



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P SPRING 2022

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britain needs a pay rise

TUC GENERAL SECRETARY FRANCES O'GRADY HAS A ONE MESSAGE FOR THIS GOVERNMENT AT THE START OF 2022: BRITAIN NEEDS A PAY RISE

FAMILIES are bracing themselves for a cost of living storm in 2022. Bills are rising – fuel and energy bills fastest of all. Millions of working households have been hit by the cut to universal credit – and will be hit next year by the hike to national insurance.

As the Omicron variant sweeps through the country, over-worked and under-paid staff in the NHS and public services are put under intolerable strain. Industries like travel, hospitality and entertainment hit by government guidance need help targeted at protecting pay packets, not just business profits. And with self-isolation rates sky-high, too many families will be forced to survive on measly sick pay of just £96 per week – or no sick pay at all.

Our economy will only recover when working people can afford to spend in local shops and businesses. That's the way to boost demand, grow the economy and protect jobs.

This Conservative government has had 11 years to get wages rising. And they have failed, over and over again.

We are still in the longest period of pay stagnation since the Napoleonic wars. Real wages for millions are less than they were before the bankers' crisis in 2008.

And, unless ministers act now, the future looks bleak. Real wages are set to barely move between now and 2026. They will go up by a miserable £760 in total – about £150 a year.

So, in 2022, we need a long-term economic plan to get wages rising across the economy. If we could get real wage growth to mirror the average growth in the 10 years before the global financial crash, real wages would grow by £500 per year – leaving workers £2,500 per year better off by 2026.

If this Conservative government had achieved that over the past lost decade, workers would be around £8,000 better off today in real terms.

As always, the best way to get wages rising is to give workers the power to bargain for better pay from their employers.

Ministers should get round the table with unions and employers to hammer out sector-wide fair pay agreements – and every employer should be bound by them.

Take social care – where more than three in five are still paid less than £10 per hour. Let's make every social care employer in the country sit down and negotiate fair wages with unions representing social care workers. And let's make every employer in that sector pay the wage negotiated. That's how we keep dedicated people working in social care – and reward them fairly.

Fair pay agreements work all over the



world. And they could work here too. They are a sensible, modern solution to the problems of staff shortages, low skills, and low pay. And they will stop a race to the bottom on pay and conditions.

2022 is also the time for a new deal for working people. In 2022, let's raise the minimum wage to at least £10 per hour immediately, ban the zero hours contracts that trap workers in poverty and insecurity, outlaw fire and rehire, and end outsourcing.

Key workers, who went beyond the call of duty, are exhausted and demoralised. If ministers can fast-track lucrative Covid contracts to their mates, they can afford to give hardworking key workers the real pay rise they have earned. Or we'll see

yet more dangerous staffing gaps open up in our precious public services.

The government can't sit this wages crisis out. The pandemic showed us that our society keeps functioning because of the dedication of ordinary women and men, going to work day in day out.

After decades of real wage cuts and falling living standards, no one can seriously say working people don't deserve a pay rise.

That's my priority, and the priority of the whole union movement, in 2022. The prime minister should shape up and make it his priority too.

I wish you, your family and workmates happiness, good health and security in 2022 and always.

the cost of living crisis

££ UK Inflation rises to 30 year high of 5.5%. The Bank of England expects it to hit 7% this spring.

££ National Insurance to increase by 1.25% in April.

££ Electricity and gas bills to rise by 54% in April with typical household paying £693pa more.

££ Bank of England increased interest rates to 0.5% from 0.25% the second rate rise in three months, resulting in two million homeowners on tracker or variable mortgages paying up to £26 more each month.

££ Universal Credit was cut by £20pw in October 2021 when the Chancellor withdrew the pandemic uplift affecting six million people.

££ MEANWHILE...

££ Bank of England boss, Andrew Bailey paid £575,000pa tells workers to show restraint when asking for pay rise.

££ Tesco Chairman, John Allen says customers should expect food prices to rise as Tesco reports £2.6 billion profit in 2021-22

££ Shell and BP had a combined profit this year of £40 billion (£85 million per day). Shareholders have received £147 billion in last 10 years.

££ Britain's billionaires increased their wealth by £290 million per day during the pandemic. They are now £100 billion richer.

the nhs – we own it! keep it that way



UNIVERSAL healthcare is a women's issue. Cuts to services impact on everyone, but research shows that women bear the brunt of austerity policies. More than three quarters of the 1.3 million members of NHS staff are women. And it is women who have been leading the resistance to the slow dismantling of our health service for over a decade.

