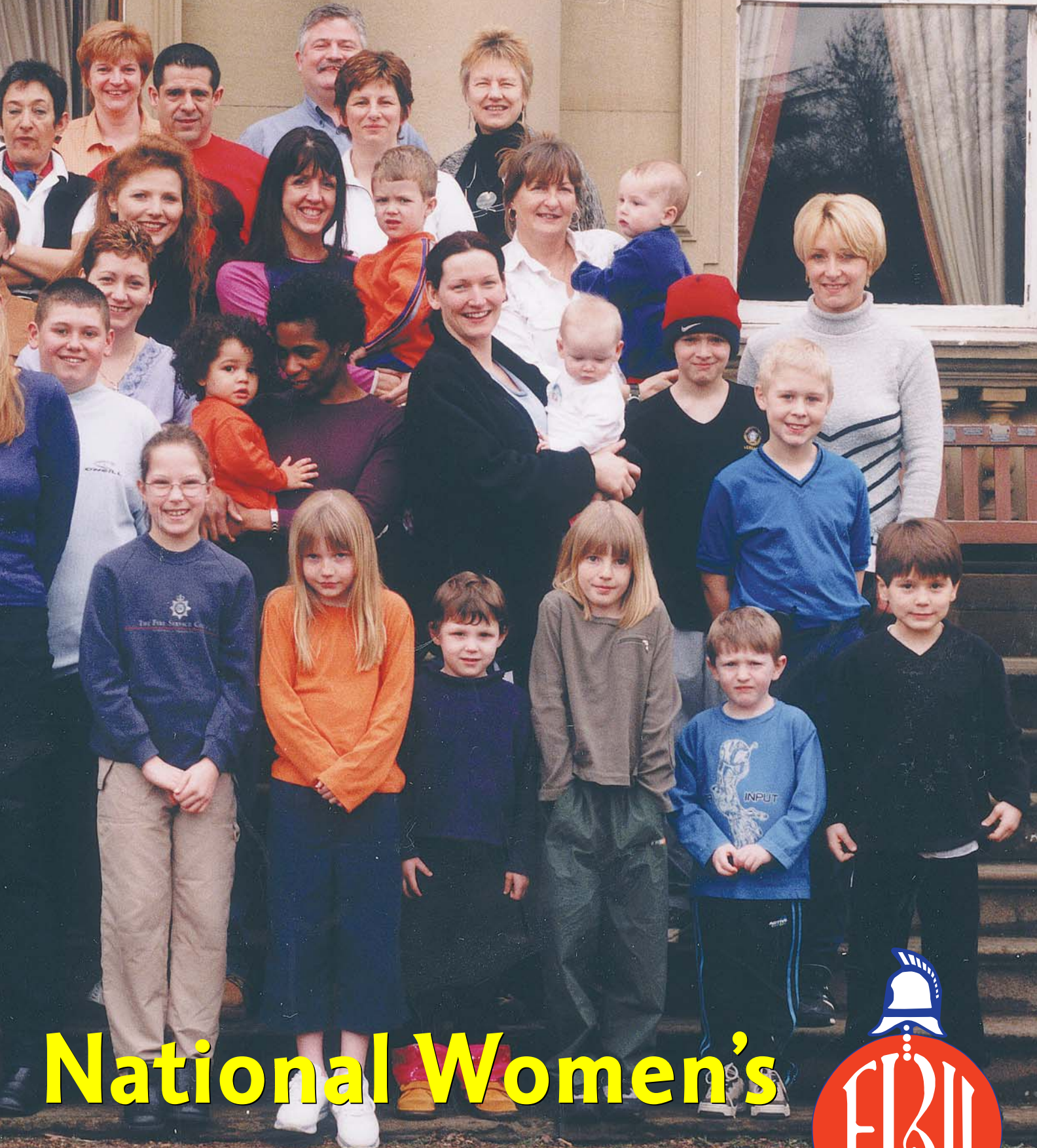


SIREN

SPRING 2002



**National Women's
School 2001**



EDITORIAL/CONTENTS

QUITE a lot has happened since our last issue. We have witnessed the atrocities on September 11th and all that has followed, from the rescues of civilians and emergency service personnel to the confirmation of the total loss of life, all because a group of people decided on a very drastic course of action.

Closer to home we have held our Annual General Meeting at Wortley Hall, and in this issue we have a report of proceedings written for us by three members from Region 10, who attended this their first Women's Annual General Meeting as observers. We hope to see them back next year as delegates.

We have also included a progress report on the work done by the National Women's Committee after the Annual General Meeting in November 2000.

We will keep up the good work next year, but in the meantime we hope everyone has a Happy and Prosperous Year.

**From Lynda & Janette
Editors**

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Long and interesting year with a lot of changes and battles

NOVEMBER 2001

A WARM welcome was given to all by the Chair of the Women's National Committee Dona Feltham and congratulations were extended to Helen Hill who had just been voted National Retained Secretary at their AGM at Wortley Hall in November 2001. Dona then encouraged everyone to get up and speak and said: "If I can do it then you certainly can." This set the friendly, sisterly tone for the rest of the meeting.

Kay Vernals from Standing Orders Committee gave their report, which was promptly challenged by Jo Winrow-Jones from Region 9, she said "We challenge the decision to rule out of order two of the resolutions submitted by Region 9"

Jo then proceeded to inform the AGM why they believed that both resolutions should not have been ruled out of order. Following the challenge on these two resolutions the decision was put to the floor, it was found to be a unanimous vote in favour of putting the resolutions back on the order paper. Hooray!!

Dona then invited Ruth Winters the Fire Brigades Union's Vice President to give the National Report. Ruth told the Women's AGM:

"We have had a long and interesting year with a lot of changes and battles. Best value is now beginning to bite and as predicted the effect has not been to improve the service. We are now seeing proposed cuts in staffing and services and the realities of the best value legislation is now becoming apparent." Ruth then moved on to the situation around Fire Control Mergers. She said: "We have given constant opposition to the proposed mergers and amalgamations of Fire Controls and have been united in this fight, however this battle is still ongoing and still needs our support."

