

Women's Fightback



No. 9 June/July 2011

Middle East and North Africa

THE LEFT MUST FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S LIBERATION!

Saudi women get in the driving seat!

The recent direct action by women in Saudi Arabia — openly driving cars in defiance of an official ban on female drivers — is one of the latest inspirational effects of the Arab democratic revolution.

It is not the first time that Saudi women have attempted to reverse the ban (the last wave of protests was in the 1990s). It is not about the driving. It is about women wanting personal autonomy. As the campaign is supported by both men and women, it may also signal and attempt to push for other democratic rights.

The direct action has been organised on social network sites, where women have been posting images and videos of themselves behind the wheel.

The Women2Drive Facebook page said the direct action would continue until a royal decree reversed the ban.

Campaigners had asked women who have foreign driving licences to drive themselves as they go about their daily life.

By Vicki Morris

At a recent Workers' Liberty meeting in London, Nadia Mahmood of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq described attending the Cairo Conference in Egypt (3-5 June). At the conference she argued that it was important for leftists to campaign on women's issues, such as lack of childcare and sexual harassment.

Women under capitalism suffer specific oppressions that need to be fought now, not after "socialism" has been achieved. Large numbers of women can be brought into socialist and trade union struggles through campaigns on such issues — in fact, unless socialists and trade unions take up these issues, it will be impossible for women to be involved in the broader struggle.

Nadia says that some of the people attending the conference said they would think about these ideas. "Think about it"?!

The left in advanced capitalist countries in the west largely accepts the importance of campaigning on women's issues, but only after a political struggle, mainly by women. It will be the same in countries of

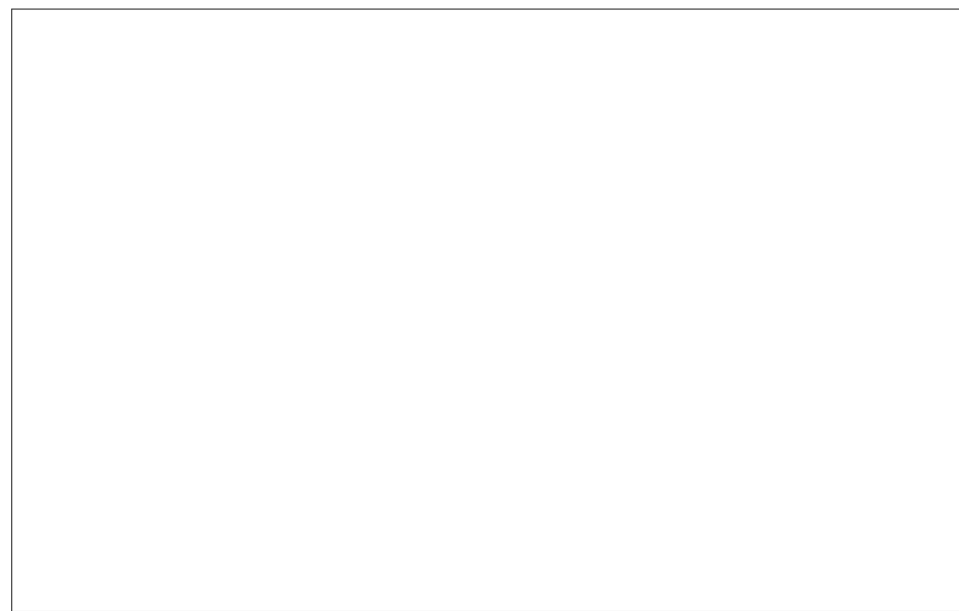
North Africa and the Middle East.

Women's position in these regions is dire, particularly in Egypt, the site of the recent inspiring revolution that ousted Hosni Mubarak. It shouldn't be surprising that in a country where more than 90% of women undergo Female Genital Mutilation, sexual harassment and violence is rife and largely unopposed. Only 24% of Egyptian women are in employment; 40% of Egyptian women are illiterate.

