

Women's Fightback



No. 13 March/April 2012

www.workersliberty.org/women

Picture: Last chance to save our NHS protest, Saturday 17 March, Department of Health, Whitehall

Fight for the NHS!



By Anita Downs, palliative care nurse

The NHS should provide healthcare free at the point of use and on the basis of need. Despite repeated attacks, and moves to erode this principle — to introduce profit as a major factor — the principle still holds to a large extent.

The NHS is not all we would like it to be, care can sometimes be abysmal. But when professionals decide on the best treatment for a patient it is based on medical facts, not on how expensive the treatment is, or whether the patient is able to afford it. There might be wrangling with budget holders, delays and inconsistencies, but most patients get the appropriate treatment.

With the passing of the government's Health and Social Care Bill (on 20 March) all that will end — unless we fight to make it unworkable, and build local campaigns and stronger national networks which can stop wholesale privatisation.

The NHS reforms will mean:

- the fragmentation of the NHS, allowing “any willing provider” to provide healthcare;
- private providers “cherry picking” the most profitable services, leaving the NHS struggling to cover the rest, including some of the more chronic

conditions;

- the lifting of the cap on the number of private patients that can be treated in NHS facilities;

- responsibility for “commissioning” (not planning) services will lie with groups of GPs.

Cuts to the NHS are increasing the pace of change and will exacerbate the effects of these reforms.

The changes threaten chaos, and chaos in the NHS costs lives.

WOMEN

There are a number of services women depend on, such as maternity care. We are also generally more responsible for providing contraception; care relating to abortions affects us. These services are already under strain.

While birth rates have increased by 18% since 2001, the number of midwives has only increased by 8%.

I am a union rep, and some midwives came to me close to breaking point. They complained of routinely working 14 hours without a break. Under the strain, sickness and bullying was rife. There were conflicts over competency issues because lots of people can't maintain standards under such conditions.

When I was pregnant, I often found midwives unapproachable, and seemingly uncaring, they just didn't have the emotional

energy to relate to me. But when things went wrong in labour, the staff were all fantastic, and kept me and my baby safe.

Other women's services are similarly strained. The main response of the Department of Health seems to be to make sure no one talks about it.

CEMACE, a maternity services monitoring body, and a teenage pregnancy group, were both shut down last year straight after publishing scathing reports.

Family planning and sexual health promotion are facing 28% cuts. As the coalition government's cuts have already decimated these services, it seems unlikely that a profit hungry regime will be keen to invest in them.

We're likely to see more women paying to get an abortion so they don't have to wait for more scarce NHS-provided care; poorer working class women will have later abortions.

Women will also be disproportionately affected as workers in the NHS. 77% of NHS staff are women.

Terms and conditions, negotiated by the unions on a national basis, are going to be smashed up. Already foundation hospitals can vary their terms and conditions. A more fragmented NHS will make it harder for unions to negotiate national agreements. The government wants to introduce regional pay rates for public sector

workers.

Moving away from a service which treats people on the basis of need will put a lot of stress on workers.

For many, the fact of knowing that the most urgent cases are dealt with first helps staff cope psychologically with the lack of resources in the NHS.

Knowing that there will be preventable deaths because it has become mandatory to allow the rich to jump the queue routinely will be incredibly stressful for staff.

Women will be affected as carers. Women are more likely to be caring for elderly, sick and disabled relatives as well as children. If the NHS becomes less comprehensive, women will most likely be the ones helping their family cope with the consequences.

CAMPAIGN

Men and women alike must continue to fight not just to defend the NHS from these attacks but to improve it. Our lives do depend on this.

There are a number of campaigns that we should support including Kill the Bill, 38 Degrees and Keep Our NHS Public.

These campaigns have been organising petitions, increasing public awareness, and setting up local groups. But the mobilisations have been surprisingly small given the importance of the issue.

This is not because people don't care. It is probably a combination of a feeling of powerlessness — after all, the NHS has been chipped away at over many years — and being overwhelmed by so many cuts and increasing economic insecurity.

Trade unions and NHS professional associations have almost unanimously condemned the Bill, but have had little to say and do about how to stop it.

Health Alarm is a cam-

paign that aims to help support existing campaigns as well as set up actions of its own — especially focused on all the privatisation that is coming through.

