



Feminist Library Newsletter

International Women's Day edition

No.11, March 2012

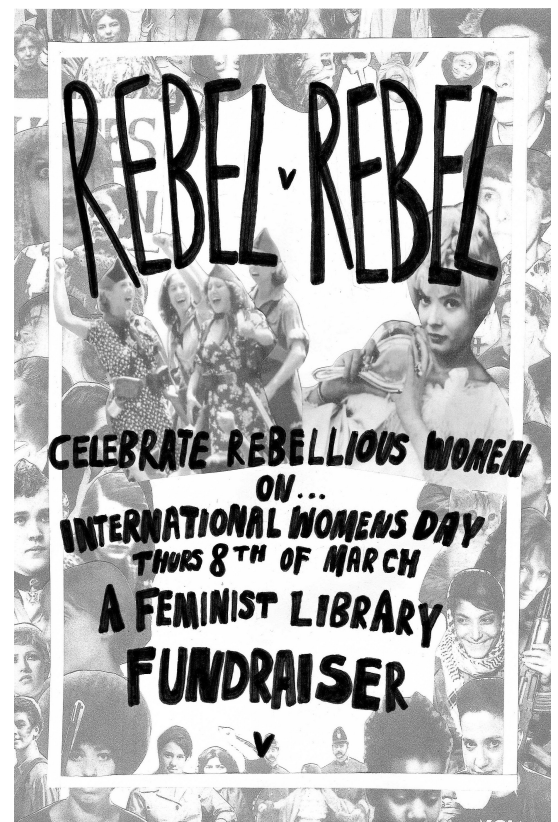
Welcome to the International Women's Day edition of the Newsletter. This is always a busy time for the Library, so look out for us at Million Women Rise on the 3rd, at Women of the World Festival from the 9th to 11th, and at Spitalfields Market on the 10th. And don't miss our own very special fundraising event on the day itself, 8th March, at the library.

2012 is the 101st anniversary of the first International Women's Day. We asked Ruby Kearney to give us a brief outline of some of the background to the day.

At the start of the 20th century, radical ideologies were exploding among the people of the industrialized world. New York City in 1908 saw 15,000 mainly female, garment workers marching for fair pay, dignified working conditions, shorter hours, and for women's right to vote. The year after, the Socialist Party of America declared 28th February the first National Women's Day. Subsequently, during the Copenhagen Conference of Working Women in 1910, Clara Zetkin, a German Marxist theorist and activist, proposed that both the developed and developing worlds should share a globally recognised Women's Day. The resolution was backed unanimously by 100 women from 17 countries and, following suit, a cluster of European countries including Germany, Denmark, Switzerland and Austria declared this day, in March, a positive place in their calendar. Its initiation turned the embryonic movement into a real force for radical gender politics, after a million protesters marched in solidarity on the first official International Women's Day. The movement rapidly gained momentum, and in 1917, demonstrations in St. Petersburg to mark International Women's Day - the last Sunday in February (the 8th March in the Gregorian calendar) - led to the February Revolution, as Russian women and men rebelled in socialist-inspired rallies, political strikes, marches and demonstrations against soaring food prices and bread shortages. Following the October Revolution, Alexandra Kollontai persuaded Lenin to make it an official holiday in the Soviet Union, after which the day was marked as an official holiday in Russia and other communist and socialist countries. The rise of Women's Liberation saw International Women's Day being celebrated in many countries – London's first IWD march was held in 1971. In 1977 the UN National Assembly invited member states to observe 8th March as the UN Day of Women's Rights and International Peace. Since then it has been observed more widely, embracing a variety of historical and national traditions. Since 2008, the Million Women Rise march against all forms of male violence has helped us in Britain mark International Women's Day as a time to commemorate and reflect upon the triumphs of those that have fought for women's economic, political and social equality, and a time when men and women may act together to challenge continuing global gender inequalities.

International Women's Day at the Feminist Library

On Thursday 8th March the Library will open its doors from 2pm to welcome you for a day of bookstalls, food, drinks, discussions and celebration of rebellious women. Colorama Cinema nearby (coloramacinema.tumblr.com) will host our rebel film screenings – Agnès Varda's French mistresspiece *Cléo* from 5 to 7 (at 5pm) followed by *Libertarias*, Vicente Aranda's evocative portrait of female militia in the Spanish Civil War (at 9pm). Our lovely friends from 56a Infoshop will be helping us provide a feast of Spanish and South American food. Copious quantities of tea and cake will abound, as well as a bar and a crèche (please book in advance). Join us in making this a great fundraiser for the library and a wonderful International Women's Day.





International Women's Day is an opportunity to celebrate the legacy of all the feminist women who have gone before us. In January 2012 the Feminist Library was honoured to receive a large donation of feminist material from the estate of recently deceased Natasha Hodson. Linda Shockey wrote this tribute to Natasha, on behalf of herself and Natasha's other friends.

