Women’s Rightback

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www.workersliberty.org/women

Picture: Last chance to save our NHS. Protest, Saturday 17 March, Department of Health, Whitehall. For more info: 07904 944 771 or 07734 088 243. Email: healthalarm@yahoo.co.uk. See our Facebook page: facebook.com/HealthAlarm

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

The changes threaten choice, 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: the NHS Alliance; the Stop the Bill campaign; 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 campaign that aims to help support existing campaigns as well as set up actions of its own — especially focussed 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 Hinchingbrooke 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

8M Bex 4628, London WC1N 3XJ

healthalarm1159.wordpress.com

facebook.com/HealthAlarm
Get active!

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, leader of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) Women, was elected Women’s Officer. Conference passed progressive policy.

Imogen Martin from Hull is the 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 current Women’s Officer and Labour Student, Estelle Hart, by less than 10 votes. It was always going to be close, as Student Officers 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 campaign. NCAFC Women decided to organise for Kelley’s campaign after publicly questioning her about political stances / general activism. [QA session: tinyurl.com/egzgzr]

NCAFC Women had a good presence at the conference and handed out leaflets with a feminist agenda. (Includes all the key points that arose from the QA). It is vital that 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 Charter 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 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 unite 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 step toward changing the structures of 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 close, 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 workers organisations, pro-sex work and anti-pornography and de-criminalisation
- To fight cuts
- To campaign for more women’s representation: a woman’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 grass roots 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 NUS Women’s Blog.

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

- anticus.com / women
- ncafcwomen.wordpress.com

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: ncafcwomen@gmail.com.

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

Fighting the funding cuts, which will disporportionately 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 attack.

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 our workers on campus.

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 officer on every campus.

IDEAS TO CHANGE THE WORLD weekend school

A weekend of class-struggle socialist discussions and debates for students and young people, organised by Workers’ Liberty

Saturday 21-Sunday 22 April

Venue for 21 April: Higher 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 back
- 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 £5 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, 245 Great 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 demonstrators 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 their victims. In Amina’s case, her rapist arranged a marriage to a man who sexually assaulted her when she was 15. Amina took poison on 18 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 Mohamed 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 be heard in court, where she has equal say and the law on rape is being reviewed. But 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 disbelieving, alongside an ongoing decline in a conviction rate — the worst in Europe.

The hashtag #AminaReport trended on Twitter as women commented on their experiences and why they do not feel safe reporting. They highlighted the lack of reporting of rape — highlighting cases where victims were locked in a system and a fear of being blamed. Meanwhile, in 2010 an investigation into how 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 sexual violence is unacceptable, and brings “dishonour” to women and their families, even if they are raped? Last year 90% of Moroccan women were sexually assaulted, at least once — they faced the choice of keeping their 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 people.

Under pressure from campaigners Morocco’s Ministry of Justice has issued a statement saying the judge did not violate any court procedures. They claim Amina had refused her marriage opportunity due to four court hearings to state her refusal to marriage, and 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 commenting on “the gains that have been made”. This year of this 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 women. Amina or women like her.

Quite the opposite: they are betraying them, organising and activism. Millions of women have been mobilised by protests in the UK, in the strike of the abortion clinic in London, in the US and in the North American and Middle Eastern revolutions.

Working women’s struggle to celebrate 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 Zoueida, Houzou Mahnouz and Dha Ali Kani spoke about women’s struggles in Egypt. Kurdistan, Iraq and across the Middle East.

Janine Booth, of the AWL, and RMT national executive, spoke about the roots of In-Excommunication, 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 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.

Abortion: for a woman’s right — on women

By Annie Newman

The latest US craze to hit the UK is for religious Muslims and failed mis- side abortion clinics harassing staff and pa- tients.

In Britain “pro-lifers” gather twice weekly to haranguge 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 shouting your hateful, misogynis- tic, outdated crap down vulnerable women’s throats? Women will al- ways need abortions. Let’s not go back to nasty coat hangers.

In France these zealots were the only threat to re-productive rights in the 1970s.

What is a woman to do? Ask someone to punch them really hard! Pro-Choice Alliance, bloomsburypca.

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

Women’s Fightback 3

Counter-protest against pro-life groups at British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), 26-27 Bedford Square, London WC1 7pm, Friday 30 March.
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 marched 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, opposite-sex couples are seen as the very essence of their own, in an effort to get a clearer picture of Italian feminism.

I began by asking about the prevalence 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 organised 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-climaxes of the 1970s feminist movement in Italy. Although it achieved great steps forward in 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 Femministe Plural 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 current of more traditional feminists, identified in the reformable in the new movement Se non ora, quando? that bring to the fore their own demands linked with the Democratic Party. The results of this investment in traditional politics remain to be seen.”

“The other side, are feminists that are using the internet to spread their own re-

WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

February 20 April, 7.30-10.30pm

Women and the budget

Getting to grips with what’s in the budget minus the jargon — what it means and how we can organise to fight the government’s 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