



# National Assembly of Women

## Annual Report May 2016 – May 2017

*The National Assembly of Women was founded in 1952 to work for full social, economic, legal, political and cultural independence and equality for women irrespective of age, race, religion, philosophical belief, sexual orientation or nationality. These aims, of course, can only be fully achieved in a world at peace and to this end we campaign for an end to nuclear weapons and militarism.*

### National Assembly of Women Officers and Executive Committee 2016-17

**President:** Anita Wright

**Secretary:** Liz Payne

**Treasurer:** Eleanor Lewington

#### Executive Committee

Megan Dobney, Siobhan Endean, Rose Keeping, Carolyn Simpson, Joanne Stevenson, Yvonne Washbourne, Barbara White.

#### Vice Presidents

Vera Baird QC, Rita Donaghy CBE, Pat Hawkes MBE, Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, Alice Mahon, Gloria Mills CBE, Frances O'Grady and Baroness Margaret Prosser.

#### Executive Committee Meetings

Since the last AGM there have been four EC meetings held in London.

#### SISTERS

Four editions of Sisters were published this year carrying reports of events and activities including articles from Kerry Abel, Chair of Abortion Rights; Vicky Knight, Chair of TUC Women's Committee; Annabel Berdy, Senior Policy Officer of Maternity Rights; and Maria Exall, Chair of the 2017 TUC Women's Conference

#### Website

The site continues to highlight NAW responses to consultations and many progressive campaigns especially the People's Assembly against Austerity. Various Labour movement demonstrations and events that members may wish to attend have been advertised including those from West London NAW branch. Reports of WIDF activities and regional meetings have also been posted on the website. Visits to the site since the previous report from end of March 2016 to end of March 2017 were 13,677 visits. Visits per day average 39 (47/31). Visits continue to rise since going live in October 2010 resulting in 71,665.

SISTERS can be viewed in colour at [www.sisters.org.uk](http://www.sisters.org.uk)

Join up with other sisters on the NAW facebook group:



<https://www.facebook.com>

### Looking forward

The decision to leave the European Union has dominated British politics since the referendum in June 2016. Now that Article 50 has been triggered the job of untangling EU regulations from British legislation will begin. The government announced in March 2017 that they intend to bring the Great Repeal Bill to Parliament which would mean that all the current EU laws on workers' rights, environmental protection and consumer rights would be transferred into British law. But once on the statute books these laws could be changed. The trade union and labour movement must continue the campaign to protect workers' rights, particularly as the austerity policies of the Tory government, now under Theresa May's leadership continues to deepen the inequalities in our society. Low wages, cuts to benefits and rising inflation make life increasingly difficult for millions of families trying to make ends meet. Young people struggle to find affordable housing and a secure job and a growing number of elderly people are being deprived of the care they need to live in dignity in their old age.

Women have frequently been at the sharp end of these cuts, as workers and carers, so the fight for equality has to be central to every campaign and the NAW, with its strong links to the trade union and labour movement has made this point at every opportunity. The speakers at the NAW Seminar in October showed how an economy that delivers for women can deliver for everyone. And there's



no shortage of money as seen by the obscene amount of spending wasted on armaments, notably Trident, which NAW sisters have tirelessly campaigned against. We have a

government that is increasingly seen as being for, by and of the rich – typified by former Tory Chancellor George Osborne who as well as being paid £75,000pa as an MP, £650,000 for one day's work a week for BlackRock and £120,000pa from an American think tank, is to become editor of the Evening Standard. Inequality on this scale frequently leads to resentment, anger, disillusionment and despair. The backlash against these deep divisions is often exploited by the most right-wing elements within our society to whip up racism and xenophobia. In this climate it is important that the NAW continues to work with others in the campaign for an inclusive and tolerant society.

**Anita Wright, President**

## NAW Activity over the past year

**AGM Motions 2016** focussed on pensions, the NHS, opposition to the expansion of nuclear power and the Charter for Women. Members reaffirmed their commitment to fight austerity by building strong networks in workplaces and local communities. NAW members, including EC members have been actively engaged in campaigns to save services, defend trade union rights, protect the environment and oppose Trident renewal. Reports and articles on these issues have regularly appeared in *SISTERS*.

**NAW Plan of Work** called on us to raise our profile in the movement. The NAW has provided a speaker at a number of regional and national events including:

- National Pensioners' Convention Women's Network Seminar
- Midlands TUC Equality Conference
- Unison SW Region Women's Meeting
- Unite Residential Women's School - *Eastbourne*
- IWD International Event, Marx House – *London*
- Unison West Midlands Retired members
- Keep our NHS Public AGM
- Morning Star Readers and Supporters - *Cardiff*

**AN ECONOMY THAT DELIVERS FOR WOMEN - The second Weekend Seminar organised by the National Assembly of Women** was held at Wortley Hall on 12/13<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

We were very privileged to have as a key note speaker Dr Faiza Shaheen, Director of the Centre for Labour and Social Studies (CLASS). She identified the key factors for creating a more equal society notably:



- an economy that is inclusive; built on growth; with good jobs; funded by a progressive taxation system and within a spend framework.
- a commitment to end discrimination through laws and policies that address discriminatory barriers alongside a public campaign to challenge prejudice and ingrained reactionary social norms.
- accountability and representation that gives people a voice in decision making; ensures budget transparency and preceded by equality assessment.

