

WOMEN AGAINST NATO

5-minute presentation by Cynthia Cockburn on behalf of women's networks, to the Saturday afternoon plenary at the No-to-NATO activists' conference in Berlin, 16-18 October 2009.

Hello, it's nice to be here with you all again. I'm going to speak about, and for, a group of about forty women who came to the No-to-NATO events in Strasbourg in April. They came in answer to a call put out by a working group from three women's networks: the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Women and Life on Earth, and Women in Black against War.

In Strasbourg we held a women's vigil at the rally, and a workshop at the conference, in which we exchanged information about the actions we had been taking in our local groups in Spain, Italy, Britain and other countries, against military bases, nuclear weapons and the war in Afghanistan.

Since Strasbourg we have set up an e-mail list 'women-against-nato', for those women in our networks who want to co-ordinate actions in future specifically against NATO and European Union militarization.

Some of you may wonder why women want to organize *as women*. Why women's actions and women's workshops? Isn't this being negative and divisive? Absolutely it is not! We aren't taking away from the movement, we are adding something that needs to be added.

Feminists share other groups' critique of NATO: it is a war-making machinery, it should have been disbanded long ago. NATO's enlargement and the war in Afghanistan are completely wrong and must end. We also share the mainstream peace movement's analysis of war. Yes, neoliberal global capitalism is a cause of war. Yes, racist nationalism is a cause of war.

But – we add a dimension to this analysis. Totally intertwined with the power structures of capitalism and nationalism is a third controlling structure – entrenched, pervasive and international. It is patriarchy, the dominance of masculine values in society. It encourages hierarchy and combativeness. It despises care and conciliation. And in popular cultures it encourages violence in boys and men. To end militarism we have to address the violence of capitalism, of nationalism, *and of* patriarchy. It doesn't make sense to separate them.

Women cannot avoid seeing violence as a continuum. At one end is the massive violence of war. At the other end is everyday sexual violence in the home and on the street. Our struggle has to be against the whole spectrum. And somewhere in that spectrum is the violence we witnessed in Strasbourg, not just from the police, but from some demonstrators. The evaluations women wrote on our website after Strasbourg show that a lot of them felt that that demonstration did more harm than good. The media and the public saw nothing of our peace movement except smoke and flames.

Tomorrow morning we hope to have a working group here in which we can share ideas about how to develop our feminist case against NATO, and how to draw more and more European women into active opposition to European militarization. We hope to plan co-ordinated women's actions locally and internationally that will have in mind: the structural violence of militarism, everyday violence against women, *and* violence in our own movements of political protest.

We hope our autonomous women's actions will contribute to the calendar of anti-NATO protest and civil disobedience in the coming year. If you are interested, please come along tomorrow – and join our e-mail list. Thank you.