

Women in Black UK Newsletter - Spring 2020

As we enter into the fourth week of 'physical distancing - social solidarity', Women in Black groups around the country are finding alternative ways to be in solidarity with one another and with all women working to end war and militarism.

Bradford: new vigil!

Bradford Women in Black began holding a monthly silent vigil in the city centre in January of this year. They get together the first Thursday of the month between 5 pm and 6 pm. Their March vigil, which marked International Women's Day, was really well attended: 22 women. In April, the group held a virtual vigil with the theme of women in Kashmir. Each member altered her individual Facebook profile to add the WiB logo and an invitation was posted on the group's Facebook page. Afterwards the seven vigilliers who took part had a Zoom meeting to discuss how it had gone. Joyce Robertshaw reports: "We all agreed it wasn't the same as being with other women, obviously, but we felt it had been useful. Most of us had felt that just by sitting quietly with no social media for at least some of the time was helpful. Some had used the time to look up information on the situation in Kashmir or listen to a programme about it." To keep up to date with WiB Bradford, please go to:

<https://m.facebook.com/WomenInBlackBradford/>

<http://womeninblack.org/vigils-around-the-world/europa/united-kingdom/bradford-new-vigil/>

Portsmouth

The lockdown hasn't stopped Portsmouth WiB from maintaining their monthly vigil. On Saturday 4 April, four vigilliers met on Zoom and enjoyed being able to hear and see each other and felt linked to the many women around the planet who are witnessing to peace. Sarah Coote said: "Some of us were at home struggling with the novel technology and one was on a dodgy old phone whilst doing a solo walking vigil in the usual place opposite the Royal Navy base. The pictures of revolving trees and blue skies were enjoyed by those indoors. The spot is near a busy junction away from people, but there were probably more passing cyclists and runners than drivers, and the buses were almost completely empty. Twice a police car passed but neither time did they bother to go round the block to come and talk. It felt important to still be a visible witness to peace in the face of the military."

Edinburgh

WiBs are holding virtual vigils from home on Saturdays from 1 to 2 pm by putting a placard in their windows calling for an end to armed conflict. One of the placards says: "Testing, not arming. Ambulances, not tanks". Photos are later shared on the group's Facebook page and these have been well received. You can see the images here:

<https://en-gb.facebook.com/womeninblackedinburgh/>

London

Each Wednesday, the group is focusing on a specific theme, such as British arms sales to Saudi Arabia, domestic violence or global military spending, and posting a photo-leaflet on its website and social media accounts. London WiBs are also inviting people to take actions for peace, such as signing the petition for a global ceasefire initiated by the UN Secretary General or contacting their MPs to encourage them to work for peace.

<http://london.womeninblack.org>

Isle of Sheppey

Helen Martins lives on the Isle of Sheppey and manages to participate in the London vigil every few weeks. On 2 April she did a solo vigil close to her home and added the Women in Black sticker to her car. Helen sent us a photo (attached) and commented: "Please note my number plate which enables me to do peace politics on the move in-between WiB vigils!"

Other news:

Last year we saw a Tweet about a **Women in Black vigil in Cambridge**, which prompted us to try to find this group. Happily, one Facebook user saw our post and put us in touch with the Cambridge women, who meet the first Saturday of the month in the Market Square from midday to 1pm. Ann Barnes writes: "It's so nice to feel a real part of a wider body of WiB vigillers. Our numbers remain small, but a slight boost last month meant that we had six of us for our March vigil, and we hope we can sustain that number into the future. During the lockdown some of us will be continuing our silent vigil in our own homes for that hour for as many months as we are prevented from standing together." If you have friends in the Cambridge area, please invite them to contact the group: <http://womeninblack.org/vigils-around-the-world/europa/united-kingdom/cambridge-new/>

On International Women's Day, **Borth and Aberystwyth Women in Black** held a vigil to draw attention to violence wreaked against women domestically and through war. Pat Richards says: "We had a good response, a mix of ages and our Mayor. As usual, it felt moving and powerful". You can see a photo of that particular vigil here: https://twitter.com/WiB_London/status/1237735770447851520?s=20

Oxford WiB had planned to re-start their monthly vigils in the Spring, which were a feature of Saturday mornings in Bonn Square for many years. With the health crisis, their plans are on hold. In the meantime, Carol Starvis shares good news: the group got a grant from the Maypole Fund that will be used to pay for leaflets and other vigil materials. The Maypole Fund also gave grants to WiB Leeds for banners and to WiB London to contribute towards the costs of the WiB conference in Armenia.

The international Women in Black gathering in Armenia has sadly been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At the present time, WiBs from around the globe are discussing whether to hold the meeting in October or in the Spring of 2021. If you want to join this discussion, please contact Lieve Snellings <lieve.snellings@telenet.be> from WiB Leuven, who can add you to the international mailing list.

London WiB Rebecca Johnson writes in The Guardian about France's ambitions to provide the nuclear deterrence role in an integrated EU defence policy. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/feb/10/emmanuel-macron-brexit-nuclear-britain-president-france>

Hava Keller passed away in Tel Aviv on 2 January 2020, aged 90. She was at the heart of several anti-occupation movements in Israel, including Women in Black. A very good article about her life and activism can be found here: <https://www.972mag.com/remembering-hava-keller-a-pioneer-in-the-anti-occupation-struggle/>

To celebrate Cynthia Cockburn's lifetime of writing and campaigning, and to remind people of her outstanding contributions, Soundings have made freely available a selection from the pieces she wrote for the journal, including her articles about transversal politics and photo-narratives of

women's projects in Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Israel. Cynthia, who died on 12 September 2019, was one of the founders of WiB London and a pillar of our global network.

<https://www.lwbooks.co.uk/people/cynthia-cockburn>

Our **international website** provides a listing for every Women in Black vigil, enabling women in your area to find out about your group, when it is held and who to contact for more information. Although there are fewer active vigils than in the past, it's been encouraging to add some new ones to the website over the past year. Whether you are a new group, a long-established one or if your vigil no longer meets, please check your entry and let us know if the details are correct, need updating or whether your entry should be deleted. Please send the information to Sian Jones:

wibinfo@gn.apc.org

<http://womeninblack.org/vigils-around-the-world/europa/united-kingdom/>

Feel free to forward the Newsletter to your friends, relatives and fellow peace activists.

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