the NAW operates.

Further to the previous day's motion regarding austerity it was decided that the NAW would have a presence at the People's Assembly at Central Hall Westminster on 22 June. With a new perspective on Wortley Hall and the NAW, I left looking forward to standing with my new sisters as part of the NAW at this event and many more yet to come.

MEGAN WRIGHT, NAW MEMBER
WWW.RAPAR.ORG.UK
WWW.WARONWANT.ORG
WWW.THEPEOPLESASSEMBLY.ORG.UK



save our **NHS!**

A few months ago I attended a three day course for trade union full time officials who had recently taken on responsibility to cover some of our trade union members in the NHS. We were not fully aware up until then just what was happening to our NHS and just how serious the situation is. The conclusion I and my colleagues reached was that the public are unaware that our NHS is being destroyed from under our feet, we decided to commit to fighting for OUR NHS.

The following explanation may be helpful...

A slow process of privatisation has taken place which is introducing markets and private profit. However, now everything is speeding up. The privatisation of our NHS is taking place through the following combination.

- The reduction of the role of government in regulating health provisions.
- Transferring services to the private sector through "commissioning" from "any qualified providers" such as the independent sector treatment centres, Circle, Serco and Virgin Care.
- Outsourcing of parts of services to the private sector (Cleaning, IT, Pathology, Security).
- The creation of market mechanisms

for the distribution of funding within the NHS.

■ The use of "Private Finance Initiatives" that use private money to build new buildings and infrastructure which the state then pays for.

■ The creation of foundation trusts that are run very like private companies, and can raise money through private patients paying for their services.

■ Allowing services to become not-for-profit co-operatives, or mutuals which will then leave public ownership.

■ Limiting access to some services which were previously provided by our NHS.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012, it leading to privatisation mainly in two ways...

■ The abolition of the democratic and legal basis of our NHS in England. The Act ended the Secretary of State's duty to secure or provide health services throughout the country, it transfers and waters down many of these duties to various different bodies, including Clinical Commissioning Groups, the NHS Commissioning Board (now known as NHS England), and regional commissioning support units and Monitor. In practise these organisations will be deciding what services

will be delivered, who will deliver them, and which service will be freely available and WHO will receive it.

■ Foundation Trusts – the Act makes it obligatory for all NHS hospitals to become Foundation Trusts by 2014. Foundation Trusts are hospitals set up like businesses with governance structures that grant them greater levels of autonomy over the use and disposal of OUR NHS assets. They are able to raise private finance and enter into agreements with the private sector, which has already led to hospital departments being outsourced to private providers, such as cleaning, maintenance, pathology and pharmacy.

Foundation Trusts can also raise funds by treating private patients, which can lead to queue jumping.

The above is by way of an explanation showing how we have got where we are today. I am sure that we can still make a difference, by getting involved in the organisations that are being set up, by joining together in a broad alliance of the people who OUR NHS belongs to. There are broad alliances across the country made up of people in our communities, the trade unions, and various pressure groups, young mums etc. I urge you to get involved because I know that we can make a difference together.

It is important also to note that the above article applies to only England at the moment.

BY ROSE KEEPING, NAW EC MEMBER

it changed her life...

THE NAW recently received a lovely letter from 93 year old Nan Phillips from Pitteucher, in Glenrothes, Fife, Scotland. She wanted to pass on to us some of the speeches and the delegates report from the first ever World Congress of Mothers which was held in Lausanne in Switzerland in 1955.

Nan was part of a delegation of 25 - 30 women from all over the UK who attended this Congress with over 1,000 women from 66 countries from the five continents. They reached the conclusion that "the world is big enough for everyone to find her/his space in it and live in peace".

Four days of friendships made in a flash of understanding, of informal chats and formal talks, of laughter and tears, compassion and indignation at what they had to tell one another – and at the end everyone of them agreeing "let us make a vow to remain united and meet more often in defence of our children against war, and for disarmament and friendships between peoples. Let our millions of hands stretch over the earth to clasp one another in friendship".

Nan was born into a mining family, her father was a miner and she later met and married a miner herself. Nan

and her husband Dick went on to have a daughter and two sons.

