

Women's Fightback



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www.workersliberty.org/women

Fight to save the NHS!

By Jane Kerr

Since the start of the year hundreds of thousands of people have mobilised around the country to save the NHS.

- On 16 March 5,000 people marched through the streets of Islington to stop cuts — loss of 230 beds and 570 jobs — at the Whittington Hospital.

- On the same day hundreds of protesters gathered outside Lewisham Hospital to oppose the downgrading of the emergency and maternity services — cuts that threaten the long-term future of the hospital.

- On 26 January 25,000 people marched through Lewisham. That did not stop Tory Health Minister Jeremy Hunt from approving the plan to downgrade the hospital.

- In Leeds more than 600,000 people have signed a petition to defend the

children's heart surgery unit.

When the government announced plans to sneak through regulations to the Health and Social Care Act that will mean the privatisation of the NHS, 200,000 people signed a protest petition in days. The Government are now back with the same sort of plans, and so the campaign continues.

Together these local mobilisations could be the beginning of a mass movement. As that movement begins to take shape we will begin to

Lobby of the House of Lords against NHS privatisation, 26 March. Photo: Philippa Whitecross

work out what sort of health service we need.

Defend the Whittington Hospital Coalition — dwhc.org.uk

DEFEND LONDON'S NHS — demonstration

- Save our hospitals
- No to privatisation

Saturday 18 May

Assemble: 12 noon, Jubilee Gardens, Belvedere Road, SE1

defendlondonsnhs.wordpress.com

Defend maternity services in Lewisham

The government plans to replace the obstetrician-led maternity service at Lewisham Hospital with a stand-alone birth centre.

A birth centre is a unit for women with so-called low-risk pregnancies (an estimated 10 per cent of all births). There will no longer be facilities at the hospital for emergency situations — no theatres, no critical care for babies.

And Lewisham has a high proportion of high risk births.

In the event of an emergency mothers and babies will have to be rushed in an ambulance to another hospital, miles down the road, to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Woolwich. Without on-site back-up

facilities like this, both midwives and obstetricians believe that a stand-alone centre is not safe.

While many women in the low-risk category would prefer a midwife-led service, they generally want to know it's safe and emergency treatment is there if they need it. And the option of home birth will no longer exist, as women will not want to use a service that is not

"Born in Lewisham" campaigns to save maternity services

backed up by a local acute service.

Lewisham currently helps around 4,000 babies be born every year. Where will everyone go when it effectively no longer exists? Last year King's closed

its doors to expectant mothers on seven occasions. Even Lewisham had to close their existing unit on three occasions. Statistics from the Greater London Authority predict that by 2016 (the year after the predicted closure) 5,163 babies will be born in Lewisham — that's 1,000 more babies than in 2006.

Women will now receive antenatal care in the community, care in labour by

another set of midwives and then yet another change with postnatal care. The whole birth experience will be very complicated for some — much more stressful than it need be. GPs have unanimously

and publicly told the Trust Special Administrator and Department of Health that they are against the proposals. In the new NHS, GP commissioners are supposed to be in the driving seat — yet they are being ignored!

More to the point, none of these changes were made by consulting people in Lewisham. They were made so that the government could bail out the South London Healthcare Trust's debt to a big business PFI scheme.

This attack on our maternity service is another assault on women alongside cuts to child tax credit, community resources and largely female-dominated public sector jobs.

The government's rhetoric of choice, either on

choices for pregnant

women or for everyone

else using the health serv-

ice, is a lie.

Stop these cuts!

Save Lewisham Hospital campaign savelewishamhospital.com

Rape jokes: it's not that simple

Trigger warnings apply for sexual assault and rape, discussion of statistics around how common rape culture and rape are, discussions of types of rape jokes told in comedy, discussion of a personal emotional experience following rape, and discussion of why rape jokes can be used.

By Matt Reuben

Rape jokes are generally considered, within the organised left and/or feminist movement to be bad.

They're not something decent people tell. They reinforce rape culture. Every time I hear this it kicks me internally because I'm a rape victim, and I tell rape jokes.