Women, as health workers, patients and campaigners, are vital in the fight against politicians and companies seeking to erode the founding principles of our NHS: healthcare that meets the needs of everyone; based on need and not the ability to pay; free at the point of delivery; universalising the best. And now, as the pandemic has highlighted and widened inequalities while bringing the healthcare crisis to a head, it's vital that we push back against and present an alternative to the government's plans to privatise our NHS. These plans are distilled in the Health and Care Bill, legislation currently being pushed through Parliament.

So what are we up against? The last major reorganisation of the NHS, the 2012 Health and Social Care Act, enforced competition between the NHS, private firms and charities. This led to a year on year increase in the number of health service contracts going to profit-making companies, worth billions of pounds. As a result, the amount of NHS spending syphoned off by private sector providers has nearly doubled in the last 10 years.

This private sector involvement in the NHS is deeply unpopular with the public, with 84% of the population wanting the NHS in full public ownership. Polling has shown that three-quarters of people fear that an increase in the use of private companies in the NHS would result in corners being cut in care.

Politicians therefore know that increasing privatisation in the NHS won't do them any favours in future elections. This is why the process is so often obscured: hidden from the light of public scrutiny in cloaked bureaucracy, dense jargon and technical omissions, which all allow for false reassurances to land more easily. How many times have we heard 'the NHS is not for sale', while swathes of our services are taken out of NHS hands?

Now enter 'Integrated Care Systems (ICSs)'. These are the flagship policy of the Health and Care Bill. The Conservative's plan is to restructure the NHS into 42 ICS Boards, each deciding how NHS money is spent in their region. This might sound innocuous, but the legislation in its current form would allow private companies to sit on those boards, making decisions about the care we receive. Proto-ICS boards are being set up across England, and Virgin Care already secured a seat on one: Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire (BSW).

This Health and Care Bill was even initially presented as undoing the privatising impact of the 2012 Act. While the legislation may reduce competition, its main purpose is to reduce accountability so that contracts can be awarded without justification or scrutiny. What this boils down to is more crony contracts of the kind we've seen during the pandemic, with companies like SERCO being handed huge sums of public money without process, often because of personal connections or investments.

The government is currently striking such deals with private hospitals, who are being paid millions to treat NHS patients in the face of mounting waiting lists. Throughout the pandemic, more than £2 billion worth of contracts were signed over to private hospitals, whose lack of doctors led to two-thirds of capacity being completely unused. A false narrative that private hospitals and providers 'help' the NHS with capacity has been shown up as a total myth. What is actually happening is the reverse: the NHS is being used to prop up and enrich private providers.

Of course, the issue of capacity in our healthcare system urgently needs to be addressed. A record-breaking six million people are currently waiting for treatment, a result of an already underfunded, over-stretched NHS carrying us through the coronavirus crisis. But outsourcing, presented as the solution, is actually a large part of the problem. Waiting lists are used to justify and accelerate privatisation, pointed to as evidence that undermines the idea that we can have the national, universal, high-quality, free health service we need. Long waiting times push more desperate people to spend their savings on private healthcare, and more services are handed over to private healthcare to deliver in the name of building capacity. Ultimately, this shifts us further towards a

US model of healthcare, with profit as the bottom line and millions unable to afford treatment.

Ask most health workers and they'll tell you straight: what's needed to fix waiting times and improve quality of care is more funding. The system has only avoided collapse through the sheer overwork of dedicated staff. But public services should not have to rely on heroism. They should be run by workers with rights and dignity. With funding, hospitals and equipment could be upgraded, and tens of thousands of beds could be reopened along with hundreds of A&Es. The number of doctors, nurses and healthcare staff could be increased through training and encouraging staff to stay with better pay, terms, and conditions. This is the only way out of the mess created by privatisation, outsourcing and underfunding.

While we need a serious vision for the future of our NHS, the government is instead choosing to rush through a Health and Care Bill which does nothing to address the crisis we face. We must now prevent it from embedding the most harmful structures in our health system. Our MPs can do this by backing amendments to ensure that private companies cannot sit on NHS decision making boards, and that the NHS is the default provider of NHS services. 70% of Conservative voters are worried about the Bill resulting in contracts being handed out to companies without scrutiny. There is a real opportunity to cut through.