It was important also to raise the issue of the Fire Cover review, which is something we should all be debating on branches now. Ruth informed us that "Affecting us all is the issue of the 'Fire Cover Review', this has been ongoing via the Pathfinder Review and will affect the way we all work, this report is due out in March 2002 and we will be prepared for it."

Ruth spoke passionately about the situation in Afghanistan and the plight of the innocent men, women and children. She spoke on loads more, but this is just a taster – you will have to come next year to find out more.

It was then Vicky Knight's turn to speak; Vicky is the NWC's

National Secretary. Vicky told the AGM about the busy year the National Women's Committee has had. She said "We have been involved in negotiations, policy development, conferences both internal and external, seminars, educational events and disputes" It is important to mention that Vicky extended a very special thanks to Ruth for her massive support. She said that Ruth proved that women in this Union are both resilient and brilliant and that by supporting and helping each other we CAN and DO effect change.

Vicky spoke about the Draft Maternity document that the NWC has drafted and as we speak is on the agenda for the NJC sub committee. She also mentioned the many other things that the women have been involved in, namely a Model Workplace Facilities Policy, a Model Radiation at Work Policy ... the list goes on. Vicky moved on to say "we had the honour of bringing over the first woman delegate from the Federation of Cuban

"We had the honour of bringing over the first woman delegate from the Federation of Cuban Women"

Women." Alicia Gonzales came to the National Women's school in March and also attended the women's TUC. Vicky talked about the achievements in Cuba and that we could try to mirror their socialist way of society, to improve what the Labour Government has failed to achieve so far. It is important to mention that Vicky spoke of the tragedy in New York on September 11th and the devastation of many lives, but also that retaliation bombing was not the answer.

She said "We need to put pressure on the Government 'here' to achieve justice not revenge, for the murder of many, for the sins of a few" A thought echoed later in the conference. To finish her speech she told delegates

"Thank you for your attendance, enjoy the conference, lets have some good debate and remember everyone gets nervous. I am nervous right now, but your views are important and unless we share our views we can't change anything...and I know that we already have done this, so its achievable...so if you thought you couldn't get up to the rostrum and make a speech, however short – then prove yourself wrong."

AGM

RESOLUTION 1**Family Friendly Officer in Brigades***Sian Griffiths – Region 11*

A resolution for all Brigades to employ a trained Family Policies Officer to provide information for members on all relevant issues, such as, Parental Rights and Brigade Obligations.

This is particularly relevant in Maternity issues as most Brigades write Maternity Policies only after a female firefighter becomes pregnant.

*Seconded by Pauline Layhe – Region 13***CARRIED****RESOLUTION 2****Family Friendly Policies****WITHDRAWN****RESOLUTION 3****Maternity Policies***Sharon Scott – Region 6*

A resolution to ensure pregnant women in the Fire Service have the choice to work their recognised duty system in their workplace. A written policy needs to be in place in each Brigade so there can be no discrimination or bad feeling at work in what is a stressful time for many women.

*Seconded by Sharon Mossop – Region 7***CARRIED AS AMENDED BY REGION 9****RESOLUTION 4****Workplace Facilities***Helen Harrison – Region 7*

A resolution for a full document of minimum standards for workplace facilities to be formalised. This would mean that Brigades can no longer only pay lip service to progress in this area, but must show that they are actually making some headway. Progress to be reported to The Woman's National AGM 2002.

*Seconded by Pauline Layhe – Region 13***CARRIED AS AMENDED BY REGION 1****RESOLUTION 5****Women's Facilities on Fire Stations***Sharon Peverett – Region 10*

A resolution for monitoring procedures, to ensure that Brigades are actually providing the female facilities, for which they have received government funding. Again this would mean that Brigades can no longer just

leave this issue on the agenda, but must be seen to be making progress.

*Seconded by Jane Moss – Region 7***CARRIED AS AMENDED BY REGION 1****RESOLUTION 6****Facilities for Women in the Fire Service***Pauline Layhe – Region 13*

A resolution to demand that the Executive Council instigates an audit of Fire Service workplaces, to highlight the lack of facilities for female personnel. Audit and Improvement Plan to be presented to The Women's National AGM 2002.

*Seconded by Heather Lawrie – Region 1***CARRIED****EMERGENCY RESOLUTION 5****Capability***Kerry Baigent – Region 10*

An emergency resolution to pledge solidarity and support to the FBU in Bedfordshire where the Fire Authority is trying to dismiss a 15 year member, now on sick leave using capability, or frustration of contract, instead of retiring her on ill-health pension.

*Seconded by Jo Winrow-Jones – Region 9***CARRIED****RESOLUTION 12****Education Programme***Joanne Evans – Region 9*

A resolution to call for extra training for women appointed to carry out investigations under the All Different All Equal Policy. This is due to lack of knowledge and understanding and must be included in the education programme 2002.

*Seconded by Kerry Baigent – Region 10***CARRIED****RESOLUTION 13****Verbatim Report***Jo Winrow-Jones – Region 9*

A resolution calling for a verbatim report of the Women's National AGM. This is asking only for transparency and accountability and so that all Women Members can know what is being discussed and decided on their behalf.

*Seconded by Sian Griffiths – Region 11***CARRIED****RESOLUTION 7****Women in the Fire Service***Pauline Layhe – Region 13*

Pauline spoke about how we are falling at the first Key area in schools and that a strategy plan needs to be produced for schools so that the Fire Service can be a career choice for girls.

*Seconded by Helen Harrison – Region 7***CARRIED****RESOLUTION 8****Recruitment & Retention of Women Fire Fighters***Sally Harper – Region 11*

Sally gave an example from London Fire Brigade whereby 190 women have come through training school and only 70 of those are still in the Fire Service. These were obviously determined women – what changed their minds? Could be a number of reasons i.e. facilities, harassment, uniform, constant fight for acceptance, lack of support. But unfortunately most of the time we just don't know why.

*Seconded by Sally Tyrrell – Region 10***CARRIED****RESOLUTION 9****Height Requirements***Sally Tyrrell – Region 10*

Spoke on how height requirements have been imposed in the past leading to indirect discrimination, as the average height for women is 5' 4". 50% of women potentially being ruled out because of this. Tests should not discriminate – team approach.