We need to continue the struggle for comprehensive healthcare for everyone on the basis of need. Get involved in the ongoing campaigns, and put pressure on your union to put their words about saving the NHS into action.

Join the protest against the vultures!

Thursday 5 April, 12 to 2pm, Circle Healthcare HQ, 32 Welbeck Street, London W1G 8EU (2 minutes from Bond Street station) CALLED BY HEALTH ALARM

Circle Healthcare is one of the private companies making a killing out of the NHS. Given the contract to run Hinchingsbrooke NHS Hospital in Cambridgeshire, they are paving the way for the wholesale transfer of hospitals to the private sector.

To contact Health Alarm: Jill Mountford (07904 944 771) or Rosie Woods (07734 088 243) Email: healthalarm@yahoo.co.uk BM Box 4628, London WC1N 3XX healthalarm1159.wordpress.com facebook.com/HealthAlarm

Get active!



London Metropolitan University has decided to ditch the the Women's Library and Trades Union Congress Library Collections — they are seeking "new homes" for the books, pamphlets and other materials.

These are incredibly important collections, not stray dogs, and should be defended.

Workers at both libraries were not involved in these decisions.

The Women's Library has been told that if a new home is not found by the end of December 2012, the library will move to opening hours of one day per week for a period of three years, with a further review at the end of that period.

● Women's Library Campaign:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/37042675298975>

The x:talk project (organising and empower workers in the sex industry) is organising for a moratorium on sex work arrests during the Olympics.

They believe that there is likely to be an increase in anti-trafficking policies and policing practices that target sex workers.

In London, anti-trafficking practices have resulted in raids on brothels, closures, and arbitrary arrests of people working in the sex industry.

x:talk and its supporters are calling on the Mayor of London and London Metropolitan Police to suspend arrests and convictions of sex workers under the criminal laws laid out in Appendix 1.

● More information and details of meetings:
<http://www.xtalkproject.net>

Feminist Fightback is conducting research about Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) and the effects of changing political structures on women's reproductive services and SRE resources.

● feminist.fightback@gmail.com; www.feministfightback.org.uk

NUS Women move left

By Jade Baker, NCAFC Women/NUS Women's Committee (pc)

The Women's Conference of the National Union of Students (13-15 March) gave the left many reasons to look forward to the year ahead. Kelley Temple, backed by the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) Women, was elected Women's Officer. Conference passed progressive policy.

Imogen Martin from Hull is the new Black Students Rep and Emma Kerry from Leeds is on as a job share Disabled Rep.

Kelley Temple is an independent left activist and currently Scottish NUS Women's Officer. She beat the current Women's Officer and Labour Student, Estelle Hart, by less than 10 votes. It was always going to be close, as Labour Students have a deep foothold in the campaign. They have had the leadership for over a decade.

The result was achieved by a coming together of disillusioned women on NUS Women's Committee (much further left than Labour Students generally), collectively organising for the election.

NCAFC Women decided to organise for Kelley's campaign after publicly questioning her about political stances/general activism. [Q&A session: tinyurl.com/cggzzrv]

NCAFC Women had a good presence at the conference and handed out leaflets for Kelley's election (this included all the key points that arose from the Q&A). It also had information about the NCAFC Women's Charter for Women in Education session at the conference.

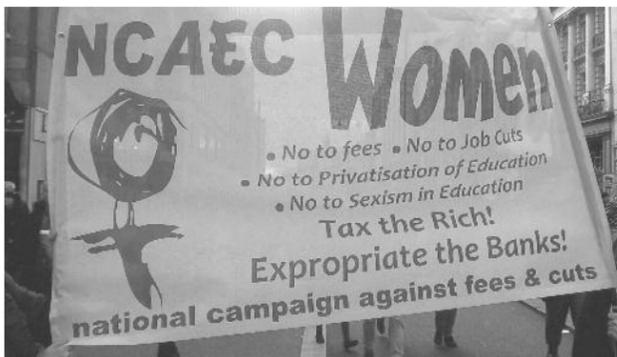
ELECTED
 I'd like to think NCAFC Women's support played a role in getting Kelley elected.

NCAFC Women are also having an impact more widely: the campaign's contact details were included in the reference section in last year's NUS Women's shiny new "Cuts Briefing".

But political change is by no means a "finished product"; this is where NCAFC Women and other left women's groups come into the picture.