Opposition to the Bill is growing, with thousands of people taking to the streets across 100 towns and cities across the country at the end of February. Unite the Union, Keep our NHS Public, SOS NHS, We Own It and many more unions and campaign organisations are rallying together. Local communities are already gearing up to take action against ICSs being set up in their region, following multiple victories in the campaign against US insurance giant Centene taking over GP surgeries. Local people piling the pressure on has already led to a commitment from the chair of the shadow BSW board that Virgin Care (now known as the HCRG Care Group) "will not have a place on the future ICB board – nor will any other private provider".

There is hope for our NHS as long as we are there to fight for it.

BY ALICE DANN FROM WE OWN IT

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recognising **misogyny** is a hate crime



UNITE'S WOMEN'S OFFICER SIOBHAN ENDEAN ARGUES FOR EXTENDING HATE CRIME LEGISLATION TO INCLUDE MISOGYNY

THE TUC women's Conference 2022 will debate a motion on extending hate crime legislation to include the ability to ensure when crime is reported to the police the report can be recorded as misogynistic hate crime and hate incidents.

It is almost impossible to effectively address the issues in a 250 word motion, as such it's welcome that the TUC Women's Committee has indicated support for the motion and has decided to write an additional TUC Women's Committee statement to conference on the issue. What the statement says is critically important.

The first thing to set out is what misogyny is, and why this is not simply about "hostility based on sex or gender" as written in the Newlove amendment to the Police and Crime Bill. It would not be the first time the Tories have suggested that structural discrimination is about people disliking each other, or that feminism has led to the oppression of men and have framed a debate with the intention of dividing and setting us against each other.

Misogyny is so engrained in the institutions of our society that it is too easily internalised, and we need to be clear that just because it is all prevalent, does not mean that we should tolerate it. Misogyny is structural and intrinsic to patriarchy and capitalism and designed to disempower women. It is hostility towards women who challenge the gendered roles that society expect us to conform to.

Misogyny is the frame that says women should dress, speak, think, work, travel, act only in the way men permit us to, reinforced by a society that is structured by men deciding what they permit us to do. When women stand up for themselves and for other women or step outside the confines of what is expected of women, misogynistic views become all too obvious.

Misogyny is the driver that leads to derogatory attitudes such as working-class girls as prostitutes rather than survivors of abuse; women leaders as bitches; single parents as cows; lesbians

as promiscuous and women academics as not just a pretty face. It is the acts and threats to rape, murder and abuse, threats which are not taken seriously by the police.

When Donald Trump says "you can grab women by the pussy" and Boris Johnson can write a book called *Seventy-Two Virgins* filled with racist and sexist slurs, we can see what happens when misogynistic attitudes gain power.

We also need to recognise the emergence of organised fascist and far right movements such as the incel movement. The 'incel' movement is a dangerous online subculture of men who identify as 'involuntary celibates' and express deeply misogynistic views about women.

Misogyny is only part of our oppression, as working class women we are also subjected to racism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism and disablism. This is not hierarchy of oppression, it is multiple oppression and urgently needs recognition.

The practicality of how hate crime legislation should work in relation to misogyny is an important point. The Law Commission review of hate crime laws recently proposed a further offence of public harassment, a proposal that we would welcome. However it also rejected a proposal to legislate for hate crime relating to gender and sex because of the unsuitability of the hate crime framework in dealing with offences of domestic abuse and violence against women.

The law commission went on to say that "By excluding two of the criminal contexts that are most harmful to women (sexual offences and domestic abuse) – albeit for sound policy reasons – they would render the remaining laws somewhat tokenistic".

With respect, the trade union women's movement needs to disagree here.

We need to be able to register misogynistic hate incidents so that we can monitor these and ensure we are able to cam-

paign for effective change for example with on-line hate or clubs and pubs where women are routinely subjected to misogyny lose their licences.

We also need to be able to report misogynistic hate crime where a crime has been committed. Recording crimes of violence against women as misogynistic will not reduce violence against women, or increase any trust in the police, but it should be possible for women to choose to register from the outset where the motivation for the crime is misogynistic.

Further we need to ensure that our legislation recognises inciting misogyny through hate speech the dangers of far right misogynistic movements such as the incel movement. That where misogyny is an aggravating factor in the crime that sentences can be increased.