Seconded by Sharon Mossop – Region 7

'Equipment should be adapted for people rather than making the people fit the equipment'

*Joanne Winrow-Jones moved amendment 1**Sian Griffiths formerly seconded this***CARRIED AS AMENDED BY REGION 9****RESOLUTION 10****BNP Opposition***Janette Ferguson – Region 1*

FBU condemns the murder in Sighthill and the murders of two asylum seekers, the violence in Burnley and Bradford. Encouraged us to support Anti-Nazi League, demos and lobbies against unnecessary violence to innocent people.

*Seconded by Sian Griffiths – Region 11**Amendment moved by Kerry Baigent – Region 10 and seconded formerly*

**CARRIED AS AMENDED BY
REGION 10****EMERGENCY RESOLUTION 1****Afghanistan***Jo Evans Region 9*

The Afghans are suffering – they are not the guilty ones it is the Taliban and their harsh regimes. Expressed the need to tolerate other religions and cultures. Retaliation is not the answer

*Seconded by Kerry Baigent – Region 10***CARRIED****EMERGENCY RESOLUTION 3****Islamophobia***Jo Winrow Jones – Region 9*

Spoke on the rise of hatred of the Muslim community due to the media. No longer considered that ignorance was the reason but intolerance

*Seconded by Janette Ferguson – Region 1***CARRIED****RESOLUTION 11****Control Mergers***Pauline Layhe – Region 13*

Under the guise of Best Value – brigades are looking into changing control rooms/ Sharing databases could be the first step to merging.

*Seconded by Samantha Aulton – Region 11**Amendment 1 moved by Sharon Peveritt**Region 10**seconded by Jane Moss – Region 7***CARRIED AS AMENDED BY
REGION 10****EMERGENCY RESOLUTION 2****ILAs***Jo Winrow Jones – Region 9*

Why can't a security system be put in place rather than getting rid of a very important system?

*Seconded by Wendy Woods – Region 1***CARRIED****EMERGENCY RESOLUTION 4****Merseyside***Jo Evans – Region 9*

Jo outlined the history of the disputes in Merseyside with Saunders. Stated that there has been no recruitment for 4 years at that they are seriously understaffed.

*Seconded by Sian Griffiths – Region 11***CARRIED**

PROGRESS REPORT OF ACTIONS WOMEN'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, NOVEMBER 2000

Women in the Fire Service*EC referred back to NWC for action*

Research commenced with Sister Unions. The results of the research showed that the issue needed to be debated in open forum. We concluded that our current journals, Siren and Firefighter were appropriate vehicles to drive this debate into the public arena. This issue was further raised at NWC following the AGM. In order to maintain the profile of this issue – members need to engage in the debate.

*See article in this edition – Women Misunderstood, page 7.***Women in the Fire Service***Mike Fordham to raise Fire Service Implementation Group**This is ongoing.***Job Share***NWC and CSNC to action*

Current CSNC draft policy document is to be reviewed and progressed by sub committee comprising NWC and CSNC reps. This policy will include job share for all members. This will be progressed through EC member with reference for FAW.

Resolution No. 4

Unfortunately this resolution fell due to no representative from Region 8 being able to attend at AGM.

Fire Kit*Referred to NWC to progress*

Met with Dave Patton in May 2001. Raised a number of issues regarding women's PPE. NWC met with Dave Patton and CFO Doig (Staffordshire) Head of CACFOA's PPE Forum. Invited to attend Flame Engulfment Tests at FSC, Moreton-in-Marsh, (23/10/01.) Issue was further debated – no conclusion at this time. Awaiting formal feedback from Health & Safety representatives for next NWC meeting, specific agenda item.

*Also, ongoing with FBU H & S Dept, to ensure item remains high on the agenda.***Radiation Incidents***Referred to NWC for action*

Research of existing Brigade Policies carried out by NWC Rep. Region 10. Distinct lack of available information. Draft Policy prepared. Consultation period ongoing, working

closely with H & S. Final Document to be produced as soon as possible.

Maternity Pay*Referred to NWC for action*

NWC Draft Policy Document is currently on agenda for discussion at NJC level. Has been circulated to all Brigade Sec's as a model document (agreed at EC.) already partially implemented in many Brigades.

Paid Absence Policy*Family Friendly Policy being discussed by NJC – ongoing.***Recruitment***Agenda Item discussed and ongoing at Home Office EOTG*

This issue has been debated with a huge amount of FBU input at EOTG level. The NWC remain involved in the discussions and continue to work with the National Officer with the reference of FAW at Head Office.

Fire Service Controls*CSNC continuing to progress – The Campaign continues*

The NWC will always support the CSNC and to keep this a high profile issue.

Verbatim Report*Referred back to EC*

After debate by EC it was decided that this was not a cost effective option for recording the AGM of Women members. Awaiting report back from National Officer on alternative options.

