

# RMT WOMEN'S

# Newsletter



Welcome to the first edition of the RMT Women's newsletter. We welcome contributions from all members and would particularly like to hear about you and your experiences of the RMT and your workplace. We also welcome book reviews, articles about events relevant to RMT Women and reports of RMT courses or events you have attended.

**This issue includes an introduction to the RMT Domestic Violence policy, the RMT Womens Conference and the upcoming Matchwomens Festival.**

## RMT Launches Domestic Violence Policy

**RMT is taking a stand against domestic violence. We support services for those who suffer violence, and campaign against the cuts that these services are facing. And we have launched a model policy on domestic violence that we are asking employers to implement.**



It includes key demands such as:

- no disciplinary action under Attendance policies for non attendance and lateness caused by domestic abuse
- protection from abusers seeking you out at work
- time off that you might need to escape domestic violence, or to help a close friend or relative.

A policy is just a piece of paper unless we put it into action. So, RMT will submit it to the Company Council of every employer we have negotiating rights with.

We want you to show employers how strongly we feel that they should adopt and implement this policy. Speak to your Regional Organiser, Regional

Women's Officer or RMT rep.

Contact your RMT Company Council rep and put forward your views; this will help our reps with their arguments.

Write a short note about why you feel the policy is important.

And if your employer refuses to adopt the policy, get ready to get campaigning!

"This Policy isn't just words on paper, it is a working document aimed at protecting and supporting those subjected to domestic violence and RMT expects it to be endorsed and fully-implemented by employers across the transport sector. Delivering a safe and supportive working environment has to be an over-riding priority for staff and employers alike."

**Bob Crow, RMT General Secretary**

"It is important for this Policy to be launched across the transport industry, Women need to know that support is there and that violence towards women and children will not be tolerated. Women are inclined to keep this violence to themselves and with welfare cuts looming it is expected that violence may escalate. Don't keep it to yourself speak out. Help is there."

**Janet Cassidy, RMT National Women's Advisory Committee**

"Our union has long demanded the right of transport workers to go to work without being assaulted. But we also need the right to go home after work and not be assaulted.

Domestic violence is not a private issue, it is a workplace issue, that affects its victims – women and men – at work. It can affect how well you do your job, your timekeeping, your physical and mental well-being. RMT is determined to bring it out from behind closed doors, give full support, and demand an end to domestic violence."

**Janine Booth, RMT Council of Executives (pictured below with Holly Swinckels from Nottingham Womans Aid)**



**You can read the full policy here:**  
[www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk/DVpolicy](http://www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk/DVpolicy)

## FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

(Source: Women's Aid)

- Domestic violence accounts for between 16% and one quarter of all recorded violent crime.
- One incident is reported to the police every minute.
- Less than 24% of domestic violence crime is reported to the police.
- 89% of victims are women.
- In any one year, there are 13 million separate incidents of physical violence or threats of violence against women from partners or former partners.
- 54% of UK rapes are committed by a woman's current or former partner.
- On average 2 women a week are killed by a male partner or former partner: around one-third of all female homicide victims.
- At least 750,000 children a year witness domestic violence.
- In 75% to 90% of incidents of domestic violence, children are in the same or the next room.
- 40% of all homeless women stated that domestic violence was a contributor to their homelessness.
- Abused women are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, psychosomatic systems, eating problems and sexual dysfunction.
- 75% of cases of domestic violence result in physical injury or mental health consequences to women.

- 1 in 5 young men and 1 in 10 young women think that abuse or violence against women is acceptable.
- The cost of physical healthcare treatment resulting from domestic violence, (including hospital, GP, ambulance, prescriptions) is £1,220,247,000, i.e. 3% of total NHS budget.
- 30% of domestic violence starts in pregnancy.

## STOP CUTS TO REFUGES

For women trying to escape domestic violence, the opportunity to move into a women's refuge is literally a life-saver. But the organisations which provide refuges are warning that cuts in their funding, and recent benefit cuts, threaten the future of refuges with many facing closure. A letter to the press from several of these organisations explained that, "The impact of changes arising from the Welfare Reform Act 2012, plus cuts to local authority budgets, risk destroying the national network of refuge services and forcing many adult and child victims of domestic abuse to remain in life-threatening situations. Two-thirds of those affected by the 1% benefit and tax credit freeze are women. Meanwhile, refuge services are experiencing consistently high demand and many women and children are being turned away due to lack of capacity. A Women's Aid

## IF YOU OR A FRIEND NEED HELP

Contact the freephone 24 hour  
National Domestic Violence  
Helpline run in partnership between  
Women's Aid and Refuge  
CALL: 0808 2000 247  
EMAIL: [helpline@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:helpline@womensaid.org.uk)

snapshot survey shows that on one day last June, 320 women and their children were turned away from refuges."