When women have protested about their situation, they have been shoved back in their place with brutal and humiliating treatment. Thugs broke up a celebration of international women's day on 8 March in Tahrir Square. The army arrested 18 women protesters when it cleared Tahrir Square of protesters on 9 March. CNN reported what the army then did to 17 of them:

"...a senior general who asked not to be identified said... virginity tests were conducted and defended the practice.

"The girls who were detained were not like your daughter or mine," the general said. "These were girls



The Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq, protesting in Baghdad's Tahrir Square

who had camped out in tents with male protesters in Tahrir Square, and we found in the tents Molotov cocktails and (drugs)."

"The general said the virginity checks were done so that the women wouldn't later claim they had been raped by Egyptian authorities.

"We didn't want them to say we had sexually assaulted or raped them, so we wanted to prove that they weren't virgins in the first place," the general said. "None of them were (virgins)."

In Iraq, four women tak-

ing part in a pro-democracy rally in Baghdad on 10 June were sexually molested and beaten by government-supporting thugs. The women were part of a delegation from the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), which holds a protest every Friday in the square to demand women's liberation.

After the attacks, OWFI Director Yanar Mohammed told the press:

"It took us so many years to get women involved in the political struggle... And the prime minister decides to send these women

home in what he knows is the best way, the most humiliating way. When the humiliation is sexual, in a society like Iraq, they know it will break the women."

Socialists should support women in the Middle East and North Africa who are fighting sexism in order that they can participate fully in the wider struggle of men and women for a better life. Taking up women's issues does not divide the socialist and trade union movement, on the contrary, it can only strengthen it.

Expect... cuts!

A woman "betrayed"? Imogen Thomas's situation is deliberately dramatised by the media

Sex, Lies And Superinjunctions

By Cath Fletcher

Imagine that His Honour Judge A (he is almost certainly a man) is hearing the case of Celebrity B versus Tabloid C. Whose side are you on?

That of the celebrity, who wants to keep his sex life out of the newspapers? Or that of the tabloid, which wants to publish "in the public interest"?

One current superinjunction concerns a case where two employees had an affair: it was decided they could no longer work together, the woman was sacked and the man kept his job. I'm not sure that's clearly a private matter — especially the conduct of the employer. But when it comes to the sex lives of actors, footballers and celebrities, I can't see that there's much of a public interest.

There is, though, an interest in publishing these stories, and we should ask *whose* interest it is.

The commercial interest on the part of the tabloids is certainly important. But the red-top tales of celebrity sex lives also serve another interest — capitalist interest in reinforcing a set of social norms about sex and relationships that shore up women's role as domestic workers supporting husbands and children.

These stories invariably privilege monogamous partnerships, preferably marriage, and label those who fail to live up to their standards as cheats and betrayers.

"Imogen [Thomas] thought [Ryan] Giggs would marry her" was the headline in one *Sun* article, excusing her affair with the footballer because she believed it would soon be legitimised.

Another headline told how "betrayed Stacey [Giggs' wife], 32, has agreed to try to save their relationship".

Superinjunctions don't help question such reactionary attitudes — they just help a handful of super-rich people avoid becoming the victims of publicity around them.

Much of the debate

around superinjunctions assumes that sex should be a private matter — and if injunctions help keep it that way, then why worry? The problem with that is that sex is by no means always private.

The state takes an interest in our personal lives because of the importance of the family and women's reproductive labour to capitalist society. The most blatant case is that of benefit claimants, whose live-in partners are required to take financial responsibility for them.

Unlike the superinjunction celebrities they cannot claim that their relationship is their own private business. The rules on cohabitation cause many people financial hardship and distress.

Marriage is another example. You can't have a private marriage: it has to be publicly witnessed. When a marriage ends, the individuals involved go to court — a public space — if they can't agree on a divorce settlement.