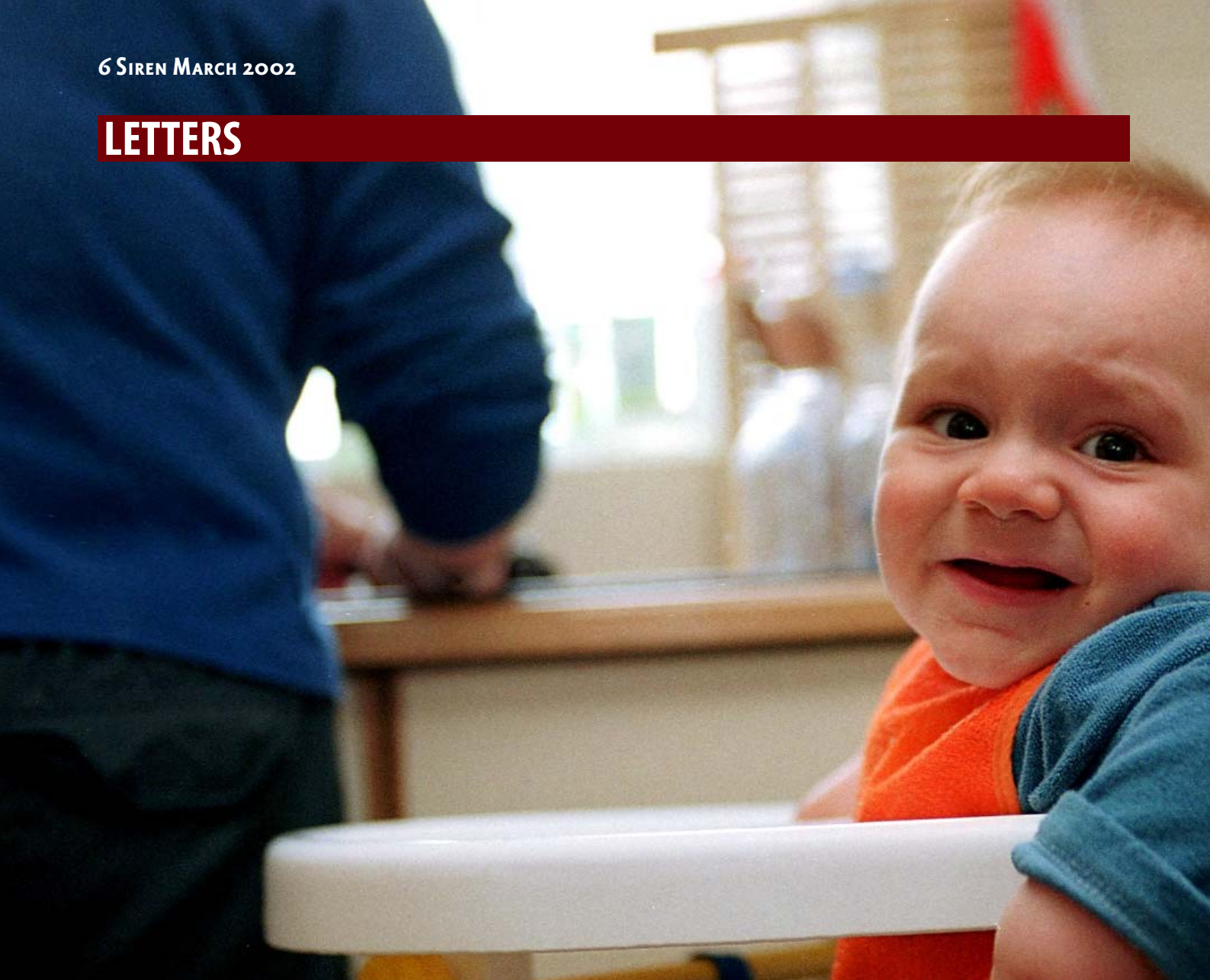
Workplace Facilities*NWC to action*

Research into current Brigade policies was carried out and debate took place both in Brigades and at NWC as to acceptable 'minimum' standards. NWC Rep., Region 7 prepared a draft document defining a 'minimum standard. This document was amended and agreed by a sub committee of NWC. The draft was then sent to Dave Patton (H&S) for any amendments and to ensure its adherence to legislation and guidelines.

**Emergency Resolution 1
Merseyside Ballot**

Overwhelming support from women members during the Merseyside Dispute, following the unanimous vote at AGM 2000.

LETTERS



JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

ADOPTION LEAVE

It is re-assuring to know that the new Maternity Policy including Adoption Leave has been forwarded to the National Joint Council for negotiation. BUT WHAT ABOUT NOW??

There is a significant increase of individuals and couples within the Fire Service taking the decision to adopt a child which can be a difficult, stressful and lengthy process, and they should be given full and supportive consideration by their employers.

Although not ideal, a policy of sorts is in place for adoption leave in some Brigades in some Regions. However, the majority of Brigades in the U.K. fail comprehensively to recognise the rapidly increasing necessity for such leave.

The yearning and natural instinct to have a child for most women is immense. In some instances, very often, when after years of failed attempts with, IVF and other fertility treatments proves fruitless, adoption is the only option left.

For Brigades to refuse reasonable leave for adoption is an open act of discrimination against the mother, simply because she is not the biological bearer of her child.

This is unfair, immoral and totally unacceptable.

In our Grey Book Conditions of Service, it states that 5 days paid leave can be granted for an employee wishing to adopt a

child. In addition, unpaid leave can be granted in accordance with the Parental Leave Policy, also set out in the Grey Book. This is a "minimum" requirement only and should not be adopted as "the norm".

The adoption of an infant should be given the same parity with that of a maternal mother. Post-natally, time is required for "bonding and settling-in" into the new and extended family unit. This is also the case for the adoptive parents and infant. There are many other stresses and relationship problems which are associated with adoption, particularly for instance the inter-country adoption.

As a natural mother myself, I can only stand back and admire the couples going through the trauma and invasive procedures of adoption.

Brigades who fail to recognise, or respect, the prospective adoptive parents in their employ are totally unjust.

The new Maternity Policy approved by the N.J.C., is still some way away from implementation. We can only hope in the interim that every Fire Service employee who applies for adoption leave is treated fairly and with the consideration every new mother deserves.

Cath. Orton
Region 10

Women misunderstood!

AS a woman in the Fire Service with 29 years service I have noticed over the years quite a few changes (not all for the better). As a member of the NWC I can also say we are very proud (and I think quite rightly so) of what we have achieved so far for our women members and we hope the changes will ultimately benefit every FBU member. Unfortunately we are still getting criticism from some of our members and even from some of the officials of the FBU. Statements such as "well we never had any problems in the Fire Service until they started women firefighters".

PROBLEMS such as privacy in fire stations, (Toilets, Showers, Dormitories etc.). Did male firefighters never want privacy? Did male firefighters never need their own space?

PROBLEMS with PPE, Undress Uniform etc., (Tunic, BA mask, Gloves, Fire Boots, length of Trousers etc.) Correct me if I'm wrong (which I'm sure you will), when I say that over the years the Fire Service have for example changed the height restrictions and I know that there are male firefighters in service ranging from 5' 2" to 6' 4", with very different builds and weights. So, the problem with PPE and Undress Uniform not fitting properly has been around for a very long time and is not a 'new problem caused by women being allowed to join the Fire Service'. I have personally heard this problem raised many times over the years.