Rape culture is reinforced every time a group of men make a joke about raping some other man or woman. Rape culture is reinforced with victim blaming attitudes regarding what you wear, or where you were, or what you drank. Rape culture is reinforced every time women's bodies are objectified.

I realise how damaging rape jokes are, even on a personal level, when unexpected. I suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the imagery can be a severe trigger, it can leave me shaken and non-functional for days, or terrified to leave the house because almost everyone I know is a potential rapist and I have to keep myself as safe from them as possible.

When I watch television, or check Facebook, or hear friends making remarks like this, it can be petrifying, and I've read the statistics on the 35 per cent of college-age men who would commit rape under certain circumstances if they thought they could get away with it, or the 8.3 per cent who have. (Statistics from: <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/VAW02/csascope.html>)

Rape jokes when made by comedians often fit a certain format — one that plays into the idea of the victim and the rapist both being "other", not being part of one's circle. And even if they highlight the horror of rape in the joke it still fits the pattern of normalisation of rape, into something that people joke about, and hence

something that's okay to joke about, talk about, think about, and do.

This is why we have this narrative that rape jokes are entirely bad — because of the damage they can do to individuals, and because of the wider pattern that they play into. However, I'd argue that it's really not that simple.

For me, rape jokes can also be a form of reclamation. When I sit with a friend and we swap rape jokes for the majority of a conversation, I'm sitting with the same person without whom I would have killed myself because I couldn't handle being a rape victim.

I'm sitting with the same person who supported me near-daily through the police and judicial trauma that ensued. I'm sitting with someone who understands, almost as well as I do, exactly what I went through. Someone I feel stood alongside me for the duration of the process. And we joke about it, and we both know how much of being me my experience of rape stole, and we laugh. We're laughing in the face of a horror that nearly destroyed me. We're laughing in the face of rape and we're reclaiming it.

CONTEXT

Now, to some extent, it could be said that the foci of these jokes are different.

Typically the intent of a comedic joke, or one passed around a circle of friends, is to mock the victim and find them in some way deserving of the incident, which, of course, works with the majority of groups and people to desensitise them of this notion*, but even when I'm making them as a form of reclamation, it's often a self-deprecating mockery of my own victimhood — I'm still mocking the victim, only that victim is myself and it's me I'm

looking for humour in.

For me to laugh about my experiences is a big part of moving from victim to survivor. I find it very difficult to recognise or express any emotion about having been raped whatsoever. I credit this partly to my own personality, and partly to the socialisation that tells me that as a man I shouldn't show emotion, and partly to the fact that regardless of how incorrect this is, I feel like as a man and a rape victim I am emasculated.

For me, making jokes about rape, with people who understand this experience, is part of surviving. It's also part of moving on — finding the humorous side in it, and sometimes we laugh because the humour we can find is so frail and thin as to be almost meaningless, but we laugh anyway, because then, for that second, I'm not cowering in terror of it.

The time and the place to do so is critical — doing them in a comedic act with an unknown audience is one thing, and risks triggering people and reinforcing damaging prevailing attitudes.

Doing so with one close friend who I know is obviously very different, but I do believe there is a grey area in between the two, and that whilst it's difficult to delineate, the prevailing attitude on the left that rape jokes are always bad, always wrong, is at conflict with my own need to make jokes out of it to survive.

There needs to be a clearer differentiation between rape jokes made to continue the subjugation of women and of rape victims, and rape jokes made to survive, and I will continue to defend the latter.

* Thanks to Yasin for reading over the whole article, and for making that specific point to me.

The Tories, rape and

By Cathy Nugent

In 2010 the Labour government commissioned Baroness Vivien Stern to oversee a review into how rape complaints are handled by the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

The review followed the catastrophic failure by police to take complaints against serial sex attacker John Warboys seriously, leaving him free to rape and sexually assault at least 85 women.

The review is worth reading because it shows how the "austerity regime" is impeding the possibility of real progress in helping the victims of sexual violence.

There is a consensus now (even in government!) that Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) help many more women and men, including those who would not otherwise seek help. More SARCs are needed but the government has no intention of providing them.

Other ostensibly radical goals, both in the review and

the government's response to the review, are much less than they seem. The government says it favours a "multi-agency" approach to tackling sex crime but this is next to useless if they are not prepared to provide extra cash to enable public agencies to work together.

