



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P SUMMER 2025

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naw agm 2025

IN opening the NAW 2025 AGM, Liz Payne acknowledged that we were meeting at an exceptionally critical time. She said that through our affiliation to the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) she had just received greetings and a message from the Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women (below) on the current conflict between Israel and Iran.

In presenting the Annual Report, Sandra Durkin thanked members of the Executive for their contributions to the report, and for running a NAW stall at numerous trade union conferences. This had raised our profile in the movement and saw our literature being widely distributed. Carolyn Simpson gave the financial report, which was passed unanimously. Elections were not required this year as the Officers were elected unopposed, but nominations for the Executive fell short of the number of posts available. The incoming Executive will therefore have to consider discuss possible co-options.

Three motions were debated and passed: Decriminalisation of Prostitution; Misogyny; and Peace. In addition, an Emergency Motion on Elections following the rise of Reform UK was discussed and passed (the full text of all motions will be available on www.sisters.org.uk).



In conclusion Liz thanked delegates for their thoughtful contributions and continued commitment to equality, justice and peace.

The Democratic Organization of Iranian Women strongly condemns the military attack by the fascist Israeli regime on Iranian soil and the start and persistence of a devastating war whose victims are innocent people, especially children!

The terroristic drone and missile attacks on Iran, by the racist and child-killer regime of Israel, follow two years of relentless slaughter of the people of Gaza, and have ignited the fire of yet another devastating war in our homeland, Iran – a war which has the potential to spread to the crisis-ridden region of the Middle East. The violation of the territorial sovereignty of the Iranian people began on the morning of Friday, June 13, 2025. These catastrophic attacks have been met with a wave of airstrikes in response to the bombing and destruction in dozens of cities in several provinces, military and security centers, and even residential complexes which have killed and wounded dozens of civilians in Iran. The Iranian military also responded forcefully to these attacks. The repeated threats from both sides continue, causing concern among the people of our homeland - who had already borne the heavy burden of eight years of the catastrophic Iran-Iraq war, alongside bloodshed, and the destruction of vital infrastructure.

This bloody and catastrophic war has been started by the Israeli regime, a fascist and racist regime, helped by its allies, that does not heed any of the international treaties or any of the warnings from the United Nations and the World Health Organization, a regime that - as the world is witnessing in Gaza - has no hesitation to bomb residential areas and to carry out the genocidal killing of people including children.

The missile attacks by this aggressor regime on our homeland have left dozens of people injured and dead, many of them children, women, and civilians. Yesterday, Iran's representative to the United Nations announced that 78 people, including senior military officials, were killed and more than 320 were injured in the Israeli attacks.

This disaster has been imposed on our people at a time when they are struggling with the hardships of poverty, a growing and crippling economic crisis, and the inadequacies of a reactionary and oppressive regime, and while they are grappling with the struggle to free themselves from the heavy burden of this poverty and tyranny. The suffering people of our country do not want war. They deeply believe that it is in conditions of peace that their democratic and human rights can be achieved.

Wars have never resulted in anything other than death and destruction. The organisation "Iran's Mothers for Peace" correctly emphasized in a statement yesterday that "while we are pressing for peace and stability, we continue to press for rational decisions and measures and negotiations to avoid the spread of war to wider dimensions."

According to news agencies today, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres declared: "Israeli attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities and Iranian missile launches at Tel Aviv must stop. Enough is enough. Now is the time to end this conflict; peace and diplomacy must prevail."

The Democratic Organization of Iranian Women in unison with all peace-loving people in Iran and the world calls for a halt to military operations on both sides of the conflict and an end to this dangerous crisis that also threatens world peace.

Through negotiations, and with the help of the efforts of reputable international institutions and the progressive stance of the freedom-loving and peace-loving people around the world, we must try to end this great disaster that is unfolding before us, as soon as possible. Time is of the essence! We especially call on our comrades in the Women's International Democratic Federation and its affiliate organisations to make their voices of protest ever louder against the war that is sought by imperialism.

Democratic Organization of Iranian Women
14 June 2025

climate crisis and green reps



LYDIA MERYLL REPORTS ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND THE ROLE OF GREEN REPS

AT last year's NAW AGM I proposed a motion that hoped to further inform Health and Safety Reps in the workplace that they could organise WITH their Green reps to address the additional hazards of HEAT and flooding.