PROBLEMS with pre-conceived ideas that the standard at entry into the Fire Service has been lowered to let women into this job. All recruits whether men or women, have to pass the same standard tests. Then after a 16 weeks recruits course and all the other assessments and interviews which follow, whether you choose to go for promotion or not, everyone is expected to reach the same high standard.

PROBLEMS of intolerance which in too many cases has caused severe aggravation or worse for our firefighters before they have managed to get a transfer to another watch or station. Or, our control staff, who also have in many cases suffered severe aggravation or worse, before managing to transfer to another watch. Or, in other cases to a completely different Brigade.

But thankfully it's not all doom and gloom. There are still a lot of fair minded people out there in the Fire Service and not all of our firefighters and control staff feel they have to leave the Fire Service to get away from the intolerance aimed at them and after transferring away from the intolerance go on to settle and



REPORT/DIGITAL.CO.UK

Future recruits? All entrants to the Fire Service have to pass the same standard tests.

enjoy the career they have chosen.

So, if you have any comments to make regarding the above, please address them to: **The Editors, Siren Magazine, FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 62 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE**

COLOMBIA

Women fight back in Colombia

TRADITIONALLY a patriarchal society, Colombia is a country in which extensive social discrimination against women continues to be a serious problem. Where rape and acts of violence against women are pervasive and are seldom prosecuted and where, in spite of legislation and constitutional guarantees, women are subjected to a worrying degree of discrimination in the labour market. This situation is aggravated by the country's escalating economic crisis, neo-liberal policies and IMF-imposed austerity measures which are having serious repercussions on society generally, but particularly on women, and most specifically on single mothers and impoverished rural women. Another major contributing factor is the on-going armed conflict in which women are increasingly victims of violence, with many thousands made destitute and left to fend for themselves, their children and elderly relatives. State-sponsored paramilitary death squads and the security forces murder fathers, husbands, brothers and sons in daily massacres. Disappearances, selective killings and orchestrated massive civilian displacements are commonplace.

The factors detailed below paint a bleak picture of the reality of being a woman in today's Colombia.

Inter-family violence, sexual assault and murder of women are increasing in Colombia. In the first half of 1999, there were around 20,000 reported cases of spousal abuse, 92% by the husbands against their wives. It is estimated that 95% of cases of abuse are never reported because of lack of confidence in the governmental institutions set up to address these issues and that there were probably around 15,000 unreported cases of rape throughout that year. While it is written into the Constitution that there should be no discrimination against women and local authorities are required to ensure "adequate and effective participation by women at decision-making levels of public administration", the daily reality is different.

A quota law was introduced in March 2000 requiring that a minimum of 30% of public positions should be allocated to women, yet women still do not hold more than 15% of the highest positions of authority. There is a huge discrepancy in hiring and in salary levels exacerbated by the country's economic crisis. Women's salaries rarely match their education and experience and they invariably have to demonstrate higher qualifications than their male counterparts.

Women earn 28% less than men in equivalent positions.

The unemployment figures for women greatly exceed those of men, with 16.9% of men and 24.5% of women unemployed in 1999. In addition, women represent a higher proportion of low-paid subsistence workers, especially in rural areas, with female rural workers the most severely affected by wage, labour rights and education discrimination and unemployment. 17.3% of women in rural areas are illiterate and 68% of the unemployed in rural areas are women. While dismissals for being pregnant or

There is a huge discrepancy in hiring and in salary levels exacerbated by the country's economic crisis. Women's salaries rarely match their education and experience and they invariably have to demonstrate higher qualifications than their male counterparts.

having a young child are prohibited by a ruling in September 1997 by the Constitutional Court, the reality is another matter and it is not clear whether the fear of losing a job through pregnancy contributes to the fact that the second greatest cause of maternal mortality in Colombia is abortion. Colombia is one of the world's few remaining countries where abortion is totally outlawed. Women, and in particular women in rural areas and single parents, suffer the hardest, from the extreme poverty that affects 55% of the population, rising to 80% in the countryside. As women resort to ever more desperate and dangerous means to resolve their financial situations, a consequence has been that Colombia is now the third most common country of origin of women and girls trafficked for prostitution.

Women who turn to prostitution in Colombia become

targets, along with street children, homosexuals, petty criminals, juvenile delinquents etc, of paramilitary “social cleansing operations”. Women are forgotten victims of the armed conflict that has been raging in Colombia for the last 40 years.

In 1999, around 60% of the internally displaced population, which is currently estimated to be in the region of 2 million people, were women and girls, 32% of displaced households were headed by women. Since 1999 the situation has become worse. Displacement is a strategy of paramilitary groups and the armed forces to destroy social cohesion and prevent social organisation. The circumstances of displacement involve dangerous, overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions, little or no access to health care, malnutrition, the prospect of only informal employment and further persecution by paramilitary groups.

On the positive side. There have been a growing number of female social movements in recent years that testify to the will of Colombian women, not simply to survive the social, economic and humanitarian crisis affecting their country, but to take an active part in finding solutions which have women in mind. Tired of the social and labour discrimination which is a legacy of Colombia’s centuries-old patriarchal society, and the hardships imposed on them by poverty and war, women are starting to organise and to take their future into their own hands. They realise that achieving sustainable peace and social justice for the entire population has to be an all-inclusive process. And while many women have been prepared to sacrifice their lives to the armed struggle fighting alongside the men in the country’s guerilla movements, networks of civilian women’s organisations have also taken some important initiatives to ensure that they too can actively participate in the struggle for a better Colombia.

Last year, different networks of women’s organisations including, the National Women’s Network, the Rural Women’s Network, Women and Politics, the Worker’s Union Umbrella Group (CUT), Women’s Network, Women for Colombia and the Women’s National Network for Initiatives for Peace and Against the War, presented their views about the negotiation process between Andres Pastrana’s government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP).