We should intervene in the campaign as much as we can in the next year to secure it as a national grassroots campaigning organisation.

It was fantastic to see lots of education institutions present at the conference. Many Scottish universities and colleges were represented. This is a positive harbinger of things to come; women from across the UK are taking their national



NCAFC Women on the demonstration, 9 November

campaign back!

A really great opening plenary session reported on lap dancing.

It vindicated what socialist feminists say about the sex industry and women workers' place in it. We need to be uniting with sex workers to secure better working conditions, instead of moralising about them being victims of sexual violence.

Liberal/radical feminists at conference did not like this and put up a fight.

They argued that if we promote unionisation in these industries we are accepting and not challenging the status quo. They can't see that if sex workers unionise and organise it would be a step toward changing the structures in society which pave the way for the sex industry.

There were a few liberal feminist motions (we need more women bosses, managers, MPs, etc). NCAFC Women spoke against, with a socialist feminist perspective, on these questions. We got claps, but, unfortunately, no motions were voted down at all in the whole conference. The general feeling was one of consensus and inclusiveness.

For example, an anti-cuts woman was speaking militantly about fighting cuts but also talking against the position of NCAFC Women, saying we need to be inclusive of *all* women, even if they are Tories!

Serious left politics is still lacking here but the seeds

have definitely been sown.

The conference voted to support:

- A national student demonstration next term
 - To work with sex worker organisations, promote unionisation and decriminalisation
 - To fight cuts
 - To campaign for more women's representation: a women's officer in every SU.
- There is also still policy standing from last year for free education and living grants for all. Kelley Temple backs all of these policies.

The year ahead needs to see NCAFC Women helping to build a grassroots left movement in the campaign. There are two campaigns planned to kick start this:

- A campaign to save the Women's Library at London Metropolitan University (see "Get active" column);
- A campaign around The Charter for Women in Education (see box).

NCAFC Women held a session on the charter with around 20 people attending. Lots of ideas were raised, and good feedback. More information on the NCAFC Women blog.

NCAFC Women look forward to working with the NUS Women's Campaign in the year ahead. Whatever you do, get involved!

- anticuts.com/women
- ncafcwomen.wordpress.com

A charter for women in education

This text is a draft for a charter for women in education, a set of ideas that could be used as demands and campaigning goals. Please send comments and further ideas to: ncafc.women@gmail.com.

Support all those fighting sex and gender discrimination in our universities, schools and colleges.

Fight the funding cuts, which will disproportionately affect subjects where women are concentrated. Fight for publicly owned universities with decent funding.

Free education and a living grant for every student to eliminate student debt.

Support workers' fight to defend their pay, conditions and pensions — women will lose most from the Tory attacks.

Defend sex education against the Tories' reactionary, moralistic

agenda. Fight the religious takeover of parts of our school system. Defend and extend sexual health and reproductive rights services on campus.

Defend and extend university and student union childcare provision.

Fight for safety on campus: for decent lighting and transport, stop the cuts to campus support workers.

Eliminate poverty pay — a living wage for all workers on our campuses.

A serious fight to make equal pay a reality in our universities and colleges.

A woman's place is in her union — no to sexism in our student unions. Campaign for a women's officer and liberation officers in every student union. Fight to scrap men's officers wherever they exist.

For a campaigning women's group on every campus.



IDEAS TO CHANGE THE WORLD weekend school

A weekend of class-struggle socialist discussion and debate for students and young people, organised by Workers' Liberty

Saturday 21-Sunday 22 April
Venue for 21 April: Highgate Newtown Community Centre, 25 Bertram Street, London N19 5DQ

Sessions will include:

- What is capitalism? How do we get rid of it?
- Career prospects to change the world: what left-wing students should do when they leave uni
- Palestine and Israel: eye-witness report backs
- Debate: should we boycott Israel?
- Students and class
- Iran: nuclear weapons, war and solidarity
- The left, religion and secularism

- Fighting racism and fascism
- The origins of today's student left, 1982-2012: launch of a new pamphlet
- What's coming up for the left at NUS conference (24-26 April)
- Discussion on developing the Charter for Women in Education
- Activist training on public speaking

Tickets £6 waged, £4 low-waged/uni students, £2 unwaged/school and college students if bought in advance; £7, £5, £3 on the day.