Natasha Hodson was a woman with a loving and charismatic personality. When she was in a hospice towards the end of her life, she asked me "Why have so many people from my past come to see me, even if it meant travelling from abroad?" I replied "Because you're such an unrepentant scoundrel." She liked that.

Tasha's main interests in life were travelling, feminism, art, politics, and documentation. By the latter, I mean that she collected every possible missive from her, to her, or about her from the time she was able to read and kept diaries of most of her activities as an adult. She also collected memorabilia from the rest of her family, books (especially feminist books), music, artworks, and decorative paraphernalia. I referred to her flat as the Hodsonian Museum. Her minor interest in life was (arguably) work. She enjoyed it as a way of meeting people and making money, but otherwise, it didn't motivate her. For her, life was about enjoying yourself, not about drudgery. It was almost as if

she had an inkling that she didn't have much time ... she was only 67 when she died on December 9th, 2011.

Feminism was always high on her agenda. Friends were constantly being asked, "What are you doing for women?", and the reply was never entirely satisfactory. She realised the necessity for reform when she lived in Mexico, where she was a founder member of the Women's Liberation Group in the early 1970s. She returned to England in her 30s to get a degree in Latin American Literature at the University of Essex, and here she was a leading light in the women's group and an indefatigable organiser of events.

She was a great one for coming up with ideas for projects and activities in every sphere, but her ideas, while inspiring, were often not put into practice. There were several reasons for this: one was that ideally the actual work should be done by someone else, second was that her fertile mind went off in many directions at the same time and it wasn't clear to her which one to follow, and third was a perfectionist streak which made her unwilling to declare anything finished until it was 100%. This sometimes gave the impression that she was slow, but in fact "muddling through" was not for her. Her passion for travelling took her everywhere, including most of Europe, Russia, the Americas, Cuba, and China. Her contacts with students from every corner of the globe while teaching English as a foreign language gave her a host of worldwide friends and correspondents.

Though a dedicated good-time girl, Tasha had a stoic streak which stood her well through struggles with health problems and other obstacles throughout her life. Everyone was moved and impressed with her bravery during her last illness, which progressively robbed her of sight and speech. We will miss her very much.

Linen Press Book Launch at the Feminist Library, Thursday 8th December 2011 Yula Burin reports

We were delighted to host this event for the Edinburgh-based Linen Press publishing company, set up by Lynn Michell three years ago to publish works by women that speak directly to women's experience.

A small but dedicated group of women attended the Linen Press launch, which was a real treat, despite having to contend with the evening's wind and torrential rain. The theme of the book launch was **From the Margins to the Page: Women Writers Give Voices to Heroines of Disrepute**, and each of the selected readings offered us an exploration of the nature of women's struggle for independence and self-determination within their particular cultural and political contexts.

Lynn Michell read from her book: *White Lies*, about a rule-bound army wife questioning herself and her life, set in the early 1950s against a background of growing Kenyan dissension with British imperialism. Hema Macherla read from her two works: *Blue Eyes*, about Angela, a teenager who is forced to take part in Suttee; and *Breeze from the River Manjela*, which finds Neela journeying from struggling to cope with being a new bride in a foreign land with a cruel husband and in-laws, to developing self-determination in her quest for love and fulfilment.. Olukemi Amala was unable to attend and read from her book, *Under an Emerald Sky*, about two black girls coming to terms with who they are, given their origins and their formative experiences, in suburban Britain. Fortunately, Lynn's sister was on hand to read a few pages for us. A Q&A followed, generating a wide-ranging discussion about the issues covered in each of the readings, and about independent publishing, and the publishing industry generally.

A thoroughly enjoyable experience, I hope the Feminist Library will get the chance to do this again. For more information about the Linen Press and to order these books, go to: www.linenpressbooks.com

Stuff your Sexist Boss (doesn't want you to know)!

I have recently been assisting the South London Solidarity Federation Gender Working Group's research into practical methods of resisting sexual harassment in the workplace. We found some really interesting pieces of scholarship on the topic at the Feminist Library, as well as a fascinating variety of pamphlets in the library's pamphlet collection at the Bishopsgate Institute (including the Equal Opportunity Commission's catchily titled *'What Would You Do if Your Boss Asked For a Blowjob,'* 2001).