We should see the superinjunctions debate in the context of the way the capitalist state regulates personal relationships, and the way that the press encourages acceptance of the social norms of monogamous marriage.

Superinjunctions at best save a few rich individuals from harassment. At worst they reinforce a hypocritical attitude towards sex that says — to men in particular — "we know you might stray, but just do it discreetly". That is precisely the attitude that French feminists are now questioning as the Dominique Strauss-Kahn affair rolls on.

They worry that France's super-strict privacy laws prevent the media from investigating sexual misconduct not only in celebrity cases, but also where there is a genuine public interest.

Socialist feminists have no interest in backing the tabloids in their campaign for the "freedom" to invade personal lives. But we should not kid ourselves that in a capitalist society sex is a genuinely private matter.

By Esther Townsend

Issues around women's sexuality, and sexual violence have been prominent in the media recently, and provoked people into defending women's rights. But the people shouting and marching in cities across the world at events such as Slutwalk have been overwhelmingly young women, highlighting the particular pressures they face.

They are caught between the "don't let children grow up too fast" perspective (i.e., they shouldn't know about or engage in sex and relationships) and constant pressure in the media and society to look attractive and "sexy". Young women's real experiences often fall in the gap between these and are largely ignored.

Christine Barter's landmark research (2010, NSPCC/University of Bristol) has shed new light on young relationships. The study showed high levels of violence in teenage relationships: 25% of girls and 18% of boys reported physical violence; three-quarters of girls and half of boys reported emotional abuse; and a third of girls and 16% of boys reported sexual violence.

Barter's research highlights two key points: first, how young people are viewed in society, and, second, how this feeds into the education and services they access.

GIRLHOOD

Ideally (goes the social aspiration) the blissful ignorance of girlhood continues for long as possible, untainted by knowledge (God forbid, experience) of sex, alcohol or drugs, until a young woman meets the man of her dreams, settles down and has children.

The reality is very different. The figures in Barter's research are undoubtedly shocking, but why are we surprised? One quarter of adult women experience domestic violence in their lifetime — why wouldn't many of these be young women?

In fact, problems that all adults face can be particularly hard for young people. The social pressures on women to look good and follow fashion weigh on young women more, as their bodies rapidly change and they worry about wearing the wrong clothes or developing too fast or slow.

Barter's research showed that sexism and the gen-

Cuts will leave young women unsupported

dered aspect of violence in adult relationships are reflected in teenage relationships. This was particularly true of sexual violence.

There's a social expectation that boys want more sex than they can get and that a young woman's role is to resist "giving it to them". Young women's sexuality is defined in the mainstream as how to meet, or control, the raving lusts of teenage boys, rather than young women being encouraged to think about how they themselves feel about sex.

Particularly worrying is that many young women see violence as a normal part of relationships. Violence was rarely seen as a reason in itself to end a relationship, especially by young women in higher risk groups (struggling at or not attending school, or poor working class women) who reported gaining their self-worth from their relationship.

Normalising violence can result from experiencing violent adult relationships during childhood, but also of having no alternative models. Education about sex and relationships has an important role to play in explaining what healthy relationships look like.

Sex education leaves much to be desired, and

seriously, or only focused on the particular referral issue, not a young person's overall situation.

This is partly due to a lack of awareness that young people have relationships, or experience "adult" issues, but also reflects the fact that services are overstretched, leaving workers little time to look at the bigger picture.

CUTS

The lack of services is set to get worse as the cuts hit. NGO-run women's services have been easy targets for cash-strapped councils — over 50% face closure, and in some areas face 100% cuts. Women's Aid estimate that 70,000 women and children will soon be without support. The experiences of children and young people fall further into the background as child protection thresholds rise and services are reduced.

Even before these cuts services were inadequate. In the "Expect Respect" leaflet most of the directional advice was to websites rather than to actual young people's services.