Women's Aid is running a campaign to Save Survivors' Services, which you can read about and support at [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)



You can sign an e-petition to the government in support of women's refuges here:  
<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/45058>

## Sindyanna of Gaililee

... for progress and development

\* new range of products available now \*

Sindyanna is an association of Jewish and Arab women, and an acknowledged Fair Trade organisation in Israel. RMT's National Women's Conference and our AGM both declared their supported Sindyanna and urge you to buy their products.



Extra Virgin Olive Oil  
(500ml) - £5.00



Olive Oil soap - £1.00  
(natural, lemon, honey, milk,  
sage, pomegranate)



ORDER THROUGH RMT FREEPHONE:

 0800 376 3706 

## Woman's Voice

As a female rmt rep in a male dominated workplace it can sometimes be challenging. Luckily I rise to challenges. I love my role within the rmt and there are many things that keep me going including my belief in the union and my colleagues. Success is not final and failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts. Every new day brings new challenges and it is with us standing together that will see us pass all of the hurdles that are placed in front of us.

Zehra Nazim, RMT representative,  
London Underground train drivers,  
Brixton depot

## BOOK REVIEW: RAILWAYWOMEN

Janet Cassidy reviews *Railwaywomen*, a history of women on Britain's railways by Helena Wojtzak.

I joined the railway in 1986 there were very few women in the industry. It appeared harder for women to progress and be accepted into the higher grades. The reason I say 'appeared' is that after reading 'Railwaywomen' by Helena Wojtzak, I now find life was relatively easy.

The difference is between having a job where you were required to attend church on a Sunday, to today's culture, where you are expected to work a booked Sunday.

Unions were opposed to female employees and wages were 14 shillings a week.

Mind you, this was in the 1800s and we have come a long way since then.

In 1914 there were 178 railway companies.

Imagine our unions of today negotiating with these?

Victorian women were barred from 'men's work' - a position which some men today would still support, given half a chance. But we have moved on from the days when women were given specific jobs, to today when women occupy positions in all grades. From railwaymen receiving their wives' wages for any work they undertook, to women having the possibility of earning more than the men, dependent on their grade.

The first report of a woman booking clerk was in 1858 in Edinburgh. It was reported that, although startling, it was commendable. It is also startling to read that London Underground reckoned they could save money by employing women in booking offices, and, after only two weeks, reconsidered this decision.

There is also a very interesting chapter on the introduction of trade unions, and how the NUR was formed



in 1913, with startling revelations regarding inclusion or exclusion of women. There are also references to women in shipping, acting as booking clerks and stewardesses during the First World War.

The author has to be commended for the time she has taken, and the research she has done to make this a compelling read.

For those younger readers amongst us, it is worth remembering that one shilling is equivalent to five pence! I recommend this book to all, from the start I was unable to put it down,



## WOMENS CONFERENCE 2013: NOTTINGHAM

First of all, many thanks to East Midland Central Branch for all their hard work for our conference. A warm welcome for all from the Branch Secretary Jim Creamer and Ruth Strong.

Ruth made a really good job on a booklet on the Conference guide to Nottingham. Costing £1. Money went to the Women's Aid in Nottingham.

43 Delegates attended this year's conference at the Ramada hotel, Nottingham. A little down on last year's 48 delegates. Still a great turn out on the weekend of International Women's Day.

Started off Friday afternoon with lunch and a meet and greet. I really enjoyed meeting other women from all over the country and different working careers.

General Secretary, Bob Crow addressed the conference and also gave a report on the Credit Union. Education Officer Andy Gilchrist gave a report on RMT education

and the Doncaster training centre. More women need to come forward to be tutors in Doncaster. Anyone interested in tutoring other members, please contact:

A.Gilchrist@rmt.org.uk

Legal update by Thompson's Solicitor Susan Harris. Sue is great. She put the changes over in plain English. Very down to earth and a great role model for women in the workplace.

A bit of an eye opener for me was the speaker for Domestic Violence. Holly Swinckels from Women's Aid in Nottingham. When you hear about women going into a refuge you think of the person going in, maybe on their own or a mother and children. I never knew they took the family pets in as well. The pets get fostered out until the families are sorted. Some families won't leave a violent house because of the family pets. I wish more sufferers knew about this. One

thing that I still can't get out of my head, is that 2 women are KILLED every week by either their partner or former partner.