Nan's hopes for a better life for her family led her to take a more active part in the local issues and politics within her area. She joined the Cooperative Women's Guild, she also attended meetings of the local Communist Party. Then when local elections were called she decided to stand against the current Labour Councillor for the Kirkcaldy area and won the seat for Labour by doubling their majority and became the first women Labour Councillor. This brought a lot of local and national media attention. After serving for two years she discovered she was pregnant with her daughter and stood down from the council but not from politics, and campaigned on whilst bringing up her daughter. When her daughter was three years old she received a letter from the National Assembly of Women's Branch in Glasgow inviting her to attend a Worldwide Congress of Women to be held in Lausanne in Switzerland. With her husband working long hours in the mines of Fife, it didn't look like she would be able to attend. But when they realised the dates coincided with Dick's holiday from work they decided

she should attend, and he would look after their daughter and as Nan told me "it changed her life forever".

She met some wonderful women, some talked about experiencing pain-free childbirths, another was related to Anne Frank, there was only one other miner's wife there from Japan and they shared information about mining in their respective countries. Some women wondered why they were talking about hygiene when half the world was starving. A Bulgarian delegate wanted her to translate *Auld Lang Syne* into Bulgarian for them (that was not easy to do). A Russian delegate asked why she was not wearing a kilt. Another delegate signed that although they did not understand each other's language they could communicate with their hearts. Nan said "although it was overwhelming, it was also stimulating and inspiring".

From that day, some 58 years later, Nan is still campaigning and volunteering on issues to help others, such as carers in the community hours being cut. As Nan says "you cannot help someone if you are not allowed enough time to do it", she has mobility and health problems so does not get out much, but she is always at the end of a telephone, a wonderful example of the strength of women united.

BY JANETTE FERGUSON, SISTERS EDITOR

1955 world congress of mothers

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE IS FROM A DELEGATION REPORT FROM THE NAW WOMEN WHO ATTENDED THE WORLD CONGRESS OF MOTHERS IN JULY 1955. A FULL COPY OF DELEGATES' REPORT AND SPEECHES WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE ON WWW.SISTERS.ORG.UK

What an adventure it was to be going abroad, perhaps for the first time, to arrive in the beautiful Swiss city of Lausanne in the midst of lakes and mountains, to find oneself in the Congress Hall aglow with the blue and white colours of peace, to meet our sisters from far-off lands, many of them dressed in their lovely national costumes.

No wonder Mrs Ruth Jennings from Bradford wrote: "What a wonderful time we had at Congress... How the face of each lovely mother will remain with us. I think each of us must feel that we have sown a seed of world-wide love and great universal sisterhood and world peace.

Then Mrs Rita Jeffers from Tees-side, Northern England: said "Dear friends this is the first time I have ever made a speech. I am just an ordinary working-class woman. But as a mother of seven schoolchildren I welcome very much the opportunity to be present at this great Congress. This makes me understand what power the ordinary woman has.

Madame Eugenie Cotton beloved leader of the women's movement in France, and known throughout the world, explained in her opening speech why this Congress had been arranged.

"The essential aim of this Congress must be" she said "to unite women firmly together, all women who make up half the human race, into an unconquerable band. "Dear friends" she said, "we the mothers are here today, to insist on respect for life, respect for the lives of our children... The people's will is expressed through the voice of public opinion, and we know that women play a very great part in the formation of this opinion. The time has come when we are no longer content to influence our husbands and sons, but when we ourselves hold the floor."

It was in this spirit that the conference began its work.

Mrs Jessie Bairnsfather of London talked about a "special problem of education and childcare". She said "I am the mother of four children three are perfectly normal and clever children, in fact one of them my eldest son goes to university next year. My youngest unfortunately, was born with impaired mental faculties.

"Mentally impaired children" she declared, "have the right to not only maintenance, but to training to fit them for the best job of which they are capable". She went on to tell Congress

about the nursery she had set up for special needs children and the work both she and parents of other children were doing.

Who could listen unmoved to the words of the mothers of Japan pleading to all other mothers to join them in protesting against the manufacture and use of atomic and hydrogen bombs. "I do not know how I can explain the grief and agonies of 10 years ago", said Mme Yamaguchi of Nagasaki, recalling the atom bomb explosions both there and in Hiroshima which in a fraction of a moment killed 200,000 people.