We need to be clear that freedom of speech is a human right that the labour movement has fought hard for, and is determined to protect, but that has never been the freedom to incite hatred.

Our media, the police, the criminal justice system, schools, employers, need to address their institutional misogyny, and only when we define it and call it out, then we can challenge misogyny.

Some have suggested that the police are so misogynistic that we can't trust them to investigate misogyny. This echoes Boris Johnson when he says of misogyny "I think, to be perfectly frank, if you simply widen the scope of what you ask the police to do you'll just increase the problem".

When the conclusion they draw is that women in some way and many ways deserve the aggression we face because we have not done as we were told or that if we don't recognise it then it doesn't exist, then we have a much, much bigger problem sisters.

Please, contact your union delegation to TUC women's Conference, ask them to support the motion and the TUC Women's Committee statement.

tuc women's conference



THE NAW congratulates our sister Jane Stewart, Unilever Deputy Convener for Unilever and Executive Committee member for women, who will be chairing this year's conference.

It is disappointing that the conference will be held online again this year, but welcome that the conference will debate policy and discuss the TUC Women's Conference report. The TUC women's conference is essential in electing the democratic voice of the

TUC women's committee and setting the agenda for the trade union women's movement.

The TUC needs to move on from the internal structural reviews around its equality conferences and recognise the strengths in bringing together women trade unionists in our annual conference. If we could move the conference out of London then all the better, but as a priority, the TUC needs to communicate better to women trade unionists about the conference and how we can get involved, build the fringe, harness the power of women's activism and bring the trade union women's movement back to the workplace.

derwentside assemblies for **action**



IN December 2021, Derwentside Immigration Removal centre in Consett, Co. Durham officially opened. We have reason to believe that there are around nine women being detained.

We have always maintained that this IRC is in fact an immigration prison where the jobs advertised to the local community as excellent opportunities were in fact advertised as Prison Officer roles. The idea of creating good quality jobs was always a way to get the locals onside with the plans. As this is an area in desperate need of investment this was an ideal way to try and gain local support, further that if the IRC didn't open then the site would have been used for housing, something that the local community were opposed to for numerous reasons. Talking to people in the local community there was a sense that they were told it was either the IRC or more private housing and they were not fully informed as to exactly what an IRC is.

It has been our argument that, although investment is vital in the area, this could be investment that would directly benefit the community not founded on inhumane incarceration of innocent, already vulnerable women. On a site that already has such a devastating history of abuse as the former Medomsley detention centre linked to abuse scandals of young boys from 60s to 80s. At no point were the local community consulted on what they would like to see the site used for or what jobs would be beneficial to the area.

The way this IRC is being ran, the staff hired as Prison Officers, high security and police response to protests because the site is a 'prison' is deeply concerning. Derwentside IRC is being used to facilitate state funded violence against women as part of the hostile environment. Innocent women who are seeking sanctuary, safety and security are being incarcerated. The government and local Conservative MP are misleading members of the public by claiming that the women detained are criminals, some may well have served time in a prison, the point being time served, but not for criminal activity, but for unjust administrative

purposes. It is also not being made public that over 50% of detainees are eventually released back into communities.

This goes against previous government pledges to reduce the number of IRCs. Not only is it inhumane but further an abuse of taxpayer's money. It costs up to £100 per day per detainee, which is far more than it costs to house people and integrate people into communities. The majority of IRCs use the detainees to carry out the day to day running of the prison from cleaning, cooking, washing and are paid as little as £1 per day so to claim these IRCs are providing good jobs for the local community is an outrage. Not to mention that it has been handed out to a private contractor with a terrible reputation of anti-trade unionism and poor employment practice.

Many women detained in IRCs are victims of unimaginable abuse, human trafficking and assault. Locking women up in this way makes them extremely vulnerable to further exploitation and abuse.

With women now incarcerated at the site it is vital that they know we are doing everything we can to set them free. We need to continue this support by making our voices heard and that we will not stop until the site is closed and all the women are released.

We are a joint campaign group made up of Durham Peoples Assembly, No 2 Hassockfield, Abolish Detention and Women for Refugee Women. Please we ask that you stand with us against this inhumane incarceration of women. We gather at the site on the third Saturday of every month 12 noon to 2pm where we make as much noise as possible. On Saturday 21 May we are holding a National Demonstration against Derwentside IRC, and we need your support. If you feel you can help in any way, please contact us via any of our social media pages or by emailing: durhampeoplesassembly@gmail.com.