Barter's research is an important first step in acknowledging the violence and exploitation faced by young people. But in an interview with Radio 4's "All in the Mind" (31 May 2011) Barter said that further research on younger age groups was now unlikely to happen.

Since we now know that young people face high levels of violence in their relationships, how can we tackle the problem?

We need an education system which deals with these issues honestly and with respect for young people.

Everyone involved (young people, parents and carers, teachers and support staff) must be educated about these subjects and how to deal with them.

Education should be age appropriate and sensitive, but it should also recognise that real lives don't fit an idealised pattern.

We need additional inclusive, accessible and specific services for young people, not cuts!

Importantly, we need to start seeing young people as just that. Young. People. They study, work, think about sex and have it, have relationships, and face challenges, including violence and abuse.

The way they experience issues will be new and different (new technologies, different pressures) but young people deserve to have their concerns taken seriously.

Who cares about the carers?

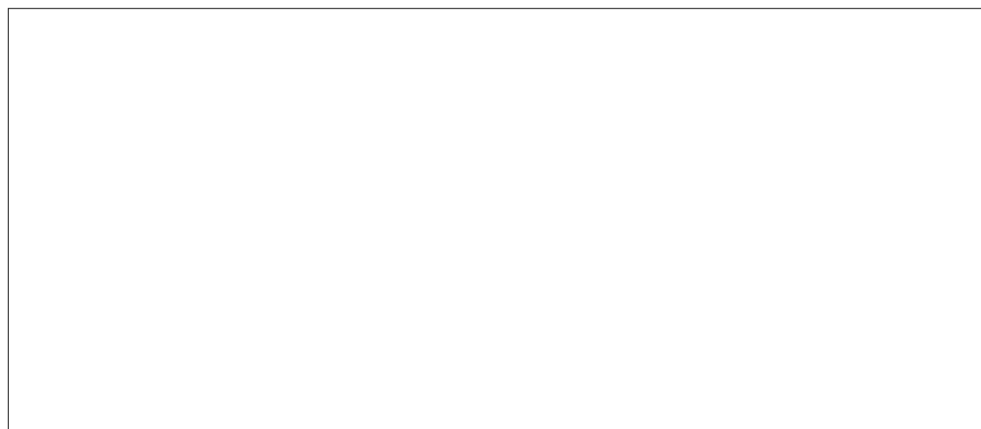
An interim report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission describes major problems with how frail and elderly people are looked after when receiving homecare visits (from privatised companies, paid for by local authorities). They found neglect and a lack of respect for privacy and dignity.

The Commission based its findings on interviews with older people, their families and also care workers. The report adds to an already depressing picture of cuts in services and the possibility of the Southern Cross, one of the biggest care home providers, going bust.

Alice Marshall, a care worker, describes some of the conditions and asks why is "caring" so undervalued.

The perception of care work as women's work is hard to shake. Despite hundreds of years of struggle for women's liberation we are still seen as the gentle, caring, nurturing sex.

The vast majority of care workers are women, and where cuts are made in care provision it is, on the whole, women who pick up the pieces. They can find themselves taking on responsibility for elderly relatives or acting as unpaid childminders to their grandkids.



The reality of carework is very different. There is no time to provide human companionship

And what about women who work in the caring professions? A healthcare assistant working full-time can expect to earn around £6 an hour and bring home about £800 a month.

The shifts are long, physically demanding, and involve anti-social hours, but can be worked around childcare which is one reason, rather than our supposedly innate drive to care, why so many women work in this field. (Although, ironically, women in a home where I worked were told that a child being ill was no excuse for missing work.)

The conditions as well as the pay are disgraceful. Often little or no training is provided for what is an extremely challenging job.

This, coupled with chronic understaffing, leads to an almost factory-like

processing of some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

Change, breakfast, television on. Change, lunch, sit in chair. Change, supper, time for bed. Even this most basic "care" is rushed, with little time for any more fulfilling human interaction.