"On the second day of my searching, I came upon the cold, dead body of my husband. What a cruel sight it was, torn flesh, half of his body burnt! What a changed man of mine! He must have undergone agony at the thought of his wife and children, he must have cried for water in the dying light of his soul. I hugged his body and cried... I have been weeping for 10 years and wishing that the father of my children were living. The house was burnt down, our property lost and we had to live in a cave with scarcely any food. "At that time I found I was two and a half months pregnant. In the midst of burnt fields and on a zinc slab I gave birth to my second child who knows no father. Now she is 10 years old, but compared with my first daughter she is very weak and has to see the doctor often, perhaps the effect of radio-activity when she was still unborn."

Who could listen unmoved by the mother from the French village of Oradour, which the Nazis destroyed; the mother from the Czech mining village of Lidice; the Soviet mother who said that no home in her vast country had been spared "the black wing of war"; or by the words of the Catholic mother Mme Clotilde Cassigoli from Florence, Italy who told the Congress "You see before you a simple old mother who never dreamed of coming to discover, at a time of life when her hair had turned white, such intense emotion or such extraordinary reasons for deep and genuine joy. But since I entered this hall I have seen reflected in so many different faces my identity as a mother – costumes and races I have never seen before, Indian, Korean, Russian mothers – here a black woman with her little boy – thousands of mothers of all races, of all countries, but with one heart. I am old, but this spectacle has moved me to the depth of my being. I feel myself a mother in the most universal sense of the word".

Black were the veils worn by the five women from Iraq – all who were allowed to go to the Congress from the 30 mothers wishing to. They told of courageous demonstrations for

peace and of the 20 women now in prison, including a 12 year old girl.

"As we listened" reports Mrs Bess Marsh (a delegate from East Anglia), "we realised that they were in danger of being imprisoned on their return".

Black was the colour of the skin of the baby boy brought all this way to Lausanne by the African mother who couldn't leave him behind, and black was the colour of the beautiful fan given to Mrs Nan Phillips, a miner's wife from Glenrothes, Fife in Scotland, (who has given all of the speeches and the full report to the NAW) by the only other miner's wife present, "a very dainty personage, with almond eyes and a gorgeous silk kimono who had travelled all the way from Japan.

To a Malayan woman the British delegates presented a hand-embroidered belt with greetings from the National Assembly of Women.

The Congress was split into four groups to discuss: The Power of Ideas; Health Problems; Social Security for Children; Education in the Family in School and in Society.

Three important documents were issued by the Congress: A call to the mothers of the whole world; A letter to the four Great Powers (who were preparing to meet in Geneva); A letter to the United Nations.

In closing the Congress Mme Cotton said "As I had expected when opening our work, Congress has already borne fruit. It has helped many delegates to a better understanding of the importance of the unity of mothers".

To further still more this unity, she then proposed that a permanent international Mothers' Committee should be set up, and this was greeted with great enthusiasm. Such a Committee would ensure that the work of the Congress will be continued, so that new meetings, broader still than the Congress will be prepared.

In the spirit of the World Congress of Mothers and our own Charter which demands for mothers the right to bring children into a world free from the fear of war, the National Assembly of Women will do all in its power to work for peace.

As a first activity from the Mothers Congress, the Assembly launched on 4 September, a message to the Prime Minister urging our government to enter into the meeting of the Four Great Powers at Geneva in October prepared seriously to examine all positive proposals to achieve a substantial reduction in armaments, the banning of all atomic and hydrogen weapons and for ending experiments with them, and as a first gesture of Britain's goodwill, to reduce the period of military service to 12 months.

DO YOU REMEMBER THE CONGRESS?
PLEASE CONTACT NAW@SISTERS.ORG.UK

against homophobia

INTERNATIONAL Day Against Homophobia has been celebrated on 17 May every year since 1990 (the day homosexuality was removed from the mental illness list of the World Health Organisation). However, Trans is still listed as a mental disorder.

In almost 80 countries around the world loving someone of the same sex is illegal, at times involving life imprisonment and in nine countries punishable by death. In many countries still, citizens may not live according to their preferred gender identity.

Even though much improved in the UK, we still remember Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) people bombed, beaten and killed both in society and at work.