BY MOLLIE BROWN, DURHAM PEOPLES ASSEMBLY CONVENER, AND EMMA PEARSON, ACTIVIST – DURHAM PEOPLES ASSEMBLY (CURRENTLY STUDYING FOR MA IN MIGRATION & GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT)

information on immigration removal centres

what are IRCs?

IRCs are holding centres for people waiting to hear the results of their asylum application and those due to be deported following a failed application.

The UK is the only European country where there is no time limit on immigration detention.

The Home Office recorded 12,967 people entered detention in year ending March 2021, 44% fewer than the previous year.

The average cost to hold one person is around £99 per day. Around three quarters are held for less than 29 days.

From 2010 to 2020 citizens of 10 countries constituted over 60% of all people entering immigration detention the top three countries being Iran, Albania and Sudan.

how many IRCs are there?

There are currently seven IRCs – Brook House (Gatwick); Colnbrook (Middlesex); Derwentside (Durham); Dungravel (Lanarkshire); Harmondsworth (Middlesex); Tinsley House (Gatwick) and Yarl's Wood (Bedfordshire)

Also, three Short-term Holding Facilities (STHFs) at Larnie House (Antrim); Manchester and Yarl's Wood and a Pre-Departure Accommodation at Gatwick.

who runs them?

Mitie Care & Custody Ltd is the largest provider of IRCs. It signed a two-year contract for £166 million to manage Derwentside IRC in June 2021 and was awarded the contract to manage Dungravel IRC from September 2021.

In 2020 the Home Office awarded an eight year £200 million contract to Serco to run the two Gatwick IRCs after G4S decided not to rebid following revelations that staff abused detainees.



AUKUS: US-UK-Australia military pact

JENNY CLEGG DESCRIBES GLOBAL BRITAIN AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE US-UK-AUSTRALIA MILITARY PACT. JENNY IS A MEMBER OF CND'S NATIONAL COUNCIL AND A FORMER SENIOR LECTURER IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, SPECIALISING ON CHINA

WHEN the news of the AUKUS agreement broke in Britain, it should not have come as a surprise.

The negotiations were indeed kept top secret but the general trajectory of Boris Johnson's post-Brexit Global Britain had already become apparent. Since December 2019, the Tory government has increased defence spending by 26%; lifted the cap on nuclear warheads by 40% in violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT); adopted an 'IndoPacific tilt' in its integrated foreign and defence policy, identifying China as a 'systemic competitor'; and then dispatched the new Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier to the South China Sea in the biggest mobilisation of armed forces since the Falklands War.

Britain was clearly going global, military fashion.

AUKUS is billed as 'a landmark defence and security partnership' aiming to stabilise the IndoPacific region through a 'commitment to the international rules-based order'. Quite the opposite, the pact violates the global rules on nuclear non-proliferation as it threatens to stoke regional tensions.

At its heart is the US-UK agreement to provide Australia with nuclear-powered submarines, a sharing of weapons-grade uranium that flouts the NPT stipulation on the use of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. This may well set a precedent for others – India, Japan, South Korea – to seek their own nuclear-powered submarine fleets. From there it is a short step to the further spread of nuclear-weapons.

Australia in fact has no nuclear industry and no skills in handling nuclear materials or disposing of nuclear waste. Its choice of nuclear-powered submarines over the French diesel-powered vessels, was for their 'hunter-killer' capability to stay submerged for longer, enabling military reach not only into the South China Sea but right up into North East Asia.

The pact also covers AI, quantum computing, cyber and undersea capabilities, aiming to set the pace in the militarisation of new technologies using US core components to help keep its corporations ahead of the game.

At the same time, AUKUS will take prime position in leading a huge militarisation in the region, with expanded US bases in Australia serving as the springboard for the forward deployment of AUKUS armed forces.

China is not named directly but is clearly the target. As leading US peace activist, Joseph Gerson, puts it, AUKUS is the moment of the actual 'Asian pivot'.



JENNY CLEGG

The pact has already emboldened regional militarist elements with Japan adopting a more hostile stance towards China over Taiwan; an outside 'Anglosphere' weapons-based intervention it is disrupting the peaceful regional trend of 'Asians dealing with Asian affairs'.