Some companies provide only 15-minute home visits. That is barely time to get through the door, let alone wash, dress and feed someone. Especially for patients with dementia or mental health issues. For the person being cared for it might be a "choice" between being washed or eating.

Lifting frail residents impossibly can and does result in deaths, yet it is possible to walk into a care job without a CRB check, having had no training at all. My agency told me that

if I didn't know how to do something I shouldn't say, but, rather, watch a couple of times before I attempted it myself.

It is common practice to provide workers with cheap gloves designed for feeding people to use whilst attending to personal care. These offer no protection from the germs commonly found in the bodily fluids routinely handled in this most glamorous line of work.

EMPLOYMENT LAWS FLOUTED

Employment laws state that there should be a minimum break of 11 hours between shifts.

The laws are routinely broken, with staff arriving back at work as little as eight or nine hours after they left. This is due to poorly designed shift pat-

terns, which makes it impossible to work a late shift followed by an early one with the requisite amount of rest time in between.

Despite the shocking conditions and pitiful rate of pay there is almost no union presence in this line of work, especially among private care home staff.

Many workers are apathetic and feel that there is no point in complaining, others are fearful of being bullied out by management if they are known to be unionised.

An active and fighting trade union presence in care work would massively improve conditions for both residents and staff.

The lack of it is unsurprising: union leadership is dominated by men, and in the unions generally despite years of lip service to organising there is no real drive to recruit workers doing temporary or "unskilled" work.

This needs to change! Unions need to recruit care workers and fight with them and service users for better conditions, pay and full and adequate training. These demands should be linked to a fight for a better standard of care for service users.

In the coming months it is essential that the fight against cuts in care services builds links and campaigns with both workers and service users.



BITE THE HAND THAT "FEEDS" YOU

Pro-choice campaign

A Pro-Choice demo outside Parliament on 9 July will hopefully kick start a renewed campaign against several attacks on women's reproductive rights.

- An amendment to the Health and Social Care bill will create a new requirement for GPs to provide counselling for women seeking abortion — opening the door for anti-choice "counselling" services to get involved.

- Anti-choice group LIFE has been invited to sit on the government's new sexual health advisory forum.

- Nadine Dorries' 10 Minute Rule bill, proposing the introduction of "abstinence-based" sex education for 13-16 year old girls (but not boys!), gets a second reading in January 2012.

Meanwhile cuts to contraception and sexual health services and increased waiting times for abortion access are already impacting reproductive choice. <http://prochoicemajority.org.uk/>

Feminist Fightback Feminist Fightback is a collective inspired by the politics of a range of anti-capitalist feminist struggles. The group organises monthly discussions in London and is currently organising around cuts-related activities. www.feministfightback.org

Slutwalk After a 5,000 strong demonstration in London on 11 June the organisers say they want to establish a "Slut means speak up" campaign. Their first action is a petition on the fact that 90% of rapes go unreported and only 6.7% of those reported result in a conviction.

Abortion rights are a union issue

By a PCS member

The annual conference of the civil service union PCS recently debated motions on abortion rights and Nadine Dorries' "abstinence bill" (motions A552, A131 and E553).

Conference was almost unanimous for gender-equal sex education. The high number of submissions opposing Dorries' bill showed that the union is interested in such matters, and discussion ranged from a woman's right to choose and control her own body, to same-sex education and awareness in schools.

Should we be surprised? Is it not a given that in the trade union movement, women's and LGBT rights are something we fight for? Well, for one or two branches, no — if those rights offend any group of members.

Motion A131 said that there is no place for abortion policy in the trade union movement and that PCS should disaffiliate from Abortion Rights. This case was made under the auspice of a commitment to PCS's diversity policy, the

assertion being that some members with "deeply held beliefs" will find a pro-choice policy offensive. This case was pretty much laughed out of the conference hall, and led to one of the most passionate debates all week.