Followed by a social with spoken word, theatre and music at the Lucas Arms, 245a Grays Inn Road, King's Cross. Accommodation available.

Book a place at www.workersliberty.org/payment or ring 07775 763 750.

Morocco: where rape brings dishonour... on women

By Esther Townsend

On 18 March several hundred campaigners, led by the Democratic League for Women's Rights, demonstrated outside Morocco's parliament against a law which led 16-year old Amina Filali to kill herself.

Article 475 of Morocco's penal code allows rapists to marry the woman they rape, if she is a minor, to avoid prosecution and "restore her virtue".

After months in a violent marriage to a man who sexually assaulted her when she was 15, Amina took rat poison on 10 March. Protesters, including her parents, held signs saying, "The law has killed Amina". Protests on the streets have been matched by an online campaign to have the law repealed.

It has been argued that there has been a move towards legal equality in Morocco. King Mohammed VI introduced reforms raising the minimum age of marriage for women from 15 to 18; abolishing a wife's duty

of obedience; her property no longer automatically becomes her husband's; custody of children is no longer the man's right; and divorce must now go through a court hearing and be by mutual consent. 10% of seats in the lower house of the Moroccan parliament are also reserved for women.

These "legal equalities" are, of course, limited — 10% is hardly representative, and women are confined to one section of parliament. Divorce by mutual consent is also far from ideal: women should be able to divorce their husband without their agreement.

Amina's case highlights the laws which have been left untouched but also the limitations of legal reform in striving for equality. Unless society creates an environment where laws defending and promoting equality can be exercised, they are little use.

In Britain, where any number of laws "guarantee" equality, a woman reporting rape still faces victim-blaming and disbelief, alongside an ongoing decline in a conviction rate — the worst in

Europe.

The hashtag #Ididnotreport trended on Twitter recently as women explained their experiences and why they did not feel they could report experiences of rape — highlighting a lack of faith in the system and a fear of being blamed. Meanwhile, in 2010 an investigation into the way the police handle, or mishandle, cases of sexual assault was shelved due to funding cuts!

ASSAULT

What chance do women have, then, in a society where sex before marriage is unacceptable, and brings "dishonour" to women and their families, even if they are raped?

Last year around 25% of Moroccan women were sexually assaulted, at least once — they faced the choice of keeping their attack secret or possibly being forced to marry the man who raped them. As a result Morocco has one of the lowest rates of reporting of rape internationally — at just 3.6 cases per 100,000 women in 2009.

Under pressure from cam-

paigners Morocco's Ministry of Justice has issued a statement saying the judge did not violate any court procedures. They claim Amina had the opportunity during four court hearings to state her refusal to marriage, and also suggested that Amina had given consent to the sexual assault.

Just over two weeks ago Morocco celebrated International Women's Day — with United Nations Women's Executive Director, Michelle Bachelet, visiting and commending them "on the gains that have been made".

The "theme" of this year's International Women's Day was "Empower Rural Women — End Poverty and Hunger". Amina Filali was from a small rural town in the north of Morocco.

In celebrating the "Moroccan Constitution, which establishes the principle of equality between men and women in all spheres" neither the UN nor Morocco's government are empowering Amina or women like her. Quite the opposite: they are betraying them.

Abortion: for a woman's right to choose

By Annie Newman

The latest US craze to hit the UK is for religious nutcases to gather outside abortion clinics hassling staff and patients.

In Brighton "pro lifers" gather twice weekly to harangue and intimidate women trying to access services they are legally entitled to.

In Bloomsbury daily "prayer vigils" are being held outside the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) throughout Lent.

Suggestion: why not try giving up chocolate for Lent, instead of stuffing your hateful, misogynistic, outdated crap down vulnerable women's throats? Women will always need abortions. Let's not go back to rusty coat hangers.

If only these zealots were the only threat to reproductive rights in the UK.

That great champion of women's rights the Conservative Party has some frankly terrifying ideas for your uterus!

Nadine Dorries and chums continue to campaign for schools to preach sexual abstinence, rather than giving kids access to the information they need to make informed decisions about what they are doing. Why? Because sex is... what? Dangerous? Sinful?

The abstinence strategy has been tried and tested in the USA and failed miserably. Eventually most teenagers will have sex (it is a fun, healthy and free activity, after all).