Sexual Harassment of Working Women by Catherine MacKinnon (1979) evidences a huge amount of research - statistics, case studies and legal contextualization - while *Sexual Harassment at Work: Is it just 'fun and games'?* by Sue Read (1982) offers a chapter of 'Practical Solutions', such as keeping a diary of incidents and tips for confronting your harasser. All of the material we found had its drawbacks - Read's 'Practical Solutions' include advice against behaving and dressing 'provocatively' at work - implying victims' complicity in their harassment. We also felt most texts focus disproportionately on official complaints procedures, trade unions and legal action at the expense of individual and collective empowerment. Much of the material we found dated from the 1980s or before - has sexual harassment ceased to be a problem, or have we just become better at ignoring it? Rising

unemployment, an ever increasing proportion of the work force - especially women - in precarious work with fewer rights and less confidence in their job security, and the threat of being penalised, ostracised or forced out for making a fuss about 'harmless banter' can make it difficult to deal with. When unions and complaints procedures are not always there to give the right support, we need to create our own structures for eliminating ingrained sexism and domineering attitudes in our workplaces.

The most compelling material, which all texts shared, were individual case studies and testimonials. In our own discussion we realised that we all had anecdotal accounts of harassment we had experienced or witnessed. To build on this shared experience, SolFed arranged a workshop session to help with producing 'Stuff Your Sexist Boss' - a pamphlet giving practical advice for collective solutions to harassment.

All this reminds me of an Angela Martin cartoon I look at every time I come into the library: a crowd of different women all say to themselves "sexual harassment - I can cope with it." In the last frame they all shout together "But why the hell should we?"

Find out more on SolFed.org.

Anna, volunteer at the Feminist Library

The Feminist Library Ephemera Collection.

The Bishopsgate Institute now houses the Feminist Library Ephemera Collection, containing over 5,000 posters, handbills and leaflets, detailing the activities of the women's movement from the 1970s onwards. The ephemera are wide ranging and eclectic, including political activism, theatre, social gatherings, gay issues and sporting events. All the items from the ephemera collection will be scanned and made available on-line shortly.

An introduction to the Feminist Library Pamphlet Collection

A Study Day on Saturday 26th May 2012 from 11am - 4pm. at Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2M 4QH.

Whether you are researcher, a campaigner or generally interested in feminist publications, come and spend a hands-on day exploring the wonderful variety of pamphlets in our collection, and see how lovingly they are being cared for at the Bishopsgate Institute.

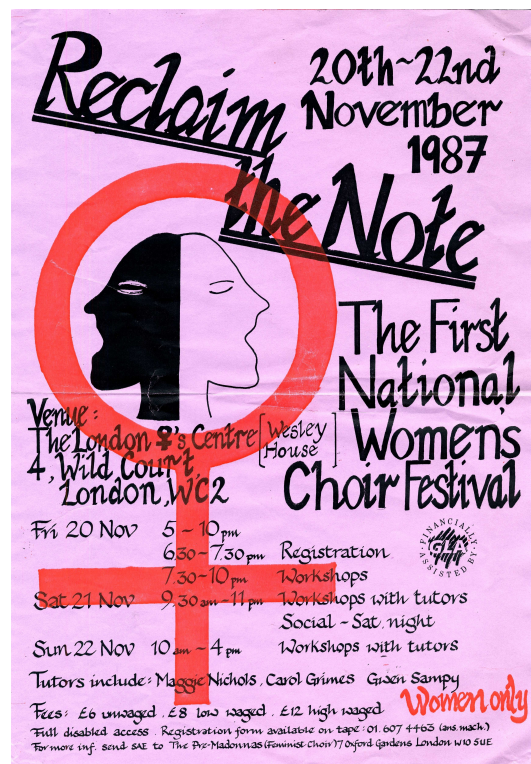
Sliding scale £2-£10. Bookings: library@bishopsgate.org.uk

For more information on the Feminist Library Pamphlet Collection at the Bishopsgate Institute, which is already fully catalogued, visit www.bishopsgate.org.uk/content/1474/Feminist-Library-Pamphlet-Collection

Text Giving

You can now donate to the Feminist Library with your mobile phone by sending a text to 70070, quoting the code "FLIB35" and the amount you wish to donate. Your text is free and there will be no charge to the library, so it is a very easy and cost-effective way to donate. Donations are capped at £10. So, for example, you can simply text "FLIB35 £10" to 70070 and the library gets £10 - yes, it is that easy! You will have to make sure that you have this credit on your phone if you are on a 'pay as you go' scheme. You will receive a text confirmation, with a link to a Gift Aid form.

For more information about donating to the Feminist Library please visit www.feministlibrary.co.uk/support/donate.



"Reclaim the Note" handbill from the ephemera collection

Listings

March is Women's History Month.

Visit womenshistorymonth.wordpress.com for lots of information, resources and details of events across London and the UK.

Wednesday March 7th, 18.30

Quaker Meeting House, 188 Woodhouse Lane, Leeds.