Recently the government has pushed the CPS into being more "generous" in its prosecution of rape complaints — "believing the victim" is the new watchword (yes, decades after feminists argued for this common sense approach). But neither lawyers nor police will do that if time, training and again money are not put into developing a more appropriate, sensitive and holistic response from the moment people come forward to make a complaint.

The complacency of the Stern Review was picked up on by the media, which pointed to the way Stern criticised campaigners' use of the fact that only six per cent of rape complaints end with a conviction in court.

This statistic, Stern says, is not adequately explained. The six per cent represents an "attrition rate". The vast majority of cases drop out of the system at the stage of police investigation, when being considered by the CPS, and when being prepared for court. However, Stern says, once a rape is prosecuted more than half will end in a conviction. Emphasising the "good news story" is all very well, but what Stern wants to argue is that substantial improvements in the attrition rate are unlikely. And, in any case, allowing victims to get "their day in court" isn't everything.

But an 80 per cent drop out/attrition rate is appalling! Rape is very serious crime and complaints are never casually made. We also know that only a small percentage of rapes (an estimated 15 per cent of rapes on women) are reported to the police.

RESEARCH

Research into the factors behind the attrition rate is limited.

The Stern Review gives a partial picture if it is read critically. A better picture is in a 2005 study commissioned by the Home Office from London Metropolitan University researchers. The report, "A gap or a chasm? Attrition in reported rape cases", uses statistics generated by the first Sexual Assault Referral Centres established in the late 1980s and early '90s.

The factors are:

- Normal "drop out": suspects disappearing, ill-founded third party complaints, and false allegations (which contrary to police and some public views is in a "normal" range of between 3 and 11 per cent).

- Insensitive contact with the police and poor and limited police specialist interviewing skills. Most people prefer to deal with female police but whether or not a trained female police officer is available is a matter of luck. Police specialist services are patchy. Communication from the police with the victim about the progress of a case can be poor. Neither Stern nor the government recommends radical action to sort this out.

- Invasiveness of examinations and intrusiveness of questioning which can only be partially mitigated by sensitive support. Going to court is a particularly difficult prospect for rape survivors, many say it is like "reliving" the trauma.

- The limited numbers of Sexual Assault Referral Centres. These are specialist centres where medical, counselling and forensic services can be accessed for anyone who has been raped or sexually assaulted. Though SARCs are universally recognised as "best

Service provision

Central government spending is minimal, compared to overall budgets and how many people suffer sexual violence every year.

Just £1.72 million per year is going to be spent on funding 87 Independent Sexual Violence Advisors in England and Wales by the Tories. According to the

Stern Review ISVAs typically have 30 people "on the books" at any one time.

Existing Rape Crisis Centres face an increasingly uncertain future.

Funding has to be sought in many areas and the new Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) will make the future of Rape Crisis Centres unstable.

Her name is Reeva

Her name is Reeva
Reeva Steenkamp
Not 'Oscar Pistorius' girlfriend'
Not 'model'
Not 'reality TV star'
Her name is Reeva

Her name is Reeva
She was not just a model
But also a campaigner against violence
She was not just a reality TV star
But also a law graduate
The story is about her killing
Not about his fame
Or it should be
Her name is Reeva

His name is Oscar
Oscar Pistorius
And every news report calls him that
Her name is Reeva
Sometimes mentioned
But only after 'his model girlfriend'

He slept with guns
She is one of fifty victims of homicide every day in
South Africa

Her name is Reeva
She is a woman
A person in her own right
Not the appendage of the celebrity who killed her
Even now she is dead
She still has a name
Use it please

Janine Booth

and the criminal justice system

practice" the government does not plan to fund any more than one SARC per police area — often huge geographical areas.

- Insensitive gathering of evidence. Many victims are examined by non-specialist, male forensic doctors. They may be forced to wait for long periods before seeing any doctor.

- Conservative culture of prosecution. Both the police and CPS have targets to

Baroness Vivien Stern

meet on prosecutions (for the police) and successful outcomes (for the CPS). Only one third of all cases are even considered by the CPS and two-thirds of these are not pursued. The "target culture" is a big factor in the decision-making process, building in conservative assumptions about an already structurally difficult to prosecute crime.