The aim was to increase women’s participation in the talks and ensure they did not result in a series of male-dominated agreements that would perpetuate the discrimination, violence and social exclusion directed against women. They demanded women’s seats on the Thematic Commission, which is an integral part of the peace process with the FARC-EP and it was eventually agreed to appoint 2 women out of a total of 20 members. It was an important achievement, but one which leaves room for improvement given that women constitute 50% of Colombian Society and 35% of FARC combatants.

On June 25th 2000, these same women’s organisations requested a space on the agenda of public sessions on economy and employment which were to be held in El Vicente del Caguan, the centre for peace talks in the demilitarised zone



ACTION BY CHURCHES TOGETHER

In Calarca, Colombia, a woman works building her new home.

established for the purpose in 1998. Around 200 women from diverse sectors and regions of society attended the session. The aim of which was to introduce the perspective of women and gender into the framework of the peace negotiations, and to bring to the attention of both the government and the FARC-EP, the serious problems that affect women in Colombia.

However, while women’s increasing involvement in social movements, including, community organisations, political and peasant movements, and human rights groups, is a way of transcending their often tragic circumstances, and taking a proactive role in shaping their own future. The result is that they are increasingly victims of political killings, threats, intimidation, ill treatment and torture by para-military death squads. Members of the Popular Women’s Organisation (Organizacion Femenina Popular) who run a community centre for displaced women in Barrancabermeja have recently been the targets of widely reported paramilitary attacks.

And yet, in the face of adversity and terrifying violence, Colombia’s women are displaying courage, strength and resilience, perhaps born of confidence in the knowledge that one day the struggle for peace with social justice will be won and there will be a better Colombia for all Colombians, including women.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Endometriosis: a common problem, but little understood

How many of us suffer from painful periods go to our doctors and are told: 'it's a women's thing and you will just have to find a way to live with it'. Pain is a very difficult thing to quantify, as it is as individual as we are. Periods are part of being a woman, but the pain some of us can suffer can be controlled and managed if diagnosed and treated.

ENDOMETRIOSIS is one of the most common problems in Gynaecology. It was described as far back as 1869 and yet it remains a poorly understood disease of the female reproductive system. Endometriosis is a condition where tissues similar to the lining of the womb, The Endometrium, is also found in places outside the womb, The Uterus. It can be found on the ligament supports of the uterus and on nearby organs such as the ovaries, bladder and bowel. It can sometimes also be found in more distant sites, such as the lungs or navel. Endometriosis can appear as spots or patches called "implants" or as "cysts" on the ovaries. In mild cases there may only be a few isolated "implants", while in others the disease may be present throughout the pelvis. Endometriosis irritates the surrounding tissue and can produce weblike scar tissue known as adhesions. The scar tissue can bind any of the pelvic organs to one another and in severe cases can cover them completely.

The disease can usually be treated with drugs or surgery. Generally endometriosis can only be diagnosed at operation and since some women have no symptoms, we can only guess at the true number of women affected. Some estimates suggest that up to 30% of women of reproductive age could have endometriosis.

It used to be thought that endometriosis was more common in women who had never had children, and is often called "the career women's disease" because women now choose to start their families later. However, generalisations should not be made since, endometriosis can affect any woman from teenager to the menopause. Endometriosis is not known to be an inherited disease, but a woman with a close relative who is herself affected is more likely to have endometriosis herself and more likely to have severe disease.

It is not known why some women get endometriosis, but its growth and spread are dependent on the female hormones produced each month by the ovaries in the reproductive cycle. The two hormones produced by the ovary are oestrogen and progesterone. Oestrogen is produced in the first half of the cycle

and progesterone, as well as oestrogen is the second. Each month in the middle of the cycle, a mature egg is released by the ovary, which is known as ovulation. The tube catches the egg and draws it inside. If the egg is fertilised, it may be embedded in the lining of the womb, the "endometrium" and a pregnancy has commenced. If it is not fertilised, it is lost together with the "endometrium", as the period at the end of the month. Endometriosis also goes through a monthly cycle each month and grows under the influence of the hormone oestrogen, it will also have a period each month, but there is no escape of blood, it remains and irritates the surrounding tissues.

CAUSES AND SYMPTOMS What causes endometriosis? Several theories exist as to how endometriosis begins, including the theory of retrograde menstruation. During a period most of the menstrual blood comes out through the vagina, in some women blood also passes backwards, through the fallopian tubes into the abdominal cavity. Contained within the menstrual blood are fragments of the endometrium, and this can seed and grow in the peritoneal cavity. It is not known why these cells seed in some women and not in others. This theory is called retrograde menstruation.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE Early implants look like spots and pimples sprinkled on the pelvic surfaces. The implants may remain unchanged, become scar tissue, or disappear over a period of months. In most women endometriosis grows slowly and can remain stable for years. Endometriosis can form benign cysts in the ovaries called endometriomas. With time the blood darkens to a tarry colour giving rise to the description 'chocolate cysts'. These may be smaller than a pea, or larger than a grapefruit. A woman may suddenly feel pain when a large endometrioma bleeds or bursts. The spilled fluid may cause further irritation and the development of scar tissue. In severe cases the web-like scar tissue, or adhesions may bind the uterus, ovaries and nearby intestines together. Endometriosis can grow into the walls of the intestine or

into the tissue that separates the rectum from the vagina, although it can invade neighbouring tissue. Endometriosis is not cancer.

SYMPTOMS Some women with endometriosis are without symptoms, but others suffer with very painful periods. Pain during intercourse and infertility. These symptoms and women with severe disease occasionally have none. Painful periods or dysmenorrhoea may be a symptom of endometriosis. Increasingly painful periods or severe pain in the day leading up to a period should be viewed as a possible warning sign of endometriosis. However, there are many women who suffer from painful periods who do not have endometriosis, teenagers for example commonly complain of painful periods, but endometriosis is uncommon in this age group. Many women with endometriosis are able to conceive without any problems. In some cases women with endometriosis are infertile. In severe cases this is because scar tissue forms a barrier between the ovary and the tube. In mild cases it is debated whether endometriosis simply develops as a result of several years of uninterrupted periods. Endometriosis can cause pain during intercourse, a condition called dyspareunia. Women with endometriosis can have irregular vaginal bleeding, other symptoms of the thrusting motion can cause pain in the tender nodule of endometriosis. Endometriosis can grow on intestines, in the wall of the bladder, or surgical scars, these implants may bleed into the bladder or bowel during a period causing blood stained urine or motions at the time of a period.