Sadly, however, the main argument focused on "my body, my choice" rhetoric, when the real and more difficult debate is around the issue of diversity. At what point should we override the equality of diversity, and prioritise one set of beliefs over another?

If, for example, one replaced the issue of abortion with anti-fascism, it could be argued that the union shouldn't have anti-fascist policy because that would offend our more racist union members. Civil Service management, in fact, do say that we should not campaign against the "far right" in our workplaces, because far-right members of staff might be offended. To take this to its logical conclusion, we should — under the banner of "diversity" — have no union policy on LGBT rights, maternity leave, prayer rooms at work... they all

might offend somebody.

Some union members are offended by the idea of strike action — perhaps we shouldn't have policy on that either, in case the scabs don't like it! This clearly would be ridiculous.

The main point to argue is that while we should respect the different views and walks of life of the membership, this should never be to the detriment of another's rights. In this case, those who would be offended by an abortion policy — conservative/religious members — would take away a policy promoting the rights of another group — women.

NHS campaign

Women Against Cuts in Merseyside have produced a leaflet explaining what NHS reforms mean and how they will affect women. They hope to distribute around local communities in the area.

- To get a copy or hear more about their campaign contact Elaine on mwac@hotmail.co.uk

Women workers in the Russian revolution

Part 3 of Elaine Jones' four-part history of the role of women workers and socialist activists in the Russian Revolution.

During 1917 the Bolsheviks were agitating for an end to the war, explaining why it was an imperialist war. Some patriotic pro-war people set up the League of Personal Example and began to organise highly disciplined shock battalions or death battalions to fight which could, they hoped, convince people to die for their country. It was in this atmosphere that Maria Bochkareva was charged to create the 1st Russian Women's Battalion of Death in May 1917. It fought in the "June offensive" on the Russian western front.

Maria Bochareva organised her battalion with strict moral discipline and all the punishment and humiliation you would usually find in the army.

Bolshevik agitators spread dissent in the battalion, arguing for a soldiers' committee or for it to be disbanded. Kollontai reports that there were no proletarian women in the battalion, just peasants, wealthy women and students.

Liberal feminists lavished praise on The Battalion of Death. Anna Shabanova hosted a meeting with speakers Emmeline Pankhurst and Bochkareva in June 1917. Pankhurst had been sent by Lloyd George to bolster the pro-victory spirit of women.

Another women's battalion — the 1st Petrograd Women's Battalion — was ordered to defend the Winter Palace against the Bolshevik-led insurrection on 25 October, but only 135 of the battalion were sent, and in the event even they refused to fight, saying their role was to fight at the front.

Undoubtedly the Bolsheviks, despite the limitations of earlier years, were the best propagandists and organisers of proletarian women in 1917. Everywhere women were being elected to serve on committees. The liberal feminists renewed their agitation for the vote. Proletarian women too wanted suffrage. The Bolsheviks had to compete (to a certain extent, they were *forced* to compete) for the political allegiance of proletarian women.

By 1917 a third of Petrograd's factory workers were women; half of the workers in the chemical industry were women; two-thirds of the workers in food, textiles and tailoring were women.

The February revolution — beginning in earnest on International Women's Day (though there had been a build up of strikes in the period before) — saw the establishment of a Provisional Government. The government did not and would not either end the war or solve the food crisis. However, political parties were made legal. The Bolsheviks used that opening to organise.

RABOTNITSA

At the 13 March party congress, Vera Slutskaya proposed that a bureau of women workers be set up and the paper *Rabotnitsa* revived. In April and May agitational bureaux, commissions and groups were set up across Petrograd with a teaching cadre at the centre.

Eventually women's commissions were established at the district party level. Clubs and trade union activities were used to draw non-party working women into party activities.