- Attitudes of disbelief. The police's working assumption is that inconsistencies and hesitations in the accounts of people making a complaint must amount to dishonesty (rather than trauma, ambivalence, self-doubt, feeling intimidated). The attitude is reinforced by sexist prejudices, e.g., that female complainants often try to "get revenge" on ex-partners, or maybe they were "asking for it" by drinking to excess, and so on.

- Particular difficulties of some adults reporting rape. Homeless women, drug users, the disabled and vulnerable adults are particularly failed by the insensitive, amateurish, utilitarian and sexist character of provision.

- Being threatened or pressurised into dropping a case, e.g., by the perpetrator (maybe a partner or ex-partner), or a family member.
- Feeling responsible for

the welfare of partners and children.

It should come as no surprise to us that neither Stern nor the governmental consensus she reflects wants to spend the necessary money on providing better and more specialist services.

But is the socialist and feminist response simply to argue for more money for the good services we know exist — SARCs and Independent Sexual Violence Advisors? These services cannot by-pass the police but do we really want to "take responsibility" for the better training of police?

No. But it is our duty to point out that however flawed it is "bourgeois justice" (a "day in court"), as well as the desire to protect others, is what many want when they come to the police to make a report. To get there we need humane and transparent approach to

these vital public services —

with as much expertise as is

needed.

This article does not claim

to know exactly what that

might mean. I hope it will

spark discussion.

But as health and other

services are cut, we need

to be more informed and

involved in campaigning

to end the shoddy deal

currently offered by the

criminal justice system

and defending and ex-

tending the best it has to

offer.

Sexual violence — some statistics

In January 2013, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Home Office released the first ever joint Official Statistics bulletin on sexual violence in England and Wales.

Based on data from the Crime Survey over three years to 2012:

- An average of 2.5 per cent of females and 0.4 per cent of males said they had been a victim of a sexual offence (including attempts). That is 404,000 females and 72,000 males.
- Around 85,000 females and 12,000 men report being the victim of rape or sexual assault by penetration.
- Around one in 20 females aged 16 to 59 reported being a victim of a serious sexual offence since the age of 16.
- Around 90 per cent of victims knew the perpetrator.
- Only 15 per cent of female victims of the most serious offences had reported the incident to the police.
- In 2011-12 the police recorded a total of 53,700 sexual offences across England and Wales. The most serious offences of rape and sexual assault accounted for 71 per cent of the total.
- The detection rate of 30 per cent for sexual offences was higher than for some other offences, such as robbery (21 per cent) and burglary (13 per cent); it was lower than for other contact crimes such as violence against the person (44 per cent).
- In 2011-12 9,900 defendants were proceeded against in court. Of those cases about 30 per cent were for rapes. Of all offences that completed to the point of guilty or acquittal at the magistrates' court or Crown Court just under two thirds were convicted.
- In 2011 the 2,900 defendants prosecuted for rape were prosecuted, on average, for 2.3 rape offences each.

Marxism and feminism

By Esther Townsend

Workers' Liberty have been organising a series of meetings to discuss Marxism, feminism and the fight for women's liberation today.

In Britain and internationally there is a revival of feminist ideas and activism. In past women's movements Marxist ideas have played an important role but this isn't so true today. It's time to renew the link! And it is time for Workers' Liberty to renew its Marxist feminist ideas.

With that in mind this series of workshops discusses issues ranging from what a Marxist analysis can offer to our understanding of women's oppression today; to the question of whether feminist politics can unite all women; to the socialist left's record on women's liberation and what we can do to improve it.

We've held workshops in Bangor, Hull, Liverpool, and at Goldsmiths College and UCL in London. All have seen lively discussion and debate. The focus has varied indicating the diversity of experiences leading people to get involved in feminist activism today.

I attended the Goldsmiths meeting where we thought about the changing nature of the family and women's oppression across history and the world; whether the state serves the interests of capitalism or men or both; and, in light of the recent development of the "Unilad" phenomenon alongside everyday sexism, we asked "is sexism more acceptable than other discriminatory attitudes in Britain today?"