If they have only been told not to do it, they don't have a clue about contraception, or ideas to negotiate what they want in sexual relationships — they will be the first in line at the abortion clinic!

Dorries wants to restrict the range of bodies that can advise women seeking NHS abortion to statutory run ones (facing cuts) and places that do not provide abortions.

For her, the BPAS cannot be trusted not to encourage women to have abortions!

Better, she thinks, that women turn to the not-for-profit crisis pregnancy

centres popping up across the county... yes, where you are likely to be told that having an abortion will leave you infertile and mentally ill, if not destined to burn in hell.

Before too long these people will be coming back to their plan to reduce the time limit for having an abortion.

I'm for no time cap on abortion. It is my body, no matter how pregnant I am! I struggle to imagine many reasons why a nine months pregnant woman would choose to have an abortion but the evidence shows that late abortions are extremely rare and are undertaken for extremely pressing reasons.

When it comes down to it that decision should be mine, not the church's, not the state's, and not the bunch of people yelling "murderer" at me as I walk into the clinic.

NEED

Defending reproductive rights is one thing, getting what we really need is another.

Getting an abortion is still an unholy struggle. You need two doctors to state that you need one for a rather limited range of reasons and in parts of the UK, notably Birmingham, it's surprisingly difficult to get even this.

Then there is the waiting time for the procedure, with some women waiting seven weeks for one. My periods aren't that regular and it would probably take me a couple of months to notice if I was pregnant — what would I do if I had to "add on" such a waiting period?

I'm glad I don't live in Northern Ireland. Thanks to the cowardly Labour government selling women out when they had the chance to change the situation, women there still have to come across to England for abortions. Not cheap. Mind you, neither is another mouth to feed.

What is a woman to do? Ask someone to punch them really hard in the stomach? Start the fightback!

● More: Bloomsbury Pro-Choice Alliance, bloomsburypca.wordpress.com

Reclaim International Women's Day!

By Lily Brown

On International Women's Day, 8 March, Workers' Liberty women in London helped organise a meeting to celebrate the original, militant tradition of the day. What tradition?

International Women's Day — founded in 1911 as International Working Women's Day — was first

proposed by Clara Zetkin and other socialist women. It was a response to the 1907/8 demonstrations of women workers in New York demanding shorter hours, better pay, union rights and the vote, and to the "Rising of the 20,000", a 13-week strike of women garment makers in 1909.

By 1917 it was well-established enough in the international labour movement

to be the spark for strikes, mass protests and the start of the Russian revolution.

In other words, International Women's Day was not, as it has become today, about generically "celebrating women", charity cake sales, or holding hands with Cherie Blair across London's Millennium Bridge. International Women's Day has had the class struggle sucked out and been depoliticised. It is like any other so-called "special day" — Valentine's Day or Mother's Day.

Perhaps the need for militant working-class women's struggles has passed? In fact women workers are in low-paid, undervalued and precarious work, while most still also do many hours of unpaid work in the home.

The majority of the world's 1.3 billion absolute poor are women; so are three quarters of the world's 960 million illiterate. Worldwide, women's wages are 20 percent behind men's — on an optimistic count. There is not a country in which women have full equality with men, and in many inequality is deep and horrific.

The economic crisis since 2008 has seen a new wave of attacks on women's rights, from the cuts and the rise of bigoted moralism in Britain to the danger of Islamist counter-revolution following the upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East.

But we've also seen, in response, a revival of feminist

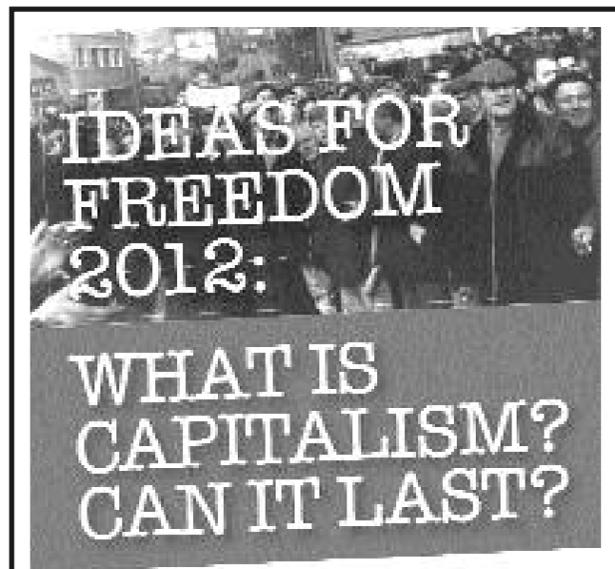
organising and activism. Millions of women have been mobilised by protests in the UK, in the strike waves across Europe and the US, and in the North African and Middle Eastern revolutions.