Friday nights meal at the Flaming Dragon was excellent. A few drinks in the hotel bar after. Very sociable night all round.

Lots of resolutions were discussed and voted on. 2 went straight to the AGM, these were a resolution to have women's public speaking workshops and one about Women's uniforms. The remaining resolutions will go to the executive committee.

To finish off there were a couple of workshops on the RMT women's newsletter and RMT (Women Friendly) Merchandise. Some really good ideas came from all the delegates.

Looking forward to next year's Women's Conference in Glasgow.

**Shirley Ann Venning.**  
**South West Midlands Branch.**

# MATCHWOMENS FESTIVAL

On Saturday 6th July 2013, the first annual Matchwomen's Festival will be held in London.

The festival will celebrate the true start of the modern movement for workers' rights: a strike by young women and girls who took on their employer- and, by extension, the entire Victorian Establishment- in the summer of 1888.

Bryant & May were powerful and prosperous Victorian 'gentlemen' with friends in very high places. By contrast, the matchwomen were labelled a 'rough set'

They were mostly of Irish heritage, at a time when Irish Eastenders were constantly discriminated against. Wages were so low the women were malnourished. They had no contracts or job security, were sometimes injured by dangerous machinery (no compensation in those days).

Working with toxic white phosphorus caused matchworkers to vomit, faint and even fluoresce. Full necrosis, which the women called phossy jaw, caused the jaw bone to slowly and agonisingly decay, Bryant & May were careful to take precautions against this; like sacking workers whose faces looked swollen, or ordering them to have all their teeth pulled out, without anaesthetic. One pregnant woman who refused, fearing for her baby, was sacked.

But there was a lot more to the Bryant & May women- to most Victorian working women – than passive victimhood.

'Factory lasses' at this time caused a scandal by refusing to know their place. Rather than dressing and behaving modestly, they marched the streets of British cities in noisy girl-gangs, cheeking passers-by and dressed to kill. One Poplar resident remembered '...these matchgirls were very tough and, in rare occasions

when in any trouble, didn't hesitate to use their horrible long hat-pins to defend themselves.'

Without a union to support them, and with no apparent power, the women surprised the country when they took matters into their own hands. When one girl was sacked for being a 'troublemaker', 1400 of her workmates streamed out of the gates after her.

It was only a two-week strike, but it changed everything.

After an astonishing victory. they began the largest union of women and girls in the country, and inspired a wave of strikes by the most exploited workers: beginning the movement we know today.

The vital role of working-class women in history has for too long been ignored or undervalued; it's time we celebrated it. The Bishopsgate Institute will host a Grand Day Out on the 6th July 2013 in beautiful Victorian surroundings near Liverpool Street.

We will celebrate the remarkable matchwomen, and the achievements of other women, migrant workers and working people past, present and future.

Speakers will include Frances O' Grady, the first female head of the TUC, Owen Jones and Tony Benn. Grandchildren of



The poster features a group of matchwomen at the top, with the text 'MATCHWOMEN'S STRIKE 2013 FESTIVAL' in a stylized font. Below this, it says 'SATURDAY 6TH JULY 2013' and '11AM - 11PM'. There are three starburst graphics: 'FREE!', 'FAMILY EVENTS', and 'MUSIC POLITICS COMEDY'. A list of speakers includes Tony Benn, Frances O' Grady, Owen Jones, Kate Hardie, Steve White & The Protest Family, Attila the Stockbroker, The Ruby Kid, Michael Rosen, Louise Raw, and many more. The event is at Bishopsgate Institute, London, with website links for www.bishopsgate.org.uk, www.matchwomensfestival.com, www.facebook.com/matchwomen, and @matchwomen1888.

the original matchwomen will be VIP guests.

In the spirit of the Matchwomen we will have Irish music and dancing, and bands, comics, poetry, special children's events, stalls and food and drink. Michael Rosen will read for children, John Hegley will make us laugh with his poetry- and possibly even new work inspired by the matchwomen.

In the evening Attila the Stockbroker, Izzy Thomas, the Ruby Kid, Thee Faction, Hollie McNish, Robb Johnson, and Steve White and the Protest Family will get the party started.

We want to keep this event free: we need your help to do so. Please donate, sponsor (you can do these via our website) or volunteer now to lend support on the day.

[www.matchwomensfestival.com](http://www.matchwomensfestival.com)

**We want your ideas and articles for the next RMT Women's newsletter!**  
**Please email anything to [esmebradbury@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:esmebradbury@yahoo.co.uk)**