Other meetings report discussions of identity and the relationship between the political and the personal; how class struggle can lead to women's liberation; and discussions of how women can become more fully involved in socialist politics and the left.

Exploring, renewing and rethinking the relationship of Marxism and feminism is a big task. It has to begin with being involved in the new feminist revival; educating ourselves; assessing the old and new debates; discussing with others; and learning from each other.

More workshops are coming up in Glasgow, Edinburgh, St Andrews, Newcastle, Teesside, Manchester and Sheffield.

- For more information email workersliberty.org or tel. 07883 520852.

Million Women Rise: challenging male violence

By Joan Trevor

Million Women Rise (MWR) organises an annual, women-only, march in the West End of London close to International Women's Day, with the slogan, "Together we can end male violence against women and girls".

Migrant and BME women play a prominent role. The first march was in 2008; the sixth march in 2013 attracted around 1,000, down on previous years.

Explaining why the march is women-only, MWR says:

"Women have been socially, culturally and economically conditioned to defer to men, to take our lead from men, to behave in ways approved of by men. On this particular day, we want women to come and feel the strength, the exhilaration and power of being with other women, to celebrate ourselves, to sing, shout and chant at the top of our voices, in all our diversity, to demonstrate however we want because we're women in the company of other women."

MWR was founded by Sabrina Qureshi, a worker with the Women and Girls

Network (WGN), a counselling service for women victims of male violence.

Qureshi says: "We may not have the physical presence of a million women on the march, but the name represents the millions of women who are with us in spirit or who want to be with us but can't."

MWR believes that edu-

Million Women Rise demonstration 2013

cating men and boys to respect women is the way to end male violence against women; they do not believe that males are innately violent. It supports the work of the White Ribbon Campaign: "Men working to end male violence against women."

Qureshi: "I have seen women who have been beaten beyond recognition yet, through the trappings of poverty, have still had to return to their partners. Last month a trafficked woman from eastern Europe was sold by a pimp over a cup of coffee at Heathrow Airport. She was just seen as a commodity, like so many of us. Yet I believe, I truly, solidly believe that we could put an end to male violence against

women in my life time. We just have to be united in our aim and active together."

MWR is supported by several women's and other organisations who agree with its demands [www.millionwomenrise.com/statement-of-demands.html]:

- To acknowledge the continued discrimination

faced by all women, the additional discrimination faced by Black women and women from other minority groups, and reflect this in all public policy in the UK and internationally.

- For the adoption of a broad definition of violence against women, which makes the links between domestic abuse, rape and commercial sexual exploitation.

- To pledge support and resources to the women's not-for-profit sector which is at the forefront of supporting survivors of discrimination, abuse and violence. Women's services are essential to a woman's healing and empowerment.

- To support the demands of the End Violence Against Women Coalition

(EVAW) and End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes International Forum (ECPAT) for the protection of children and to adopt a cross government strategy addressing all forms of violence against women.

- To abolish the "no recourse" requirement for abused women who have insecure immigration status.

- For all trafficked women and children to have a guaranteed minimum reflection period, specialist support and medical assistance, specialist safe houses for child and adult victims of trafficking and the right to a temporary residence permit if deemed at risk.

- To commit to changing public attitudes and behaviour towards women and girls through education initiatives and public awareness campaigns as set out by school programs such as Womankind Worldwide initiatives.

- To hold the media accountable for the continued misrepresentation, misappropriation and abuse of the female body throughout all forms of media.

- To recognise that global

war and conflict perpetu-

ates violence against

women and to stop all wars

now. Three out of four fatal-

ities of war are women and

children.

- For International

Women's Day to become a

National Bank Holiday in

the UK and Ireland in

recognition of and to cele-

brate women's achieve-

ments.

The next MWR march

will be on 8 March 2014

- millionwomenrise.com

Migrant women workers organising

Around the globe, migrant women's labour plays an important role in developing capitalism. Vicki Morris explores some of the issues this raises for socialist feminists. We welcome comments as we are developing a workshop around the topic — email wfightback@workersliberty.org.