With Biden promoting a network of multilateralisms – the Quad (the US, Australia, Japan and India), NATO with its IndoPacific turn, the newly-revived G7, the summit of democracies – AUKUS will spearhead a serious escalation in the US New Cold War strategy prioritising military above economic demands.

China and North Korea have strongly protested, and Indonesia and Malaysia have made clear they do not want more militarisation of the region, whilst the head of the UN weapons inspectorate together with the UN general assembly have also voiced concerns over the dangers of a regional arms race and nuclear proliferation.

New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, quickly reaffirming her country's non-nuclear policy, stated the submarines would not be welcome in its waters, and Australia's former Labour PM, Paul Keating, is warning of the threat to Australia's sovereignty, its military locked to that of the US "for one purpose alone ...to act collectively in any military engagement by the US again China".

Leaders, community elders and other organisations from the Pacific Islands are also speaking out. More than 310 nuclear tests were carried out in the area between the 1950s and 1980s, many by the US and UK, and the indigenous islanders were the principal victims. In the 1980s a powerful grass roots movement for a nuclear free and independent Pacific saw the adoption of the Treaty of Rarotonga for a nuclear free South Pacific. Now AUKUS puts this and the South East Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in jeopardy.

The announcement also shook the European NATO allies who, as with the chaotic US-led withdrawal from Afghanistan, were once again not consulted. France, embittered by the cancellation of the \$66bn submarine contract, was per-

haps even more aggrieved by the duplicity.

In Britain, former prime minister, Theresa May, expressed concerns within the establishment when she questioned whether Britain could now be dragged into a war with China over Taiwan. Labour's leadership meanwhile welcomed the deal.

Peace, environmental and other groups are mobilising across Australia and the Pacific with women at the forefront as they were in the 1980s. Here in the UK, CND and Stop the War have taken up the issue. CND's emergency resolution to the 2021 Labour Conference, calling on Labour to oppose the pact, uphold its commitment to the NPT, support de-escalation and repair the diplomatic damage done, won by 70%.

In today's world, despite its imperial vanities, Britain is just a medium-sized state but the military hawks seek to trade on historical links with former colonies in Asia and the Pacific to serve the US so as to maintain global status through the US-UK 'special relationship'. Johnson evidently sees Cold War tensions as a job opportunity, but US arms companies will surely claim the lion's share of any benefits.

That Liz Truss and Ben Wallace, respectively the foreign and defence secretaries, visited Australia in the midst of the Ukraine crisis demonstrates how important AUKUS is seen to be, setting Global Britain's nuclear weapons status in concrete for decades to come. Despite the huge implications, all in the name of protecting democracy, there is remarkably little public discussion. Rather, Tory right-wingers are betting on the popularity of Anglosphere security guarantees, appealing to the colonial legacy of the basest white racism.

The last thing people in Britain need is to be saddled with the costs of perpetual military upgrading: we need to direct our resources, our industries and jobs, our scientific research communities to address the real security challenges: if we are going to make war, let's make it on COVID, on poverty, on the climate emergency, not on China!

international news

no to war in ukraine!

The National Assembly of Women has watched with horror as the conflict has unfolded in Ukraine in recent days. As *sisters* goes to press, the invasion is one week old and the situation for the millions of people caught up in it is worsening by the hour. As in every war, women and children are disproportionately affected. Separated from their relatives and friends, they make up the majority of the thousands attempting to flee Ukraine and of those who have left their homes and communities but remained in their country as 'internally displaced persons'. And, whether at home or as refugees, it is on women that the burden of care falls for the babies and children, the elderly, the sick and the dying. It is they who must provide despite the blackouts, bombing raids, curfews, closed up food stores, shuttered pharmacies, destruction and ruin.

Seventy years ago, when the NAW was formed in the period following the Second World War and the opening of the Cold War, it stated unequivocally that the struggle for the future of women and their families was inextricable from the fight for peace. Women knew this then from bitter experience and they know it now.