With the support of Sisters, I went on to influence the Regional Executive of UCU and take a successful resolution to the National Council. This strengthens the role of Green Reps and proposes regional structures like those adopted by Unison.

While steering this resolution through, I was joined by the Manchester Branch Secretary of NEU and their regional training officer, as well as the Unison Regional Environmental Officer and we planned a Joint Education Unions' event for 14 June in the birthplace of the TUC, The Manchester Mechanics Institute.

The political impact of Reform's Climate Scepticism and their threats to "non-essential" services is very close to home with Lancashire County Council and the Right continue to diss ideas about Zero Carbon. Climate Education including TU training, is essential for a Labour Movement committed to the safety of the next generation. But very few trade union education departments have any such courses. Each union attempts their own.

We were addressed by the Greater Manchester Hazards campaign CEO, Janet Newsham, who works with Health and Safety Reps across most unions, the Greener Jobs Alliance and the Trade Union Clean Air Network (TUCAN).

She had brought a CO2 monitor into the room and pointed out that it is a human right to breathe clean air at work, not that polluted by external fumes AND those generated inside the building by toxic materials including furniture and fittings! She pointed out that toxic air is a national emergency and we all have to work together, Health and Safety and Green Reps to campaign for decent working conditions. The national Heat

Strike may be a galvanising event to organise round. She invited delegates to attend the 36th National Hazards Conference 5 to 7 September at Keele University.

She also referred to the toxic impact of war and damage done to the natural environment, air and water. We know the damage going on in Gaza and other war zones. But it also kills off hundreds of other species every day. We are killing beyond humans!

While we worked on round tables, our Visual Note taker, Siobhan Harpur, was capturing the essence of what was discussed and presented. It proved to be a very creative way to reflect afterwards. And the images and arrows for connectivity spun round social media in a way that a set of minutes doesn't!

Our final speaker was Jason Hunter, the Regional Environmental Officer from Unison North West. He spelled out the structures of recruitment and support they have in place and the fact that they have this. He picked up the theme of

Care and Carers raised by the UCU Key note speaker, Lucy Burke. ("We are disabling the planet") We need to care for the planet and make the links with the low status of this issue and the invisibility of the Carers and challenge it NOW. It is Unison's 5th Objective: To work with others, Unions, Communities and individuals.

So, this was the challenge of the day's work! How do we amplify the messages about ACTION on Climate Change and defy Reform UK's scepticism and environmental budget slashing? Don't forget 2026 is the Year of Green Action and the next COP in Brazil will be a call to action from 16th November. So, plenty of time to organise – together!

It is over to us, Sisters

LYDIA MERYLL IS THE UCU ELECTED ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICER NORTH WEST REGION

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
WWW.HAZARDSCAMPAIGN.ORG.UK
WWW.GREENERJOBSALLIANCE.CO.UK



naw seminar: creating a new narrative;

THE 2025 NAW seminar was held at the Hillscourt Conference Centre near Birmingham over the weekend of 14/15 June. As ever it was well supported by sisters from a number of trade unions including Unison and Unite as well as many individual NAW members.

NAW President **Liz Payne** opened the seminar and introduced the first guest speaker **Mariela Kohon**. Mariela joined the TUC in 2019 as Senior International Officer developing strategies to counter the rise of the far right and is now TUC Assistant Director Strategy and Delivery.

Mariela outlined how far-right ideology develops in the context of growing inequality and the inability of social democracy to deliver change which then generates anti-political feelings. Far-right ideology is not confined just to violent

election of Lula da Silva in Brazil and Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo in Mexico. But this transformation is linked to people's material conditions and seeing a future where their lives will improve.

We have much work to do as the threat of the far-right is greater now than any point since the 1930s. Training and education in our trade unions is vital. The TUC has developed a new strategy to combat the far-right that includes on-line materials and ideas for reps briefings. Unions are uniquely placed with the resources, know-how and reach to join forces with community organisations to counter the far-right and root out the politics of division and hate.