Women make up around half of migrant workers and travel throughout the world to work in all fields.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that there are currently around 90 million migrant workers worldwide of whom about 15% have no legal status.

Migration can be within country, involving moving from the countryside to town, moving to another region, or moving to another country. For the women involved migration usually involves stress, hardship and sometimes danger, and, for the time that they are away, often, loneliness and mixed feelings about leaving loved ones behind.

What drives a woman to migrate? The drivers can be a mixture of positive — seeking better opportunities, more personal freedom — and negative — to escape oppression and repressive circumstances, including, mainly, poverty.

Many women send money they earn back home to help their families, children in particular.

LEGAL STATUS

A migrant's immigration status is crucial in shaping their experience.

If people do not have the legal right to be in the country or to work they are vulnerable to extreme exploitation. Employers use workers' fear of being discovered by the authorities and expelled from the country to force them to put up with long hours, low pay below the legal minimum, poor health and safety conditions, and sometimes violence and humiliation at work.

Employers take advantage of the availability of illegal migrants to pay low wages. As cleaners working for contractors on London Underground became more outspoken for their rights at work they found themselves more vulnerable to checks on their immigration status, and some newly active trade unionists were even deported.

Women in particular are vulnerable when they have no legal status; many end up doing sex work, with all the per-

sonal risks that can entail. Domestic workers living in with households can be isolated and abused, as their right to be in the UK can depend on staying with a particular employer. The rules on this have been tightened; since April 2012 domestic workers arriving in the UK cannot change their employer and still be sure they will be allowed to continue working in the country. Opposing this change, campaign group Kalayaan (Justice for Domestic Migrant Workers) said: "This can only facilitate slavery."

• More: www.kalayaan.org.uk

CHALLENGES

Socialists want to change the world and believe that RMT cleaners demonstration, London, 2012

the working class — in all its diversity — is the social force to do it.

Migrant women workers occupy particular positions within capitalism and the role they can play in changing the world will be shaped by that, but they certainly will be part of socialist and feminist change. Socialist feminists need to rise to the particular challenges.

Even when women do have the right to stay and work in a country, they tend to find themselves in lower paid jobs with fewer employment rights.

How can these women organise to defend their rights as workers — and as women? The particular challenges they must overcome, with the help of allies in the women's and labour movements include:

- Finding ways to **combat isolation**.
- Assisting women to find a place in society, including in the labour movement. This might involve offering **training, advice on rights, language lessons, etc.**
- **Fighting racism, nationalism and immigration controls.** Migrant women have as much right to a decent life as any other person.
- **Fighting sexist attitudes** about women workers, in wider society but also in the labour movement.
- **Learning from migrants.** Many migrants bring prior political and trade union experience, and many exhibit the sheer combativity, that we need to help revive the British labour movement.

Women's Fightback believes socialists and feminists need to transform the labour movement in order to make it fit to fight for socialism, and even to win basic, bread-and-butter battles over issues such as pay. Migrant women workers stand to gain particularly from a more combative trade union movement since they are often in the lowest tiers of the workforce. Trade unions need to meet the challenge of helping all migrant and women workers to organise against exploitative employers. In their turn, migrant women workers' struggles can inspire us and remind us of the origins of the labour movement.

Most labour movements were built as people — migrants — displaced from the countryside moved to live in towns and entered the early industrial, capitalist economy.

Differences of time and place are very important and each situation must be assessed concretely.

But the key tasks are the same everywhere and at all times: to organise the unorganised, to build solidarity between workers, to fight for a common goal of socialism that will end exploitation forever.

Women's Fightback London discussion meeting
Friday 5 April, 7-9pm, ULU, Malet Street, WC1E
3 Cosas campaign: outsourced cleaners fighting for rights at work
— speaker and film showing
Details: women@workersliberty.org

Migrant women — life in the UK

IRISH WOMEN

The "Moving Here" website has interesting accounts of the working lives of migrants from Ireland, the Caribbean, South Asia, and Jewish people.

Women migrants from Ireland sometimes outnumbered men. Throughout history, they have worked in all fields, as domestic servants, in factories, particularly the mill towns of north-west England, and, more recently, in the public services, particularly the health service — by 1971, 12% of Britain's nursing staff were Irish.