Working women's struggle was the focus of the 8 March meeting AWL women and others organised through *Women's Fightback*, and held jointly with the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq. Fifty women and men came together to discuss women's situations and struggles from the UK to the Middle East. Sami Zubaida, Houzan Mahmoud and Diba Ali Kani spoke about women's struggles in Egypt, Kurdistan, Iran and across the Middle East.

Janine Booth, of the AWL, and RMT national executive, spoke about the roots of International Women's Day and used the example of her union to highlight the importance of challenging sexism in our workplaces and the labour movement.

Next year we should make sure there are meetings like this on a bigger scale and across the country.

It's time to get back to the real meaning and purpose of International Working Women's Day — it's time to reclaim it for the labour movement and for working-class women.



A weekend of socialist discussion and debate hosted by Workers' Liberty

**Friday 29 June - Sunday 1 July
London
www.workersliberty.org/ideas**

Counter-protest against pro-life groups at British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), 26-27 Bedford Square, London WC1 ● 7pm, Friday 30 March

To coincide with a prayer vigil outside the clinic attended by the RC bishop

Italian feminism resurgent?

Kate Devine, Erasmus student at the University of Turin, looks into the recent resurgence of feminism in Italy, and asks what has brought tens of thousands into the streets.

On 11 February 2011 hundreds of thousands of women piled into the streets of Italian cities and towns to shout "Se non ora, quando?" ("If not now, when?") (<http://www.senonoraquando.eu/>). For decades Italy has lagged behind the rest of Europe and much of the wider world when it comes to gender equality.

The media perpetuates a damaging stereotype of women as nothing more than window dressing; so much so, that even though 60% of Italian graduates are female, opinion polls indicate that *show-girl* (a ubiquitous presence on much Italian TV) is the number one aspiration for young Italian women.

The World Economic Forum's *Gender Gap Report 2010* ranks Italy globally as 74th in terms of gender equality; behind Columbia, Peru and Vietnam. Wage parity (121st) and opportunities to take leading positions (97th) are some of the worst measures.

Even on that rare occasion when a woman does achieve a position of power, as with Mara Cafagna (Minister for Equal Opportunity from 2008-11) it is compromised. Even she will admit that you don't have to be pretty to get on, but it helps.

All this paints a pretty bleak picture of what it is to be a woman in Italy, but many are fighting back against this entrenched Italian patriarchy. I have spoken to women from various new activist groups, as well as doing some research of my own, in an effort to get a clearer picture of Italian feminism.

I began by asking about the precedence of Italian feminist thought and activism: has there always been a strong tradition? Or is this a new phenomenon?

TWO YEARS

I spoke to Se non Ora Quando? (SNOQ), probably the largest and most prominent group of gender-equality activists.

The organisation is still less than two years old, but constitutes a diverse group of tens of thousands of women who have orchestrated demonstrations across Italy on an unprecedented scale. They insist that there is indeed a "strong and theoretically rich tradition", though they admit that over the last 20 years or so "the movement seemed silent, unable to speak to the younger generation, and to face the political changes."

It's hard to determine why that might have been. It has been suggested that the cause may lie in the anti-climax of the 1970s feminist movement in Italy. Although it achieved great steps forward in terms of the legalisation of divorce (1974) and of abortion (1978), it fizzled out after a descent into factionalism and a seeming lack of universally uniting causes.

It also saw Italian women retreat into the only domain which was wholly theirs, the family and the home. While the rest of the western world pressed on with female emancipation, Italy seemed to have stalled.

I asked whether this new wave of feminism differed markedly from those in the past.

The Femmine Plurale bloggers told me: "The new generation of feminists is divided into different currents. On one side there is a



Two women, one blonde, one brunette, are elected each year to be the *veline* on the satirical news programme *Striscia la notizia* based group who aim to disseminate information and promote awareness and discussion of these issues. They pointed me to a recent visit from the "UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women", Rashida Manjoo.