Our second guest speaker was **Cathy Pound** from Searchlight, an organisation that has been fighting racism and fascism

The far-right is not exclusively male and women are promoted and encouraged in an attempt to 'soften' the appeal and disguise the deeply rooted misogyny in their movement.

The overturning of the landmark 1973 Roe v Wade decision in the US Supreme Court in 2022 effectively eliminated the constitutional right to abortion and started the roll-back of women's reproductive rights. It's clear that the far-right are coming for us women!

Misogyny runs deep, and not just in the US. Nick Griffin, former chair of the British National Party and MEP for North West England launched his new party on Easter Sunday: the Christian Nationalist Party. 20 April being the date of Hitler's birthday. Religiosity is being used to undermine women's rights, it's also an



gangs or organised groups. Through populist arguments it is now present in political parties who have gained a foothold, notably in the European Parliament, where they regularly vote against unions and equal rights.

Political education is vitally important in the fight against right-wing ideas, and Mariela cited Trademark Belfast, which focuses on political education in the workplace and building strong internet-based networks to combat the far-right. Mariela stressed how important it is for us to use the on-line world more effectively as we are way behind the far-right in this regard.

Misogyny is an integral part of far-right thinking, exemplified by incels, toxic masculinity, and the growth of the manosphere. Fitness clubs, taking inspiration from the US are being used to promote these ideas and normalise misogyny.

Across Europe we are seeing the far-right winning elections and promoting nationalist and authoritarian views, often endorsed by religious leaders, reinforcing so-called family values intended to undermine women's rights. This happened in Argentina, the sole country to vote against the UN Declaration on ending Violence Against Women and Girls, and in Turkey – where President Erdogan declared 2025 the Year of the Family.

There have been some "wins" as in the



for over 60 years. Cathy has worked at Searchlight for over 30 years, initially starting as a volunteer after having been active in the tenants' movement and campaign against domestic violence.

Cathy said Searchlight aims to expose individuals and groups who perpetuate racist violence and fascist ideology. In the early days the information gained, often through brave volunteers going undercover in these groups, was circulated through the magazine, but now this is done through the Searchlight website and social media. As an example, Cathy said how former Home Secretary Suella Braverman had allowed Spanish neo-Nazi, Isabel Peralta into the UK in 2022 so she could speak at an event organised by the far-right publication Heritage and Destiny. This information reached over two million people on Twitter.



effective way to raise funds from potential donors, as shown in the US.

It's becoming increasingly hard for women to put themselves forward. Women candidates for the 2024 European Parliament elections received over 80% more harmful TikTok comments than their male counterparts. This included explicit cases of hateful and defamatory speech. The on-line world magnifies societal values and reveals itself as a very male space – 70% of Twitter users are men. Last year Nigel Farage applauded Andrew Tate as an "important voice for men" and makes no secret of his belief in traditional family values. Cathy concluded by saying that we are



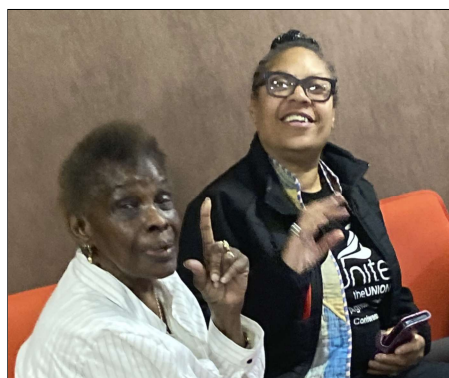
the far right, misogyny and hate

facing a real populist threat particularly if we let Farage into No.10. As women, we need to recognise that Reform and other more extreme right forces are a risk not just to democracy but very specifically to us – to our rights – to our right to choose – to any law that currently protects us from discrimination – from harm. We have a big fight ahead of us.