"In Preston, the 1871 census shows 26% of Irish males and about 15% of Irish females employed in the mills.

"Crude racial stereotypes in appearance and dialogue lie behind [a] cartoon of Irish women mill-workers asleep on the job as their horrified employer looks on...

"Wages in the mills were low. Sometimes ...the workforce was dominated by women and young people. The money they earned was often vital to the survival of a working-class family. Such work was monotonous and it could be dangerous....

"Some commentators and journalists, both in the 19th and 20th centuries, argued that cheap Irish labour forced down the wages of native English workers and undermined the trade union movement. There is little evidence that this was so."

• "Moving Here": <http://tinyurl.com/bqjrck4>

GRUNWICK DISPUTE

The Grunwick dispute, 1976-8, was important in the history of the British labour movement; at its height it involved, for the first time, white, mainly male trade unionists showing solidarity with South Asian women workers who were organising for the first time. Jean Lane tells the story in an article, "The lessons of

Grunwick", extracted below:

"The Grunwick strike... was different from other big battles of the working class before it or since. It was, in many ways, a strike that was not meant to happen. It did not involve workers in a large, powerful union with a militant history like the miners who had brought the Tory government down only a few years before, or the dockers or engineers who had helped the miners close the Saltley Gates. The workers of Grunwick were not unionised at all and had no experience of being in a union. They were mostly women, in large part young women, who had to fight their families for the right to join the picket line; they were overwhelmingly Asian, many of whom spoke little English, and who were being employed by Grunwick because they could be used as cheap labour. Yet their struggle would reverberate throughout the labour movement.

"Grunwick was a small film processing plant in North London. Conditions inside the factory were appalling. The workers had no representation.

"Rates of pay differed from one individual to another — white workers were employed on different (higher paid) jobs. Overtime was compulsory and could be imposed at a moment's notice. Conditions inside the centre of the dispute, the mail order department, were particularly draconian.

"Grunwick made itself competitive by paying low wages — about £28 for a 40-hour week: the national average for wages at that time was £72 and a full-time woman manual worker in London got £44.

"The pressure inside the mail order department was very high and the manager, a Mr Alden, ruled it like a despot. If women asked for time off to look after sick children they were told, 'This is not a holiday camp'. Compulsory overtime could be imposed when a woman was

going to pick her child up from nursery. She would have to either work on, worrying about the fate of her child, or argue with her supervisor and get the sack. Sackings were high. The annual staff turnover was 100%! There was an atmosphere of subservience and fear."

• More: <http://tinyurl.com/co96jhw>

CHINESE WORKERS

Journalist Hsiao-Hung Pai researched the lives of Chinese migrants working in the UK — many of them illegally — for her book *Chinese Whispers: The true story behind Britain's hidden army of labour*.

In a chapter about the popular restaurants in London's Chinatown she writes about waiting staff on £5 a day basic pay who survive on a — small — share of the service charge or tips. Many of these have a legal right to work. In 2007 Pai worked a few shifts pushing the "Roast Duck" trolley in one of these restaurants. She paid £50 in deposits to secure her job, had to buy her own black skirt to wear to work, and was paid £3.20 per hour. The workers' daily meal was served up in one large, metal container from which they all had to pick their food.

"Underneath" such legal workers were people with no legal right to work who were even more ruthlessly exploited. These included "greeters", standing with advertising placards in the streets in all weathers; delivery staff; and kitchen staff. In 2007, the average wage for a kitchen worker was £200-£250 per week for an 11 to 12-hour day — £3 to £3.70 per hour. On the bottom rung of the employment ladder, kitchen workers were paid £2 per hour, and received no overtime, sickness or holiday pay. They worked injuriously long hours.

Many had paid a small fortune to gangs to be smuggled into the country. Most were working to pay off these debts. Immigration raids caused workers stress, and made it easier for them to be exploited.

• Hsiao-Hung Pai's next book *Invisible: Britain's Migrant Sex Workers* will be the subject of a Channel 4 documentary by Nick Broomfield in May 2013.

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: women@workersliberty.org