As well as "legal" discrimination, social homophobia and transphobia serve daily to deny millions of people across the world their basic dignity.

International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) was created in 2004 to draw the attention of politicians, policy makers, opinion leaders, social bodies, the public and media to the issues. It is not a centralised campaign, rather a focus for individuals and organisations to take action to challenge ongoing discrimination and denial of human rights to LGBT people.

IDAHO is now celebrated in more

than 100 countries as diverse as Australia, Iran, Cameroon and Albania! It has received official recognition from several states and such institutions as the European Parliament and countless local authorities. Of particular note is the UN Declaration of Montreal in 2006 enshrining the human rights of LGBT people, but also agreeing to promote the 17 May as IDAHO. Most UN Agencies mark the day with specific events.

LGBT Organisations, trade unions, governments, human rights organisations, corporations and celebrities have all taken action on or around the 17 May to draw attention to the issue of Homophobia and Transphobia, organise events to mobilise positive public opinion, demand the attention of lawmakers and network with like-minded people.

The IDAHO Committee set up by the founders of IDAHO works all year to highlight the day itself, whilst continuing to support organisations to develop strategies and raise awareness.

This year's theme is "Fight the Web Virus". The campaign image shows a virus of course with no face and represents the anonymous abuse LGBT people find increasingly presented on the web. Unfortunately, the anonymity of the internal facilities and the spread

of abusive comments, has led to serious consequences, especially amongst younger LGBT people, in suicide and self harming.

17 May reminds us of the progress made by LGBT people, but also the challenges. Certain words, expressions and actions (even without intent) can hurt and have devastating impacts. Bullying and harassment are nothing new, but social media is giving it a new emphasis. But, as we all know "it is not homosexuality that leads to suicide, but rather homophobia".

The IDAHO site has much information to use, not just now but all year round. If you have a rainbow flag, fly it at home and work. Attend IDAHO events organised by trade unions or LGBT local groups.

Remember those who have lost their lives because of their sexuality or preferred gender identity. Watch the film *Call me KUCHA*, about a group of gay activists from Uganda and in particular David Kato killed in 2011 not long after filming was completed. It is a film that needs a wider showing especially in education establishments.

17 May is a focus, not an end in itself, there to remind us of the work yet to be done.

As David Kato remarks in the film "They say we are not here, but of late (recently) we are. You can destroy an individual, but you cannot destroy all LGBT people or our humanity.

BY YVONNE WASHBOURNE, NAW MEMBER

report from the WIDF

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION STEERING COMMITTEE REPORT BY ANITA WRIGHT, NAW SECRETARY

DELEGATES from 29 countries travelled to Cyprus in April to attend the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) Steering Committee meeting. NAW President Dona Feltham and Secretary Anita Wright joined sisters from Brazil, Cuba, Venezuela, Mozambique, North Korea, Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, Italy, Russia, Lebanon, Syria and Bahrain to review the decisions of the WIDF XV Congress held in Brazil in 2012.

Before the main plenary session, separate regional meetings were held. Each of the five regions – Europe, Asia, Africa, Middle East, Americas – has an elected representative (Vice President) who sits on the WIDF executive along with WIDF President, Marcia Campos. The regional meetings were an opportunity to share experiences of our campaigns and discuss future activities. A key concern in the European regional meeting was the impact on women of the austerity measures being imposed by the European Union and implemented by the various national governments. It was also noted

with concern that in this economic climate we were seeing the rise of right wing and fascist groups like the English Defence League in Britain and Golden Dawn in Greece.

Throughout the week, delegates also took part in several cultural events including an evening hosted by the Mayor of Larnaca, an evening of Cypriot dance, and a visit to the border area of the occupied territories. Steering Committee members also participated in a street demonstration in the capital Nicosia in solidarity with the people and women of Cyprus against the economic crisis and had the opportunity to go into the parliament building and present a message of solidarity to the President of the Assembly.

During the final plenary session delegates received a presentation on the economic situation in Cyprus from the General Secretary of the Akel Party and from Skevi Koutra Koukuma MP and European Vice President of WIDF which condemned the social and economic neo-liberal policies that was deliberately widening the gap between rich and poor.