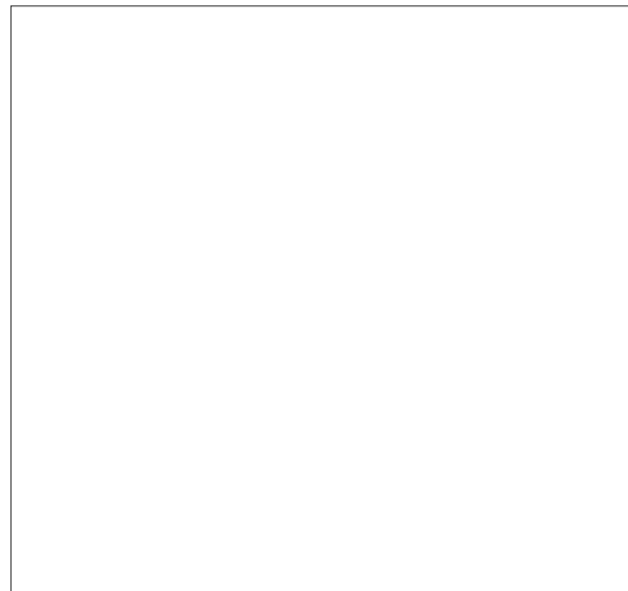
Throughout 1917 the women's organisations worked to build a conference of women workers. This conference of 500 delegates representing around 80,000 women workers would meet shortly before the October revolution.

The Bolsheviks intervened in the liberal feminist meetings. When the feminists held an "All Russian Women's Congress" in Moscow a delegation headed by Inessa Armand repeated their earlier tactics of 1908 and walked out after reading political statements.

One example of a Bolshevik campaign was agitation among laundry workers who worked 13 or 14 hours a day. The Bolsheviks called for public laundries, better conditions and the setting up of a library. The laundry workers went on strike and raised the political demands put forward by the Bolsheviks — opposition to the war and "all power to the soviets".

The Bolshevik women agitated amongst soldiers' wives for more money, but unlike the liberal feminists they did not appeal to the Provisional Government. They called on the Petrograd Soviet force through the measure.

Alexandra Kollontai organised a committee for the distribution of funds to soldiers wives and a union of soldiers



22 February (8 March) 1917: Petrograd's women workers protest on International Women's Day

wives was set up in many cities. Kollontai also called on soldiers' wives to send delegates to the soviets.

On 10 May *Rabotnitsa* reappeared. It was to be published several times a month and gained a circulation of 40-50,000. It agitated about the war, high prices and labour conditions. In the industrial-military centres of the city the work was supplemented by other campaigns. Nadezhda Krupskaya and Zhenya Egrova worked in the Vyborg district, Slutskaya on Vasilevsky Island, Ludmila Stul on Kronstadt naval base and Anna Itkina in the Narva district. Inessa Armand travelled up to Moscow and organised around the journal "The life of the woman worker".

Rabotnitsa relied on women workers' support. A group of women workers had agreed to support *Rabotnitsa* even before it was produced — pledging three days' pay. Money for copies sold was taken to the office, where paper distribution and meetings were arranged; *Rabotnitsa's* supporters also wrote articles for the paper. It was more than a journal — it was used to train agitators. In May a 10,000 strong meeting was held at the Cimizzelli circus.

The *Rabotnitsa* group in Petrograd would write copy in the morning and then travel to to the factories in the afternoon.

After a series of mass demonstrations in July there was a clampdown on political activity. Bolshevik women were even attacked by their workmates and denounced as spies. But the tide would turn. A mass meeting in August called for the release of Kollontai from prison.

In the last couple of weeks before October, hundreds of thousands of workers took and consolidated their control of their factories and barracks. Peasant revolts swept the countryside. Two-thirds of factories had committees. In Petrograd 1200 deputies were elected to the soviet. In March and April there had been 700 soviets with 200,000 delegates across Russia. By October there were 1400 soviets. The Provisional Government had no grip on events — their declarations and orders were met with indifference. Mass meetings of thousands took place in halls, workplaces and streets — people were involved in controlling their own lives.