Siobhan Edean, UNITE National Officer for Equalities spoke on the second day on *The role of Women in the Trade Unions* and echoed Dr Shaheen's view that there is a deliberate attack on trade unions in order to disarm the workforce. She said that a strong industrial strategy was

needed that recognised the digital economy along with the development of strong public services. She said that the fight for equal pay was not about the redistribution of the existing pot of money but a challenge about the size of the pot.



Anita Wright, NAW President opened the final presentation on *The Role of Women in Society*. She said that "Female oppression is indissolubly linked to the operation and maintenance of the capitalist system". In an advanced capitalist society working class women bear the greatest burden of low wages and the most housework and caring responsibilities. The solution is to struggle for a government committed to an expansion of the economy and creation of well paid, secure employment, educational opportunities and the socialisation of domestic services and child care facilities.

Throughout the two days, delegates at the Seminar had the opportunity to discuss a range of topics including the cost of war and peace; the welfare state; the EU referendum; equality at home and in the workplace and community campaigning as well as having the chance to relax and enjoy the wonderful catering services and surroundings of Wortley Hall.

### Women's International Democratic Federation XVI World Congress

Anita Wright and Liz Payne represented the NAW at the 16<sup>th</sup> world congress of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) in Bogota, Colombia, from 14 to 18 September. Two hundred and fifty-five women, representing fifty-five organizations from forty-four countries came together to discuss the theme "**Women united for peace and the struggle against imperialism.**"



A full report was published in the Winter 2016 edition of *SISTERS* and is available on the NAW website.

## West London NAW Branch Report

Our West London branch holds bi-monthly meetings with a focus on speakers and discussions - with range of organisations we try and support with our fund-raising events.

In May, we had an up-dated report on the Rainbow Fund which is a local Richmond-based charity which supports a home-work school in Guguletu in South Africa. We heard about the teachers, school meals, library and IT resources which are so badly needed. We have regular contact so we know that the funds are well-used and that progress is being made with a new Numeracy initiative.

In July, a discussion on the women's movement was led by Margaret Laird, one of our members, who raised issues about modern technology and the need to focus on students and young people and continue with the battles for equality – which are not yet won. We discussed the need to campaign on equality in the home as well – and on domestic violence – as well as the under-representation of women in politics.

In September, Rosina Robson reported on her 5 day fund-raising bike ride for 'Cycle Palestine' when 30 participants raised £100,000. MAP (Medical Aid for Palestine) support medics and hospitals in Gaza and work with the Health Authority to build capacity or Palestinians. Her visit to Hebron saw a desperate situation, with Israeli settlements splitting communities and restricting access for Palestinian children to schools and mosques.

Meetings before and after Christmas included a speaker on the Greater London Pensioners and their campaigns on NHS and the elderly, especially the impact of the Health and Social Care Act, and the moves to privatisation. We also watched a DVD of Tony Benn and his work in the Peace and Labour movement.



Then, in March, we held our annual celebration lunch for International Women's Day, hosted by Dr Schonfield and husband Victor. This is a key fund-raising event and we also discussed Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party, Brexit and the NHS.

Members have kept us up to date throughout the year on issues relating to Trident and the Peace Movement, Education, the NUT, Academies and amalgamation with ATL. We have made donations to the NAW, to the Rainbow Fund, Global Justice, the Fistula Hospital, War on Want, Network for Peace, Medical Aid for Palestine, ASTI and Cuba. Our treasurer, Joan Danvers, ensures that our fund-raising efforts enable us to continue this work.

Members have represented the Branch at campaign events such as Wimbledon Vigil for Peace, Anti-Trident and Anti-Trump Women's Equality March. Also, the National Pensioners Convention, NUT and CND demonstrations and the demonstration against the bombing of Syria.

Our members have attended many other meetings and support the local Forum for the Elderly and Refugees in Richmond. We were pleased to celebrate our tireless Chair, Maisie Carter, receiving a well-deserved Trade Union award this year.