Jane Stewart, Chair of Unite's National Women's Committee and Unite Deputy Convenor at Unilever opened the afternoon session by reminding us of the insidious nature of misogyny and how sexual assault of women is trivialised citing Spain's former football chief Luis Rubiales who grabbed footballer Jenni Hermoso without consent and kissed her following Spain's win at the 2023 Women's World Cup, and of Dominique



Pelicot who was drugged by her husband and endured multiple rapes. Praising the strength of these women to seek justice she said that women must "feel their worth" and "be fragile like a bomb not a flower!" Jane asked how do we represent women in trade unions? Stressing the need to renew trade union structures and identify barriers or risk losing what we have so far won. Responding to discussion Jane said that the attack on diversity, equity and inclusion by Trump is inspired because it opens the door to attacking women's equality. She said that policy consultations with employers must be followed with a written agreement to ensure unions have just cause to oppose changes imposed by companies. It's vital we carry on the fight.



The final speaker in this session was NAW Executive member, **Anita Wright**. Quoting the Australian Government's Framework for preventing violence against women and girls (VAWG), Anita reminded us of the four key drivers: the condoning of violence against women; men's control of decision making and limits to women's independence in public and private life; rigid gender stereotypes and dominant forms of masculinity, and male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control. She also emphasised the cost to the economy of VAWG which for 2024 the Women's Budget Group estimated at £292 billion being the costs for health and social care services; the criminal justice system; special sexual violence support; economic losses through



reduced productivity, and long-term impact on survivors. Using this information will help us to put pressure on our unions and our Government to see the importance of addressing this issue.

Unison NW Regional Manager, **Vicky Knight** opened the Sunday session with a lively game of Bingo – delegates could win prizes if they could identify the 12 leading women on their sheet!

Following this, Labour historian and NAW Executive member, **Mary Davis** explained how misogyny perpetuates the subjugation of women. The United Nations research shows that 750 million women – 1 in 3 have been subjected to violence. 1 in 5 killed every hour. Women



are oppressed because they are doubly exploited, economically and domestically. Black women are triply exploited. Consent for this exploitation is gained through capitalism's deliberate tactic of dividing workers and patriarchy being deeply embedded in the system. The left have failed to take up the sexual exploitation of young women leaving it open to the far-right to opportunistically use it politically despite some perpetrators being members of the far-right. Mary stated that women's rights are being pushed back because we do not have a united movement and the debate around self-identity has split the movement, the Labour Party and other organisations. Building a united women's movement based on race and class is vital, to this end Mary said that a significant number of women's organisa-



tions, including the NAW, are launching a new initiative this month: The Women's Liberation Alliance. The pandemic of violence against women must be tackled, but long term we know that it won't be eradicated until the material base has been eradicated.

The final speaker was **Bernadette Keaveney**, *Morning Star* Circulation Manager. She said that women were frequently portrayed in the media as victims or weak, citing the numerous sob-stories about women's lives. TV interviewers on the streets would ask men about policy issues, but only talk to women about day-to-day life like the cost of shopping or child care. We need to be much more proactive in projecting through the media

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woodcraft folk 100 years young

FOUNDED in 1925, the Woodcraft Folk is a remarkable youth and children's organisation. It was conceived as a non-militarist, pro-socialist alternative to the Boy Scouts (and other similar uniformed pro-imperialist youth organisations). It was strongly connected then, as now to the co-operative movement. Today, 100 years later, the Woodcraft Folk is still going strong. Many on the left of the political spectrum will have heard of it. Maybe they will have joined it when they were young or have sent their own children to participate in its camps and weekly group nights. Although there were other attempts, the Woodcraft Folk is the only surviving independent youth and children's organisation with a socialist, co-operative and labour movement orientation.

Woodcraft Folk was founded by Leslie Paul, in the wake of the carnage of World War One. Paul was a former Scout leader and Christian socialist who became disillusioned with the authoritarian and imperialist tone of the Scouts. Woodcraft was a breakaway from an earlier organisation, Kibbo Kift Kindred (founded by Ernest Thompson Seton), a pacifist, arts-and-crafts youth group. Both Paul and Seton were influenced by the ideas of John Ruskin and William Morris, particularly their views on craftsmanship, nature, and socialism. In fact, the name 'Woodcraft' comes from the teachings of Seton, who used the term to describe outdoor skills, respect for nature, and Native American-inspired living. From the start, unusually for the 1920s, Woodcraft was mixed sex.