DIAGNOSIS The diagnosis of endometriosis cannot be made from symptoms alone, since some women with endometriosis have no symptoms at all. A doctor may suspect the disease if a woman is having difficulty getting pregnant, or she has painful periods, or pain during intercourse. A family history of endometriosis in a close relative is also suggestive.

VAGINAL EXAMINATION Vaginal examination can be helpful in making the diagnosis, the doctor may be able to feel tender spots of endometriosis or an enlarged ovary.

LAPAROSCOPY Laparoscopy is an operation, during which a thin telescope, a laparoscope is inserted through a small incision near the navel. This enables the doctor to see inside the abdominal cavity, inspect the reproductive organs and diagnose endometriosis. A small piece of endometriosis can be removed for microscopic examination at this time called a biopsy the surgeon can then check the fallopian tubes are not blocked during the laparoscopy by flushing an inert blue dye through the neck of the womb, the cervix. If the tubes are open the dye will be seen passing out of the ends of the tubes. If minor degrees of endometriosis are seen at laparoscopy, it is sometimes possible to destroy it at this time by burning it with hot wire diathermy or laser beam. The site of the endometriosis will influence if this can be done.

OTHER DIAGNOSTIC TECHNIQUES There has been intense research directed towards finding a blood test to diagnose and

stage endometriosis. As yet this is still in the research phase. Ultrasound, Computerised Tomography, CT Scan or Magnetic Resonance Imaging, MRI can be used to get more information about the extent of endometriosis in severe cases. These techniques can identify cysts on the ovaries and are usually done in the hospital radiology x ray department or in a specially equipped doctors office. These techniques cannot be used to make a definite diagnosis of endometriosis.

TREATMENT Treatment is tailored to the individual woman and aims to improve pain and / or infertility. It may involve hormone treatment, surgery or a combination of both. It has been claimed that pregnancy is a “natural cure” for endometriosis and if you were planning to start a family in the near future your doctor may advise you to go ahead.

HORMONE TREATMENT Pregnancy and the menopause are two “natural cures” for endometriosis. In pregnancy there are sustained high levels of oestrogen and especially progesterone; in the menopause levels of oestrogen and progesterone are low. Treatment involves mimicking one or other of these conditions. Both types of treatment lead to changes in the lining of the womb, the endometrium and in the endometriosis which encourage its healing. Periods usually stop on treatment.

SURGERY Some forms of severe endometriosis do not respond to drug treatment. Surgery may be required to remove scar tissue or ovarian cysts to relieve pain, or improve fertility. Mild forms of endometriosis can be treated during laparoscopy, while more severe endometriosis may require a bigger operation.

HYSTERECTOMY For women who have no success with other treatments and have completed their families, the uterus hysterectomy and ovaries ‘oophorectomy’ may be removed to relieve severe and persisting pain. After hysterectomy alone (eg. without removal of the ovaries), there is a significant chance that the endometriosis will recur. The chance of recurrence is much smaller if the ovaries are also removed at the time of hysterectomy. However, this leaves a woman in the menopause. To prevent the loss of bone calcium and menopausal symptoms due to oestrogen deficiency in the menopause, most women will need hormone replacement therapy. The majority of women with endometriosis can take hormone replacement therapy without problems.

CONCLUSIONS Endometriosis is a disease affecting millions of women throughout the world, for many the condition goes unnoticed, but for others it demands professional attention, especially when pain affects your lifestyle or fertility is impaired. Should you be suffering from any pain or feel you may have some of the symptoms associated with endometriosis – don’t just live with it – discuss it with your doctor and decide what is the best and appropriate course of treatment for you based on your own personal circumstances.

Dona Feltham
National Women’s Committee Chair

WOMEN'S STUC CONFERENCE REPORT

Lessons of the past and planning the way forward

by Linda Shanahan

THE annual Women's Conference of the Scottish Trades Union Council took place in Perth in November of 2001. The FBU was represented by Linda Shanahan, Regional Fairness at Work Officer and Fife Brigade Secretary who was the Vice Chair of the conference, Franca Cianni from Central Brigade, Karen Hunt from Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade and Susan Morrison also from Fife Fire Brigade.

The theme of this year's conference was on reviewing lessons of the past and planning the way forward.

The conference is always well attended and as well as getting on with the business of setting an agenda for the Women's Committee in the year ahead, provides the opportunity for delegates, new and old, to develop their public speaking skills in an open and supportive atmosphere.

It was pleasing to note that many of the new delegates had progressed through their unions to be a delegate to the conference after attending many of the weekend schools organised by the Women's Committee the previous year.

The afternoon prior to the conference delegates took to the streets to petition for universal free school meals to be provided by the Scottish Parliament. The campaign had been set up a few months previously by the Women's Committee and at time of writing is due to be presented to the Scottish Parliament.

SEX DISCRIMINATION ACT

At the conference itself, delegates discussed the planned changes to Sex Discrimination Act and resolved to continue to support and work closely with Scottish women campaigning for a 50/50 gender balance in representation at all levels in Scotland, including the Scottish Parliament and Local Government. Although Scotland currently has the highest percentage of women in its Parliament this still stands at just over a third of the membership when the population is currently around 52% female. Conference supported the view that it is crucial that women are encouraged to participate in political life and stand as candidates in elections.

AFGHANISTAN

On behalf of the Women's Committee, Linda Shanahan made a statement in relation to Afghanistan which condemned the bombings on 11 September in which workers were indiscriminately murdered and called for any diplomatic effort to

replace the Taliban to have as its guiding principle, the establishment of an administration that respects human rights, specifically women's rights and is democratically based.

FBU delegates as always were never far from the rostrum and took an active part in all the proceedings of conference.

ASYLUM

Motions from the FBU included Asylum Seekers and the Voucher System and the unfair discrimination of women under the system who have to cope with buying sanitary goods, nappies, clothing, babies bottles and necessary equipment. Asylum seekers currently get 70% of Social Security allowances as no calculations exist to take into account the needs of individuals. Conference unanimously accepted the motion, which was moved by Linda Shanahan.