**Roz Carter – Secretary**



The Russian Revolution Centenary Committee is a broad-based coalition of labour movement, heritage and cultural organisations. It is organising events and activities throughout 2017 to mark the anniversary of the Russian Revolution. The NAW has been represented on the Committee by EC member Carolyn Simpson. For more information: [www.1917.org.uk](http://www.1917.org.uk)

## Trump Visit

*Stop Trump* is a coalition of organisations and individuals launched in February 2017 to oppose Donald Trump's state visit to the UK. The NAW is represented on the committee by EC members Carolyn Simpson and Siobhan Edean. Trump threatens steps towards tackling climate change, fighting discrimination, inequality, peace and disarmament. Stop Trump is organising a demonstrations to make it clear to our government, and to the world, that this is not in our name. [www.stoptrump.org.uk](http://www.stoptrump.org.uk)

## Abortion Rights – Women's March Against Trump

On 20th May the anti-choice fraternity is organising its own UK version of *March for 'Life'* (MFL) in Birmingham. The groups coming together to organise the day are made up of evangelical movements on the fringe of Christianity in the UK. MFL are styling themselves on the American model and flying over speakers from the US and use the same slogans as the US organisation 'life from conception – no exception'. Abortion Rights (AR) is joining up with women's groups as part of *Women's March Against Trump* against all the misogyny and sexism that Trump galvanised in his campaign election that is creeping over here and to counter and prove that we are the pro-choice majority. [www.abortionrights.org.uk](http://www.abortionrights.org.uk)

## British Peace Assembly

In July 2015 the BPA, an affiliate of the World Peace Council was revived with support from a number of organisations including the NAW. An annual lecture was established in the name of J.D.Bernal, scientist, socialist and peace campaigner. The 2017 lecture was given by Dr Liz Payne, NAW Secretary and Meirian Jump, archivist of the Marx Memorial Library.

<https://britishpeaceassembly.wordpress.com>

<b>NAW ACCOUNTS for 1/1/16 to 31/12/16</b>	
<b>General Fund</b>	
<b>INCOME</b>	
Balance brought forward from 2015	£5,621.35
Membership	£3,784.50
Affiliations	£1,015.00
Donations	£500
Seminar	£1,745.50
Sales	£207.06
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>£12,873.41</b>
Income in 2016	£7,252.06
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	
EC Travel	£633.96
Other Travel	£205.15
Post	£783.05
Telephone	£42.98
Stationery	£42.44
SISTERS	£794.67
Printing	£478.19
Website	£108.00
Affiliations	£765.71
Seminar	£1,820.50
Stalls	£124.00
Adverts	£450.00
Delegations	£1,633.42
Donation	£100.00
Bank Charges	£51.00
<b>Expenditure 2016</b>	<b>£8,033.07</b>
<b>Balance c/f to 2017</b>	<b>£4,840.34</b>
<b>Val Duncan Fund</b>	
Balance from 2015	£4,310.65
Expenditure for seminar	£391.45
<b>Balance c/f to 2017</b>	<b>£3,919.20</b>
<b>TOTAL c/f to 2017</b>	<b>£8,759.54</b>

#### Auditor's Report

Brian Clarke was endorsed by the 2016 NAW AGM as the appointed auditor.

The accounts have been checked and confirmed as accurate.

#### Treasurer's comments

Following the Co-operative Bank's decision to close the accounts of Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, the NAW EC decided in January

2016 to move our account to Unity Trust Bank. More than half of our NAW members who pay their membership fee by standing order have made the transfer but there are still many who have not changed yet.

#### Affiliations

The NAW is affiliated to: Abortion Rights, Campaign Against the Arms Trade; CND; Campaign for Press & Broadcasting Freedom; Cuba Solidarity Campaign; National Pensioners Convention; Palestine Solidarity Campaign; Peoples Assembly Against Austerity; Women's International Democratic Federation; Women's Resource Centre and is a shareholder of Wortley Hall and the Morning Star People's Press Printing Society.

#### Membership

The individual membership has held steady during the year at around 160. Membership retention is good for those people who pay by standing order, but remains relatively poor for those who pay each year by cheque. We have a record number of affiliations (41) with 21 Unite branches, mainly in the north, as well as three TUC regions and the Scottish TUC.

#### Betty Tebbs

It was with great sadness that in January 2017 the NAW learnt of the death of Betty Tebbs, founder member of the National Assembly of Women, former Chair and Vice President. Greater Manchester CND, which Betty was an active member of, has organised a fundraising event on 22<sup>nd</sup> April to celebrate her life, featuring Maxine Peake. The NAW is sending greetings and a donation of £100 in recognition of Betty's life-long commitment to internationalism, peace and the emancipation of women.

#### Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Lecture.

The 2016 lecture held at Wortley Hall on 13<sup>th</sup> August: *Socialism, Feminism and the Women of 1916* was given by Ruth Taillon recording Sylvia's support for the locked out Dublin workers in 1913 and highlighting the brave campaigning of a significant number of Irish women.



On August 18<sup>th</sup> a special event was held to celebrate the arrival of the maquette of Sylvia's statue to Marx Memorial Library, Clerkenwell Green, London.

#### Conferences and Stalls

The National Assembly of Women had stalls at a number of local events including the TUC Women's Conference, and the South Yorkshire Festival, at Wortley Hall

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