Throughout its history, Woodcraft has always been linked to left-wing causes, though not tied to a specific political party. It was and is strongly anti-fascist and anti-war, with members opposing rearmament and conscription before WWII and supporting the anti-Franco side in the Spanish Civil War. It has supported



CND, anti-apartheid, anti-racist, and environmental movements and currently engages in climate strikes and refugee solidarity.

Its structure has remained largely unchanged throughout its 100 year history. It is open to young people aged six to 20, divided into age groups: Elfins (six to nine years), Pioneers (10 to 12), Venturers (13 to 15), DFs – District Fellows (16 to 20). Its activities are still strongly child centred with a stress on camping, hiking and co-operative games with a stress on cooperation and teamwork through all of its activities. Weekly groups involve a mix of games, craft, discussion, debate, music and drama and discussion of age appropriate local and global issues.

Today Woodcraft still remains focused on fostering a sense of community, environmental stewardship, and social justice. Added to this, it is strongly committed to anti-racism, international solidarity and peace. Its activities emphasise outdoor education, creativity, and the development of cooperative leadership skills, setting it apart from more hierarchical institutions. Woodcraft today espouses education for social change as a means of helping young people to develop critical thinking skills in order that they may become active in their community and the wider world. Its work is still rooted in the values of the co-operative movement and is still dedicated to world peace. Its work and activities explore the causes of conflict and promote positive alternatives to violence.

Woodcraft was a founding member of the International Falcon Movement (IFM-SEI), a global network of socialist and progressive youth organisations. It retains its internationalism through bilateral national exchanges and by hosting large camps every few years (eg. Common Ground 2022) bringing together

thousands of young people from around the world.

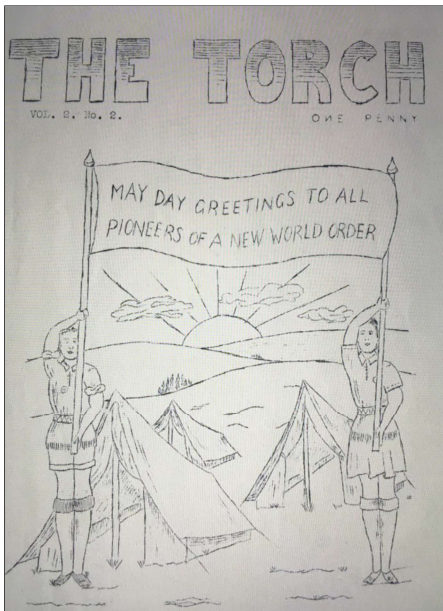
In the absence of declining or non-existent youth provision in this country, Woodcraft has a very valuable role to play – not just in keeping youth 'off the street' or glued to screens, but educating children and young people, tomorrow's citizens, to 'span the world with friendship'. Woodcraft activities and orientation have evolved over its 100 year history, but its values remain unchanged: they are the values of all of us who want to end war and strive for a better world.

MARY DAVIS IS AN NAW EC MEMBER AND
PROFESSOR OF LABOUR HISTORY
WWW.WOODCRAFT.ORG.UK

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the real-life experiences of women. The *Morning Star* is an open door. Owned and managed by its shareholders it welcomes articles and letters from women. The NAW, through its international links, often provides coverage of important world events being experienced by women and the special *Sisters* supplement gained wide distribution. The *Morning Star* is now filming interviews for the website, and Bernadette ended by inviting NAW to take part.

Throughout the weekend delegates were actively involved in a number of workshops which included drafting a letter to the local press about the UK birthrate, an issue taken up by the far-right, writing a motion for a union branch on diversity and inclusion policies, and reviewing the Charter for Women in the light of the rise in misogyny. Finally, delegates worked together to produce a SWOT analysis to show the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the NAW, which will be taken up by the incoming Executive.



invest in peace and security



ON 22 March this year, South Lakeland and Lancaster CND (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) organised a protest at Barrow in Cumbria: Scrap Trident Nuclear Weapons – Invest in Peace and Security. A group of us from across the UK gave out leaflets in the town and then held a rally with speakers on the bridge overlooking the dockyard where BAE Systems are building a new fleet of submarines, powered by nuclear reactors, which will carry the Trident missiles.