WORKPLACE FACILITIES

The other FBU motion related to workplace facilities for women calling on all employers in Scotland, particularly in male dominated industries when planning new buildings to take into account the need for facilities designed for women. For too long women have had to adapt to conditions designed for men which have often meant that there is no privacy for anyone whatever their gender in the workplace. Some sisters in the rail unions graphically described some of the conditions women are currently suffering due to the inability of managers to take into account needs of their workers in relation to toilets, showers, etc. Again this motion, which was moved by Franca Cianni was resoundingly carried.

The other delegates managed to second or support motions on Bullying and Harassment – calling employers to adopt the Equal Opportunities recommendations on informing employees on what constitutes harassment and procedures for dealing with it when it occurs and asking that the Women's Committee continue to highlight best practice to employers in Scotland; Health and Safety Implications on Injuries to breasts and the link with cancer; Women and Public Life denouncing the recent appointments to the Scottish judiciary which had all been male despite the fact that there had been an abundance of high calibre women candidates; and Violence against women in Iran where women are being stoned, tortured and given the death penalty for menial crimes.



The Scottish delegation

CHILD PROSTITUTION

Child prostitution was high on the agenda of conference this year and a motion calling for local authorities to make efforts to use greater rigour not only in the pursuit of adults who exploit children in this way but to take effective steps to counter the mounting evidence that many "looked- after" children are involved in this outrageous exploitation.

DATE RAPE

The other hot issue of the conference was Date Rape and its definition following a recent ruling by a High Court judge in Aberdeen that for a charge of rape to be proved there had to be evidence of force or the threat of force being used. This definition differs greatly from the definition used in England and has implications for women who have been rendered unconscious either through drink, drugs or natural sleep.

Conference unanimously supported the motion calling for the Women's Committee to lobby the Scottish Parliament for guidelines and training to be given to judges and to lobby for necessary protection to be given to women in Scotland should the interpretation by the judge be upheld.

As conference ended Linda Shanahan was appointed Chair of the Women's Committee for the coming year and by implication Chair of next year's conference. This is the first time an FBU activist has been appointed Chair. I am sure with the support of the Women's Committee and the FBU Region 1 Women's Committee it will be a year to remember and hopefully the first of many FBU achievements in the future.

Fire Brigades Union Gay & Lesbian Support Group

www.fbu.org.uk/sections/ngl.html



email us at:

gal01@fbu-ho.org.uk

write to: NGLC

(national gay and lesbian committee)

PO Box 10555

London N1 8XT

Phone: 0800 7834778

The trade union movement represents ALL working people, regardless of their sex, race, religious belief, sexuality or disability.

All FBU members are entitled to the full rights and benefits of Union membership. The FBU believes in Fairness at Work for everyone and is committed to the elimination of all forms of discrimination, both at work and within the community.

The group was set up by gay and lesbian firefighters and control staff who are 'out' in the workplace and felt they were in a position to help others within the UK fire service. Within the groups five year existence, we have achieved official recognition with the FBU, as well as representing the FBU in forums which were once untouched. We also have an extensive network to support and advise gay, lesbian and bisexual members who may feel isolated or harassed.

The group is run on a strictly confidential basis and accepts the rules, constitution and democracy of the Fire Brigades Union.

Our main aims are:

- ★ Ensuring gay and lesbian members have a voice within the FBU, and making sure we are not left out in equality issues at Brigade, Regional and National level.
- ★ Providing support to gay, lesbian and bisexual members in ALL regions of the FBU.
- ★ Identifying and dealing with any issues/problems faced by our members.
- ★ Providing members with the opportunity to talk/meet with other members.
- ★ Distribute information concerning gay and lesbian issues to members.

Any gay, lesbian or bisexual FBU member contacting the group will only be dealt with by a group member. All information will be protected and NOT made available to any official unless the member gives his/her permission.



0800 783 4778 0800 783 4778 0800 783 4778

Fire Brigades Union

EDUCATION SCHOOLS 2002

**Branch
Officials
school**

Glasgow
5–7 March

**Annual Women's
School**

Sheffield
8–10 March

Branch Officials School

Belfast
22–24 March

Branch Officials School

Sheffield
9–11 April

**Branch Officials
Fairness at Work School**

London
19–21 April

**Branch Officials
Health & Safety School**

Eastbourne
29 April–1 May

Branch Officials School

London
28–30 May

Branch Officials School

Bristol
7–9 June

**Branch Officials
Fairness at Work School**

Sheffield
25–27 June

● **Creche facilities available**

● **All reasonable expenses
will be met**

● **Application forms are available
from Brigade Officials**

● **Apply online at
www.fbu.org.uk/education**

**Branch
Officials
Health &
Safety School**
Cumbria
20–22
September

● **Completed forms
should be sent to
your Regional
Secretary**

**Branch Officials
Political School**
Sheffield
27–29 September

Annual BAEMM School
Sheffield
11–13 October

NATIONAL SCHOOL
Sheffield
2–8 November

Annual Gay and Lesbian School
Sheffield
20–22 October



Education

New Retained National Secretary



Didn't she do well?

AT the Retained Committee AGM at Wortley Hall in November 2001 Helen Hill was voted in as National Secretary, taking up the vacancy left by Morris Butterfield who was elected the first Retained EC Member earlier this year (well done Morris!!).

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Helen on behalf of all of our women members on this great achievement and I'm sure Helen will do a great job of representing all retained members of the FBU in the coming months and years.

Helen, seen on the left of this photograph with Lynda Rowan

co-editor of Siren Magazine on the right, has been a Retained Firefighter at the ' busy' Keynsham Fire Station since September 1995. She is also a Manager of a Mencap Residential Home for Adults with Learning Disabilities (Social Work).

The FBU positions she carries out for Avon Fire Brigade in Region 14 are Fairness at Work Co-ordinator, Chair of Avon Brigade Committee, National Retained Committee Rep and National Women's Committee Rep, so is a very busy lady indeed. Carry on the good work Helen you're doing a great job!