This is why today the NAW calls on Russia to withdraw its forces from Ukraine and that the US, EU and NATO commit themselves to a demilitarised and neutral Ukraine. Further warmongering and bellicosity can only result in escalation and suffering on an unimaginable scale. We call for an immediate cessation of hostilities, a negotiated settlement representing the interests of the working people not oligarchs and big business corporations, respect for the UN Charter and international law, the guarantee of a peaceful future in which the peoples of Ukraine, Russia and Europe are able to determine their own futures and the world is brought back from the brink of catastrophe.

women's international democratic federation to hold 17th world congress in april

The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), of which the NAW is the only British affiliate, is to hold its 17th World Congress in Venezuela at the end of April. The Congress normally takes place every four years and was due in 2020 after the 16th convention took place in Colombia in 2016. It was, however, delayed by COVID. The Congress brings together delegations from affiliated women's organisations across the globe to debate the momentous issues of the day, steer the work of the WIDF for the coming period and meet, talk, and socialise less formally. The struggle against imperialism and war and for peace, without

which there can be no equality and justice, will be central to the agenda. Look out for Congress reports in forthcoming editions of *sisters*.

UNICEF report warns of a bleak outlook for the world's poorest children

According to *Prospects for children in 2022: a global outlook*, the harm done to children by the pandemic is increasingly evident. The UN flagship report, published in January this year, stated that "the global community needs recast its

COVID strategy to focus not only on mitigating the virus but mitigating its effects on society – particularly children". The poorest children have been most exposed to lack of learning and "negative coping strategies" such as child labour and marriage, lack of access to health care and vaccines. These, if not addressed, have grave implications for the futures of millions of children and their communities across the world.

You can read the report here <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/reports/prospects-children-2022-global-outlook>

val duncan



In 2011 we were forced to come to terms with the untimely death of our sister Val Duncan.

Val was active in various women's organisations, anti-war groups and tirelessly worked in the trade union and labour movement together with being elected as a lay member president of a trade union district.

Val was the Secretary to the National Assembly of Women and held this post throughout a particularly difficult period. She always worked very hard for the NAW and

maintained her dedication and professionalism.

Val bequeathed a particularly generous donation to the NAW on her death and it was agreed to set aside this money and draw on it to finance various activities including subsidising our annual residential conferences. We would like to keep Val's name alive – so we are inviting sisters, comrades and organisations to make donations in her name that we will use and continue to support the work of the National Assembly of Women.

National Assembly of Women

annual general meeting

**11am Saturday
18 June at
Unite's
regional office,
Birmingham**

**Guest speaker:
Annmarie Kilcline**

*All members and
affiliates'
representatives
welcome*

**Contact
naw@sisters.org.uk
for more info**

naw: 70 years campaigning for peace, equality and international solidarity

**THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 1952
TO 2022 – CELEBRATING 70 YEARS
CAMPAIGNING FOR PEACE, EQUALITY AND
INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY**

THE second world war had a profound effect on women's lives. With men away they faced the horrors and hardships caused by the ferocious German bombing of cities. They dealt with shortages and blackouts as well as caring alone for families and children. Many women worked for the first time, doing jobs usually undertaken by men. They worked day and night in the factories, on the land, in the armed services, on fire watches during air raids and drove buses and ambulances.

Such experiences forged a determination and great expectations. Women felt that the sacrifices made by them and by men must lead to profound changes if they were not to have been in vain.

Peace was essential; future wars must be avoided, and friendship developed across the globe.

All over Britain, women were wanting an organisation that would voice their needs, demands and opinions. Women from all parts of the country and all walks of life gathered in St Pancras Town Hall, London. By long distance coach, bus and train, carrying hand-made banners and overnight bags, over 1,300 women responded to the call of the International Women's Day Committee, which had been campaigning intensively on behalf of women, and pledged to fight for peace, for higher living standards and the rights of children to health, education and a full life. and so, on 8 March 1952 the National Assembly of Women was formed.

On returning home women organised activities including demonstrations against the Korean War; peace cam-

aigns; demands for better child care; free education; improved health services; better housing; pensions and equal pay.

Seventy years on the NAW continues to campaign for these demands. We have a proud history and as we celebrate our 70th anniversary we remain committed to working with others to build and strengthen a united women's movement to achieve these aims.



**DELEGATES FROM
SALFORD READY FOR
THE NAW ASSEMBLY
8 MARCH 1952**

what's on...

NAW Executive Committee meetings are open to *all* members.

The next will be online at 10am or in London at 11.30 on Saturday 9 April. If you would like to attend please contact the Secretary on naw@sisters.org.uk or at NAW, 72 Beaconsfield Road Coventry CV2 4AR

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, c/o C Simpson, Unite, 33-37 Moreland Street, London EC1V 8BB