

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN – 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Celebrating five decades of campaigning for women



Sian Griffiths, Region 11 National Women's Committee Representative, on the celebration of a remarkable anniversary

THE National Assembly of Women (NAW) celebrated at Congress House in London an amazing 50 years of campaigning on 18 March 2002. SERTUC. Thompsons Solicitors sponsored the event.

Launched on International Women's Day in 1952, the NAW's first aim was a pledge

for world peace. But the founding declaration, which was read by veteran suffragette Charlotte Marsh, was a call on women everywhere to join together in support of the demands of the International Charter for Women as mothers, as workers, as citizens to act together for the defence of peace, for higher living standards and the right of children to health, education, a full life ... **FOR LIFE NOT DEATH, FOR PEACE NOT WAR, FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR CHILDREN.**

This original statement was intended only to apply to this country. But as the years have gone by the NAW has campaigned for and supported women in other countries in their struggles for liberation and independence. The NAW is affiliated to the Women's International Democratic Federation which links it with the international women's movement and its main aim is to achieve full social, economic, legal, political and cultural independence and equality for all women irrespective of age, race, religion, philosophical belief, sexual orientation or nationality.

Over the years, the NAW has forged strong links with women's groups and trade unions, including the FBU, and has worked tirelessly to push through positive change.

The evening's festivities were well attended and Linda Smith, London Regional Treasurer, and myself represented the London Region Women's Action Committee. It was an honour to be among so many women who despite being involved with the women's movement for decades have not given up yet and don't look like they ever intend to. This was incredibly inspiring.



STATUE OF SYLVIA PANKHURST

The plan was for the statue to have been unveiled in the summer of this year, but there have been delays. The NWA has planning permission from Westminster City Council but also needs the approval of the Parliamentary Works of Arts Committees of the Commons and Lords. The next meeting of the House of Lords Works of Art Committee is in November 2003. The Director of Parliamentary Estates says the NWA application for approval will be placed before them then. The members of the Committee are Baronesses Hilton, Trumpington, Warwick, and Lords Cobold, Eames, Gavron, Luke, Redsdale, Rees, Rees-Mogg, Tordoff. Sponsors are sought for this project so get your committee to contribute. Contact www.gn.apc.org/sylviapankhurst for further information.

◆ Pictured: The Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee (l to r) Barbara Switzer, Megan Dobney, Philippa Clark and Mary Davis with a model of the statue.

Tributes were paid to many women, rousing songs were sung and there was plenty of wine. It is at times like these that you realise that feminists are not in the minority and that they have always been with us: very heart-warming.

A special mention was made of the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee, which was established four years ago to promote Sylvia Pankhurst and her contribution to working class women. One thing the committee is trying to do is have a statue of Sylvia Pankhurst erected on College Green outside the Houses of Parliament (see box above).

■ If you want to join or just find out more about the National Assembly of Women then email naw@belvedere.clara.net.



Janette Ferguson, Editor, recalls the highlights of the 50th anniversary AGM

WHEN the chance came to attend the AGM of the National Assembly of Women (NAW) at Wortley Hall, I put my name forward as did Joanne Winrow-Jones. We set off to Wortley not knowing quite what to

expect but at the end of the weekend we were both glad we had gone and have every intention of going next year as well. The women we met there were from every age group, from every walk of life, and our first impression was that everyone was welcome.

After the elections of the NAW Committee and the Secretaries Report, the AGM covered a wide variety of topics:

- ◆ Star Wars issues at Menwith Hill and Fylingdales. After lengthy discussions, the AGM voted to support all action against this.
- ◆ HIV / Aids in South Africa. Talks about funding had moved from the Multinationals to internal issues with the Government and Courts currently in dispute about costs of health care.
- ◆ Japanese women were petitioning against Nuclear Weapons to ban them completely. They had 150,000 signatures.
- ◆ A letter – A Woman's Right to Choose – was sent to Bush. No reply – no surprise there! His party has withdrawn funding and aid for abortions in America.
- ◆ NAW, Public Profile – The website is on-line at www.sisters.org.uk and will be updated regularly. A Profile Committee was set up.
- ◆ Morning Star – Two articles printed, links still strong.
- ◆ Pensions – Politicians say one thing and do another. More accountability needed. Better state funding is needed. Launch of pensions programme at same time pensions leaflet will be sent out. Working party to be set up regarding Women's Issues in Pensions.
- ◆ National Pensions Convention – NAW have been asked to participate.
- ◆ NAW Magazine – All contributions welcome.
- ◆ Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee – Statue was due to be unveiled in summer 2003.

- ◆ Children at work – Putting children out of work is not the only answer. Some children, who have no parents, need to be earners for grandparents. But children deserve an education and a childhood.
- ◆ Public Transport – And the lack of it. Public Transport is used by Women and children so it should be safe from accidents and breakdowns, it should be affordable to all and it should be taken back into public hands. Jo Winrow-Jones spoke on this issue, saying "This is a class issue not always realised by people living in London, where they have the Underground and a reliable Bus Service. There is a greater problem in other areas."
- ◆ Palestine – There was a debate on both Saturday and Sunday on the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the brutality being used on a defenceless people. This is all because war criminal Ariel Sharon wants to 'get rid of' Yassar Arafat, blaming him for the suicide bombers targeting Israel. And during this time, Britain still trades with Israel. Conditions in the refugee camps/compounds is appalling: lack of basic facilities, the constant humiliation and indignity of so-called security checks everywhere and the lack of sanitation. Pressure has

MAKING THIS WORLD A BETTER PLACE

got to be put on Blair to try to isolate Bush. We can do a lot by concentrating on this country as well and also to give our support to the P.L.O. and Friends of Palestine. Demonstrations so far have included a lot of young people and now Trade Union Banners are appearing as well. Public statements are also required to support Palestine and lambaste Israel, Bush, Blair etc.. Also contact MP's and MSP's, find out exactly what is being done and what we can do. What are the UN and NATO doing? America continues to do nothing to force Israel out of Palestine and is propping up other states eg., Saudi Arabia. Israel is emulating what the UK has already done, Iraq, Kosovo etc. Is this now accepted as OK! Emergency resolution agreed condemning the systematic bombing, demanding an immediate withdrawal with the UN as overseers. Ariel Sharon should be charged as War Criminal.

- ◆ Iraq – Particular worries and commitment to write to Tony Blair to voice concerns.

We finished off the Saturday evening with a dinner and speeches to celebrate the 50th anniversary and it is plain that the women who attend the NAW are committed to at least trying to make this world a better place. I think we should all share that sentiment and do something about it!