Why were we there? Firstly, Trident is a weapon of mass destruction. Each of the four Dreadnought submarines being built in Barrow would have the capacity to carry multiple nuclear warheads, each with many times the destructive power of

the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in August 1945 when over 100,000 women, men and children were killed and many more suffered ill health for the rest of their lives. If even one warhead were exploded either by accident or intention it could see nuclear winter and the end of the planet as we know it.

When we talked to people in the town, some of whom were hostile as they worked for BAE Systems, we were keen to explain to them that we wanted to support them and their jobs. We simply wanted BAE Systems not to be manufacturing arms but to convert to making socially useful products, such as the infrastructure for sustainable energy.

In the leaflets we gave out we also pointed out that accidents involving the meltdown of working nuclear powered reactors in the dock would result in the release of highly radioactive iodine, leaving anyone exposed – especially children and unborn babies – at high risk of developing thyroid cancer. Iodine tablets have been distributed throughout the town and if these are taken soon after the accident may counter the risk, but the World Health Organisation has stated they 'would not protect against any other radioactive substances that may be released in the environment'.

Then there is the cost of replacing Trident. It has been estimated that the total cost of Trident would be over £205,000,000,000. Even if the cost of decommissioning Trident is considered, it would still leave billions which could be spent on public services such as the NHS, education, including universities, local authority services and measures to combat climate change. Just to give one example, although the government has given some extra funding to hospices, it

is nowhere near enough. Most local hospices are having to cut back on beds and services they provide which are so appreciated by those with terminal illnesses and their families.

The whole Trident project is a completely insane policy upheld by this current Labour government which is now showing it is more interested in warfare than welfare. It needs to be remembered that most of the money expended on the Trident nuclear armed submarines will go to the huge US military manufacturers, such as Lockheed Martin. War is good business! We must resist this and speak out where we can. For to be sure the mainstream media will not be doing that. CND are organising protests at bases throughout the UK this year. At Lakenheath there was a whole week of protest at the end of April, organised by the Lakenheath Peace Alliance of which CND is a member, at the base in Suffolk where it is expected that US/NATO nuclear capable aircraft and bombs will be returned. In June there were protests at Plymouth Devonport where the nuclear armed submarines are serviced at the dockyard. As with all the bases, Devonport could be on the front line of hostile attacks. As with Barrow, Devonport could be a major centre for socially useful manufacturing such as wave turbine production.

We need to be clear to let this current Labour government know how their current policies of more militarisation and nuclear weapons (Trident is 'non-negotiable' said Keir Starmer) will not bring peace and security but the exact opposite – world instability and war. Join the protests.

**RAE STREET IS FORMER VICE CHAIR OF CND
WWW.CNDUK.ORG**



farewell sisters...



Janette Ferguson

Sisters in the NAW were saddened to hear that Janette Ferguson had passed away. Known as Jinty, she was a fire control operator and active in the Fire Brigades Union, attending the TUC Women's Conference as a delegate. As a long-standing member of the NAW Executive Committee, she was the editor of *Sisters* and represented us at many conferences including the world congress of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) in Brazil and Mozambique.

Ann Scargill

Ann Scargill was a leading figure in the battle against pit-closures in the 1980s. Along with Betty Cook she co-founded Women Against Pit closures and tirelessly fought for the rights of striking miners and their families. She sadly passed away in April this year after a long period of ill health. Tributes poured in from all those who knew and campaigned alongside her, honouring this inspiring working-class hero; feminist; internationalist and warm-hearted woman.





SYLVIA PANKHURST

Memorial

LECTURE 2025

SATURDAY 9 AUGUST @7PM

Wortley Hall
(the Workers Stately Home)
Wortley, Sheffield S35 7DB

SPYCOPS

the Undercover Policing Scandal

The 2025 lecture will be given by Lindsey
– from Police Spies Out Of Lives.

'Lindsey' is a socialist and trade unionist working with Police Spies Out Of Lives (PSOOL) to both support women deceived into sexual relationships by undercover police officers, and to campaign for law change to illegalise this abusive surveillance

what's on...

NAW Executive Committee meetings are open to *all* members. The next one (online) will be on 1 July at 17.00. For more information about the meetings please contact the Secretary, Sandra Durkin, 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)

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