Kollontai wrote, "Stick to your revolutionary posts, women workers. All our strength, all our energy, all our thoughts must be given to strengthening the power of the revolutionary democracy, the power of the soviets. The place of working class women in these great days of the first proletarian revolution is amongst the courageous fighters for revolutionary ideals."

The Bolsheviks were opposed to the politics of the women's battalions — the prosecution of the imperialist war. But they were not against women fighting. Bolshevik women were involved in armed actions and in street fighting. Women took part in the Red Guard. Several women were involved in Petrograd soviet's Military Revolutionary Committee. Women were involved at every level.

Lenin's verdict: "In Petrograd, here in Moscow, in cities and industrial centres, and out in the country, proletarian women have stood the test magnificently in the revolution. Without them we should not have won, or just barely won."

Socialist women

Nadezhda Krupskaya

She was the daughter of a radical army officer and a governess. In 1889, at the age of 20, she joined a St Petersburg Marxist circle. In the 1890s she taught Marxism to workers in the industrial districts of St Petersburg. She was arrested in October 1896, a few months after her partner Lenin, and exiled to Siberia. She worked with Lenin for the rest of his life.

Kollontai on Krupskaya: "...Nadezhda Krupskaya did not speak at the numerous stormy meetings at which the people argued over the great question: would the Soviets win power or not? But she worked tirelessly as Vladimir Ilyich's right hand, occasionally making a brief but telling comment at party meetings.

"In moments of greatest difficulty and danger, when many stronger comrades lost heart and succumbed to doubt, Nadezhda Konstantinovna remained always the same, totally convinced of the rightness of the cause and of its certain victory."

After Lenin's death she supported the Joint Opposition against Stalin, before capitulating in 1928.

Inessa Armand

Inessa was born Elizabeth d'Herbenville in Paris in 1874 — the daughter of music hall performers. When her father died, she was sent to live in Russia with her aunt and grandmother who worked for the wealthy Armand family. The Armands educated her, and by the age of 18 she spoke French, English, German and Russian, and was a skilled musician. She married one of the Armand sons and lived with him for seven years, bearing five children. In 1903 she joined the Marxist movement. After 1910 she became a leading activist of the Bolshevik faction in exile. She died in 1920, from cholera.



Elena Stasova

Elena Stasova became a member of the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1898 and later an agent for the party's underground news paper *Iskra* — she had to move from city to city and take papers across borders.

Kollontai on Stasova: she had a "clear, high brow, a rare precision in, and an exceptional capacity for work, a rare ability to 'spot' the right person for the job... In her hands she holds a notebook, while around her press comrades from the front, workers, Red Guards, women workers, members of the party and of the Soviets, seeking a quick, clear answer or order." She became secretary of the Bolshevik party in 1919, after the death of Jacob Sverdlov, and before the rise of Stalin.

Klavdia Nikolayeva

Klavdia Nikolayeva was a working woman. She joined the Bolsheviks in 1908, in the years of Tsarist reaction, and endured exile and imprisonment... Kollontai comments: "She spoke at meetings, still nervous and unsure of herself, yet attracting others to follow. She was one of those who bore on her shoulders all the difficulties involved in preparing the way for the broad, mass involvement of women in the revolution, one of those who fought on two fronts — for the Soviets and communism, and at the same time for the emancipation of women."

When Kollontai was removed from the Women's Commission of the Communist in 1922 (when Kollontai led the Workers' Opposition faction) Nikolayeva took over. She later supported the opposition to Stalin.

Konkordia Samoilova

Konkordia Samoilova was born 1876, the daughter of a Siberian priest. She was, according to Kollontai, "A party worker of unparalleled selflessness, a fine, business-like speaker who knew how to win the hearts of working women. She was simple in manner, simple in dress, demanding in the execution of decisions, strict both with herself and others."

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: Jean, Rosie and Esther:
wfightback@workersliberty.org