"On the other side, there are feminists that are using the internet to spread their own reflections and initiatives. This method certainly wasn't part of the feminism of the 70s and represents, therefore, an innovation."

Given the state of Italian television today, as veritable plaything for the likes of Berlusconi and his cronies, this alternative way of disseminating ideas and news is vital to any liberation movement. It must be frustrating, then, to know that although the internet is teeming with independent news and opinion sites, still, in Italy, 80% of the public's knowledge of current affairs comes directly from television.

As the women from SNOQ see things, this current revival is "as radical as the precedent" and, they are quick to emphasise, "it is not as separatist and anti-institutional as the old one."

This seeming praise of a more institution-friendly approach seems odd to me, especially given the state of "legitimate" Italian politics at present. Even the supposedly left-of-centre "Partito Democratico" (with whom SNOQ have been loosely associated) support Monti, a prime minister whose public spending cuts are having a disproportionately detrimental effect on women's lives.

It is hard to collect accurate statistics with regard to domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape, anywhere in the world. Though occasions of these offences are not thought to be hugely high in Italy, I was interested to know how the issues are perceived, dealt with, and campaigned against.

I spoke to Zeroviolenzadonne, a web-

mestic violence: "Most manifestations of violence are under-reported in the context of a family-oriented and patriarchal society where domestic violence is not always perceived as a crime, there is economic dependency, and there are perceptions that the state response to such complaints will not be appropriate or helpful".

I asked whether there were campaigns, on university campuses for example, that aimed to tackle the problem of violence against women. The reply was disheartening: "there have been a few sporadic campaigns" they said, but they were disappointed with their focus; generally centring around the criminality of the act, rather than on the proper relationship between men and women.

They did emphasise that there have been better focused campaigns run by students themselves, but these initiatives are "hindered by the disparity of economic means that big companies have at their disposal for promoting huge publicity campaigns using the bodies of women, or the role of the mother, in order to sell products".

It's obvious then, that at least for Zeroviolenzadonne, the proliferation of these damaging female stereotypes is a contributing factor to the level of violence against women in the country. The image of women as meat, as "prosciutto", as one eminent journalist recently put it, that pervades most media outlets, is not just bad taste, it actively perpetuates their subordinate status in Italian society.

I asked whether they thought this was the case.

In society and in the media, the woman is often represented in a reductive manner nearly exclusively as a sexual object or a mother," said Zeroviolenzadonne.

"In this way one creates a fertile terrain for discrimination and violence based on gender.

"Advertising and TV commercials in Italy are the demonstration of this reactionary and chauvinistic way of seeing women that can't but be harmful and contribute to maintaining stereotypes and prejudicial behaviour."

● Kate Devine blogs at elbowtennis.wordpress.com

Women's Fightback discussion group (London)

Friday 20 April, 7.30-10.30pm

Women and the budget

Getting to grips with what's in the budget minus the jargon — what it will mean and how we can organise to fight the government cuts attacks?

Meet outside the Poetry Library, Royal Festival Hall, Waterloo. Take the glass lift up to the 5th floor and the Poetry Library is right there — call 07837 432 911. Arrive for a 7.30pm start to discussion.

Women's Fightback London discussion group meets on the third Friday of every month and welcomes all self-defining women to discuss feminism, socialist ideas and to make

Women's Fightback

Women's Fightback is a bimonthly socialist women's paper produced by members and supporters of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

We believe women's oppression is rooted in class society, and can only be ended by overthrowing capitalism. At the same time, we do not tell women — or any oppressed group



— to wait for the revolution. As socialist feminists, we see our job as reorienting the labour movement towards a fight for women's rights, and the women's movement towards class struggle.

Without the abolition of class exploitation, there can be no end to women's oppression. Without a mass movement of organised, mobilised women fighting for liberation, there can be no socialist revolution. Neither is possible without the other.

Workers' Liberty women are active in the fight to transform the labour movement, and in many different campaigns — from reproductive freedom to migrant rights to the struggle against cuts. If you're a socialist feminist, please consider joining us — and, in the meantime, write for and distribute Women's Fightback to help win the biggest possible audience for socialist feminist ideas.

● Contact: wfightback@workersliberty.org