'Meeting the challenges of gender equality in a world of crisis' March 8th is celebrated as IWD throughout the world, but given the multiple crises in both the Global South and North, how optimistic can we be about the prospects for gender equality? Panel discussion with Professor Ruth Pearson, Jane Tate, Dr Jieyu Liu, Dr Emma Tomalin and Salma Amir. www.oxfamleeds.org.uk

7 - 11th March

Southbank Centre, London SE1 8XX.

Women of the World (WOW) Festival

Festival to promote, recognise and celebrate women. Performances, films, comedy, classical music, theatre, poetry and readings, debates, talks, networking, and workshops. www.ticketing.southbankcentre.co.uk/wow

17th March 7pm "SONGS OF FREEDOM"

Hornbeam Centre, 458 Hoe St E17 9AH

An evening of poetic and political song. Fundraiser event for Iraqi LGBT www.iraqilgbt.org.uk for more information visit www.hornbeam.org.uk.

Come and join The Feminist Book Group

3rd Tuesday of each month at The Feminist Library, 7pm-9pm. londonfeministnetwork.org.uk/groups/feminist-book-group for more info

March 9th 9.30am till late.

Longford Park Stadium, Stretford, Manchester.

Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory

Convention organised by Trafford Rape Crisis to launch their Black and Minority Ethnic Women's Service. Speakers: Sara Ahmed, Gargi Bhattacharyya, Kum Kum Bhavnani, Kimberle Crenshaw, Carole Boyce Davies, FORWARD, Southall Black Sisters, Ann Phoenix, Sunera

Thobani. For more details or to book a place: email: bme.services@traffordrapecrisis.com, phone: 0161-968-2820 or visit www.traffordrapecrisis.com

Saturday 10 March 2012, 10am – 5pm

International Women's Fair

Spitalfields Traders Market hosts many wonderful creative women, exhibiting paintings and photography, handmade crafts, books, fashion designers, music, poetry, workshops, food, women's groups and organisations (including the Feminist Library) and great entertainment. Admission Free. For more information visit www.alternativearts.co.uk.

Friday 23rd March 9am-7.30pm.

Birkbeck College, 30 Russell Sq, Room 101.

Thinking Through Time and History in Feminism.

Colloquium organised by the Birkbeck Institute for Social Research. Keynote Speakers: Rebecca Coleman and Lynne Segal. £20 /£15 (cons). www.bbk.ac.uk/bisr/events/feminism

March 29th - 31st 2012

Old Refectory, UCL, London WC1E 6BT.

Conference: Emancipation, Slave Ownership and the Remaking of the British Imperial World.

Many interesting speakers, including Catherine Hall, Zoe Laidlaw, Richard Huzzey, Miles Taylor, Heather Cateau, Anita Rupprecht, Clare Anderson, Alison Light, Andrea Stuart, Cora Kaplan, Hilary Beckles, Vijaya Teelock, Françoise Vergès and Andrea Levy. For more information visit www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/nealeconference.

Saturday 19th May 2012

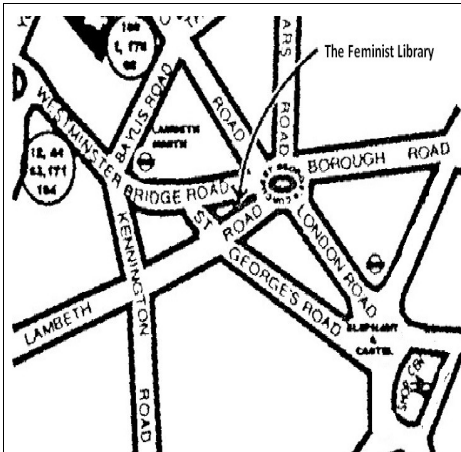
Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2M 4QH
Unofficial Histories

A free public conference to discuss how society produces, presents, and consumes history beyond official and elite versions of the past. For more information visit unofficialhistories.wordpress.com.

Friday 25 May and Saturday 26 May 2012

Queen Mary University, Mile End Road, E1 4NS.

FLOSSIE 2012. A free, two-day event for women who work with or are otherwise interested in Free and Open Source Software, Open Data, Knowledge and Education. All women welcome. www.flossie.org



The Feminist Library, 5a Westminster Bridge Rd, London SE1 7XW.

Phone 020 7261 0879

Email admin@feministlibrary.co.uk

Visit www.feministlibrary.co.uk.

Follow us on twitter @feministlibrary

Opening hours: The Feminist Library is open every Monday and Tuesday 2-6pm, Thursdays 6.30-9pm and the 1st Saturday of the month 1.30-5.30pm. Please check www.feministlibrary.co.uk/hours for the most up-to-date information, including changes to opening hours.

The Feminist Library Newsletter, March 2012 - ISSN 0951-2837. Contributors: Una Byrne, Ruby Kearney, Yula Burin, Gail Chester, Serena Sardi, Anna Pigott, Sarah O'Mahoney, Linda Shockey. Special thanks to Ruth Murphy.