The Steering Committee meeting concluded by agreeing a statement



expressing solidarity with sisters in struggle and opposing imperialist aggression, particularly in the Middle East and Korean peninsula. A plan of action was also agreed that included a series of solidarity visits; co-ordinating regional campaigns against austerity; organising events to celebrate significant dates like International Women's Day and planning for the 70th anniversary of the WIDF in 2015.

In closing the conference, Marcia Campos thanked the Cypriot Women's Organisation (POGO) who hosted the whole event and whose high level of organisation and political influence in the women's movement impressed everyone along with their generosity, warmth and humour. The next WIDF Steering Committee will take place in 2014, probably in Russia.

IWD sheffield style

SO how did you celebrate International Women's Day this year? Was it sharing a bottle of wine with friends, celebrating in your own community or at a big event organised by a large organisation with the capacity to do this. The women of Sheffield are lucky as there are lots of events around the city aimed at raising awareness and/or celebrating the achievements of women.

NAW members from the South Yorkshire branch were invited to a couple of events being held at the Town Hall. On the actual day the University of Sheffield organised a lunch where there was a discussion on whether quotas are required to break the glass ceiling. There were lots of arguments put forward on both sides and despite some very convincing arguments against the motion when it came to the vote the women there were 'sisterly' and voted for quotas. One of the Asian women attending said that European women were fortunate as theirs was a glass ceiling as Asian women had to fight through a concrete ceiling.

NAW members also attended a day conference on 'Celebrating Our Role Models' which was organised by the women in the Sheffield Centre for HIV and Sexual Health.

Julie Dore, leader of the City Council, welcomed everyone saying that she was lots of roles, politician, mother, daughter, sister, carer. She praised the women who had organised the 'One Billion & Rising' events.

The first speaker Tracey Dribble talked about contraception and gave an interesting and informative talk on the history of contraception from ancient Egypt through to the launch of the Pill in the 1960s. Contraception has changed women's lives; it has given them the opportunity to control their destiny. One of the earliest methods of contraception (which seems unbelievable to a child of the 60s) was to throw seeds into a river, the number of seeds being for the number of years you wished to avoid pregnancy; I wonder how often that worked... Other earlier methods included orally ingesting willow bark, or lead or arsenic; douching was favoured by the ancient Greeks and Romans and of course, the old favourite, the withdrawal method.

The most inspiring speakers were three young women from PASH who visit youth and school groups. They told us about the women who have inspired them.

Bronwyn is inspired by her sister and her mother. Her sister helped her to get over depression and helped her to believe in herself. Her mother, who despite living in poverty, went on to further education and fought for her children's rights.

Barbara is inspired by Maya Angelou the writer, poet and civil rights activist, plus Oprah Winfrey who has shown where hard work and a belief in yourself can get you.

Kristy is inspired by women who challenge traditional male roles, women like Sophia Jex Blake who studied and taught maths at Queens College although it was an unpaid role. Elizabeth Garret Anderson, the first woman to qualify and practice as a doctor. Elizabeth Blackwell the first woman to qualify as a doctor in the US.

Sophie Mei Lan, a journalist talked about women in the media, where women are still not always taken seriously. Thanks to this, she set-up Veritamag.com for which she won an award from Amnesty. Have we progressed? I suspect not as Sophie told us that she was advised not to mention that she was a mother when going for interviews as it would go against her.

Following this we heard a song specially written for International Women's Day; a mother singing to her daughter. We felt privileged to hear it. In addition, Carol Robinson read a couple of her poems which were disturbing. The first was about a female soldier in Iraq who was raped. The other was about a woman in her 60s suffering from dementia. Both were extremely thought provoking.

The President of the Students Union in Sheffield – Barbara Ntuny – spoke of how she became politically active by becoming involved in student politics. She believes that the Students Union has helped her to reach her potential. She talked about how politicians are alienating the young. Fifty years ago four in five young people voted, now it is one in five who vote.

Unison member Bev Miller spoke about how her trade union has led to her meeting like-minded people to fight discrimination. She reminded us that black women were only employed in areas that paid low wages when they first came to the UK, but they did get organised to challenge low pay. Today women, no matter what their ethnic background, are working together in their communities for a better life. She encourages all women to join a union, if only for the mutual support they provide.

