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**NO TO NATO CONGRESS, WORKSHOPS AND DEMONSTRATION  
APRIL 2009 STRASBOURG**

I thought that UK WILPF members would like to know first hand of the NO TO NATO Congress, Workshops and Demonstration IN Strasbourg in April. Susi Snyder, our International Secretary General took part in the planning for this and obtained a WILPF/ Women in Black Workshop listing on the Congress agenda.

Cynthia Cockburn, both a WIB and WILPF member, aided by Martine Tuininga, President of French WILPF, Irmgard Heilberger of German WILPF and Anna Gyorgy of Women and Life on Earth (Germany), did a huge amount of detailed organisation for this event. from booking hotel rooms to preparing the Congress Workshop. We were participating in four events; a WIB reunion of 40 women from France, Italy, Norway, Britain, Spain and Germany on the Thursday, April 2, a WILPF/WIB Workshop in the Congress on the next day, Friday, the NO TO NATO Congress on the Friday and Sunday and the demonstration on the Saturday.

The WIB Reunion was a large, enjoyable occasion, full of language difficulties but helped by several multi-lingual women. The hotel in which it was held was initially unhappy to discover that we were part of the NO TO NATO campaign. The whole of the city was tense, zoned and full of both local and national French police in anticipation of the coming demo that it was understandable that there was anticipation of adverse publicity. However, there were no problems. It was interesting to meet so many WIB members from European countries. When we exchanged our accounts, it was clear that practices varied. In some countries, the vigils concentrated solely on Israel/Palestine; in others as in London, they address varying conflict areas, in yet others vigils are joined by other actions.

The next day we attended the NO TO NATO Congress and Workshops. The Strasbourg authorities were clearly anxious to reduce the impact of the campaign – remember Barack Obama was in town as well as representatives of the NATO countries - and allocated the NO To NATO Congress a sports centre on the outskirts of town. The Congress plenary was..... a Congress plenary. Both men and women spoke from the platform although until Cynthia Cockburn's contribution from the floor on the final day, there was zero feminist analysis. A text of her speech is given at the end. Jeremy Corbyn MP and Helen Hudson were scheduled to speak but did not arrive – it was suggested because of airport restrictions. A large number of colourful and well resourced campaigning organisations were represented by stalls: both radical and Peace....even red hammer and sickle scarves were on sale. International WILPF missed a promotional opportunity here – no materials were provided, and our stall had only material that Marlene Tuininga from France and I happened to bring with us.

Our WIB/WILPF Workshop 'NATO=SECURITY: GENDER QUESTIONS' was a triumph. Cynthia had asked for papers to be submitted and twelve were on themes around the effects of NATO and military presence upon civilian populations and especially women with case studies from Afghanistan to Italy. One of these was given by Annelise Ebbe our International WILPF Co-President. These were printed and distributed to all 40 people attending, and copies will be available in our Report. . Summaries were prepared and small groups discussed actions which should follow analysis. Language difficulties were

overcome and a thoroughly successful promotion of a feminist perspective on militarism achieved. A Report is being prepared.

The following day we had to reach another distant part of the city unhelped by all buses and trams being suspended for the day. Several roads were blocked to us by large numbers of French police. The site allocated for the demonstration was a redundant port area by the Port of Europe bridging France and Germany. It was planned that a German demonstration would cross the bridge to the French side and join the Demonstration but they were not permitted to do this. We WIB and WILPF women arrived early and positioned ourselves most effectively with our banners across the front of the speakers' stand, thus seen by all the marchers as they arrived. Most of our banners were from WIB – but the violet LONDON WILPF banner was among them. I had not appreciated that International WILPF did not have its own banners and literature for such occasions. I propose that we remedy this. People spoke from the rostrum including Martine Tuininga from WILPF. For a while, all was pleasant and colourful if somewhat disorganised. Then black, acrid smoke belched over from a nearby burning hotel making it impossible to continue. The march then moved off; the International Co-ordinating Committee organisers seemed not to have arranged for stewards, only a van with a loudspeaker, so that later when we ran into trouble, there was no guidance or direction.

We were periodically stopped, we were told, by orders from the police, eventually arriving at a bridge over the road where we were again stopped - being told that firemen were working on burning buildings the other side. Large numbers of Black Block people then poured down from the bridge and ran into our march, followed by police, explosions and teargas. Other people may have a more coherent account of what happened here – I can only report what I saw. The march was effectively wrecked and I understand that the Black Blocks had attacked a march in the same way in Baden Baden the day before.

On the long road back to central Strasbourg, wedges of police blocked roads and conducted body searchings. Because there were no buses or trams running, it was a long walk. In the evening however, we all met up with a dinner arranged by Annelise Ebbe which was enjoyed by everyone.

**A summary:** It was a triumph that 40 women from WIB and WILPF arrived in Strasbourg and worked and talked together, exchanged ideas and experience, and enjoyed each other's company for four days. Huge congratulations to Cynthia Cockburn and her team for their efficient organisation.

And congratulations also to Cynthia for her contribution on the Congress floor – reproduced below.

The demonstration and march was large, multi-national colourful, good humoured, disorganised and eventually, in my own judgement, ineffective. French newspapers the next day carried pictures of burning buildings although some differentiated between the peaceful marchers and the wreckers.

Other people were experienced in the wrecking activities of the Black Blocks and perhaps the organisers should have prepared us for this. Stewards would have been a great help. I do not know what co-operation was sought beforehand from the police, but if so was also ineffective. I personally did not see any police violence but they were about the city in huge numbers, and appeared menacing and totally against us.

## **Cynthia Cockburn of WiB and WILPF's speech at the NO TO NATO Congress in Strasbourg, April, 2009**

"Hi, I'm Cynthia. You probably saw yesterday a group of women holding banners in a silent vigil. We were from several international women's networks -- the oldest of which is 90 years old. Sometimes people ask: why do women choose to stand and organise alone? Is this merely separatism?

No! We do so because we have a specific feminist antimilitarist analysis. We say, yes, capitalism is a cause of war. And yes, the nation-state system is a cause of war. Two big power systems, underpinned by violence. But we say there is also a third big power system causing war. Patriarchy, the system of male domination and the supremacy of masculine values. Also underpinned by violence.

These three power systems are intersected, they are inseparable. Together they cause war, they predispose our societies to war, they prevent peace taking hold.

Yesterday we held a workshop. We received 14 papers from six countries. They set out our feminist case against NATO - as an international actor; against its military installations and bases in our countries; against the deformation of our everyday life and culture by militarisation; and finally our case against NATO as a perpetrator of war, which has specific effects on women.

Now: the thing is... we do not just have a feminist antimilitarist analysis. We are activists. Because we understand patriarchy to be part of the problem, anti-patriarchy has to be part of the solution.

Our movement against war must be anti-patriarchal as well as anti-capitalist and anti-nationalist. Unfortunately yesterday we saw a lot of patriarchal masculinism in our movement! We want a movement that is not merely an anti-war movement - we want a peace movement!"