Who would have thought that talking about menstruation could be so funny. If you disagree then you need to listen to Chella Quaint when talking about being 'period positive'. She says that it is all about being aware of your reproductive cycle, being comfortable with who you are and not being afraid of 'leaking'. She talked about the taboos and negative attitudes that women have to put up with, such things as 'sharks attack women who

are menstruating'. The media and advertising agencies insist that women have to 'cope with' or 'deal with' periods, which after all is just part of life. They are aimed at making women feel ashamed of themselves.

There were several workshops ranging from belly-dancing, to women and HIV, through to women in history and women in engineering. I attended the women in history workshop, where it was pointed out that throughout history women have contributed to the economic, political and social life of the city. Sheffield has its share of celebrities who have challenged traditional male roles, women such as Amy Johnson and Helen Sharman. Other women have made contributions to society such as Mary Holbery the Chartist who worked alongside her husband in fighting slavery. Women's charities in the city have campaigned and built hospitals. Women have worked alongside trade unionists to improve the lives of the citizens.

So at the end of the day, was it a celebration of women. Yes it was, it mainly celebrated those women who go about their everyday lives caring for others and in the process improving life for us all.

BY PAT PETERS, S YORKSHIRE NAW BRANCH

the Morning Star

The *Morning Star* is the only national daily newspaper owned by its readers and supporters that delivers news and comment from a socialist and working class perspective in Britain. This is why the National Assembly of Women decided to take out shares in the People's Press Printing Society Limited, the *Star's* parent company. The recent annual general meetings held in Birmingham, Leeds, Cardiff, Glasgow and London during May and June gave shareholders the chance to debate and discuss the past year and consider the paper's future. **Janette Ferguson** represented the NAW at the Glasgow meeting and was warmly welcomed by the *Morning Star* head of circulation, Bernadette Keaveney when speaking of the shares drive. The editor *Richard Bagley* outlined a number of developments notably the landmark deal with Trinity Mirror which guarantees daily delivery across Britain – particularly in Scotland where this has been problematic, and the launch of the new website and e-edition of the paper. The meetings concluded by agreeing the members of the Management Committee which include NAW Secretary **Anita Wright**.

south yorkshire festival 2013

Wortley Hall, Wortley Village
(near Sheffield)

Saturday 6 July 2013

The main theme of the festival is a
celebration of the **NAW's 60th year**

Speakers

Siobhan Endean Equalities
Officer, Unite the Union

Dona Feltham NAW President

Skevi Koutra Koukouma WIDF
Vice President for Europe and
Member of Parliament, Cyprus

Making Waves Choir

Lesley Mercer TUC President

<http://www.wortleyhall.org.uk/2012/11/south-yorkshire-festival-2.html>

sylvia pankhurst maquette

THE Sylvia Pankhurst maquette was exhibited in the Women's Library at the Metropolitan University until December 2012. The Library is now located at the London School of Economics and the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee is very pleased that the maquette's new home is in a prominent position on the fifth floor of the home of the Trades Union Congress, Congress House (opposite the General Council Chamber). The maquette is mounted on a beautifully crafted plinth identifying Sylvia as a feminist, socialist and antifascist, and also Ian Walters the renowned sculptor. Photographs will be available in due course on www.sisters.org.uk and www.gn.apc.org/sylviapankhurst

lecture

THE 2013 Sylvia Pankhurst memorial Lecture will be at 7pm on Friday 16 August, at Wortley Hall, Sheffield.

Entitled **Women and the 1913 Dublin Lock Out** and covering British solidarity, and Sylvia's part in that including her visit to Ireland in 1914, it will be given by **Theresa Moriarty** who is an independent researcher on Irish women workers' history and a member of the Irish History Society.

There is no charge to attend the event, but if you want accommodation for the night please contact Wortley Hall direct on 01142 882 100 or www.wortleyhall.org.uk

BY BARBARA SWITZER, NAW MEMBER

NAW executive committee meetings

Our EC meetings are open to all
members to attend

Contact NAW secretary Anita Wright
naw@sisters.org.uk 07939 948 404

Saturday 17 August at Wortley Hall

Saturday 2 November in London

Saturday 1 February 2014 in
Birmingham

AGM Saturday 26 April 2014

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