

Socialist Woman

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INSIDE: WOMEN & FASCISM

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EDITORIAL

In their manifesto for the recent General Election, Labour's offerings included a 'Charter for Women' and their proposed Sex Discrimination Bill. Together these were characterised as providing 'real opportunities for women, rather than making polite noises about equality'.

Such proposals, if implemented, *would* be a step forward. Even their presentation—taking up as they do just about every relevant issue except abortion—represents an acceptance by Labour of the need for state responsibility for an intervention in domestic problems.

But these proposals have to be seen against a certain background. Apart from the Sex Discrimination Bill, they are vague and woolly promises at best—tied to no time scale, financial commitment, etc. Also, the proposals do not represent any cleavage within the party on the question of policy. They were rather, a timely vote catcher tuned to the aspirations of wide layers of women.

The proposals involve both a massive increase in social expenditure and a massive increase in the wage bill—increases which would meet with great resistance from employers and Parliament alike if implemented.

An important consideration about these proposals is that the Sex Discrimination Bill—the only one Labour is likely to push forward under its own steam—cannot effect any real changes by itself. It merely gives women a series of formal rights which many will have neither the money nor the freedom from family ties to exercise. It will provide a Sex Discrimination Board which will be no more useful or effective in challenging oppression and discrimination than the Race Relations Board has been.

Finally, in the preamble to the Manifesto as a whole, Labour makes it quite clear that it considers adherence to the social contract to be a pre-condition for delivering any goodies—including 'concessions' to women.

'These proposals take money, and we believe, and we think you will agree with us—that the timing of them depends on how quickly we can get on top of the economy'. This last point has two important aspects to it, which lends a sinister note to the proposals as a whole. On the one hand it attempts to ward off the militant response of women to inflation—which is becoming an important feature of the economic crisis—by promising them the full implementation of the Equal Pay Act by the end of 1975, increased family allowances, more nurseries, and so on.

SOCIAL CONTRACT

On the other hand it attempts to appeal to women who are not in the workforce—and therefore are unorganised for the most part—with the argument that their interests lie in the maintenance of the social contract. *Since these women cannot fight directly for their rights, they are forced to look seriously at such promises and to see the social contract as the way forward for them. Their interests are thus counterposed to the interests of those militants who break the social contract in an attempt to push up their own wages and conditions.*

However, in the background of the elections—making a mockery of such promises—women took strike actions

in three separate towns: Manchester, Luton, and Liverpool. At the Salford Electrical Instruments firm in Manchester women struck and occupied the factory in an attempt to end a 12 month struggle over equal pay. The GEC management of the factory had dodged the Equal Pay Act by paying women on a different basis from the men.

Despite their rhetoric in the election manifesto Labour had nothing to say about how they propose—even in the context of their own promises—to deal with firms like GEC, who have announced they have no intention of complying with the Act. In fact, Labour had nothing to say about many aspects of the SEI struggle: they failed to mention the loopholes in the Act enabling firms like SEI to wriggle out of a commitment to pay, the situation of two-thirds of the female workforce not covered by the Act, or how their Sex Discrimination Act will prevent male workers scabbing on women strikers.

STRUGGLES

So, by isolating their promises from the actual struggles of women against discrimination—and in counterposing their proposals to such struggles by tying them to the social contract—Labour seeks to isolate women workers who are prepared to struggle. The full support of such actions coupled with an understanding that we must rely on our own struggles must be the order of the day.

Labour's promises were vote-catchers and little more. But we should turn them to our advantage. The fight we have begun through the Working Women's Charter Campaign has now been taken up—in the form of legislation—through Labour's proposals. This has opened up the possibility for us as socialists to take the debate about women's oppression—and the struggles launched by women—into wider layers of society.

But we must situate our demands and perspectives concerning women in the context of an alternative socialist programme for the entire working class—including such questions as the sliding scale of wages, the nationalisation of firms without compensation and under workers' control (keying into firms declaring massive redundancies with women on their list as the 'first to go'), a minimum wage of £40 for a 35-hour week, etc.

We should use this opportunity of a broader audience by attending the Labour Party Conference—scheduled for the near future, by planning for a demonstration at the House of Commons, and by raising at every possible situation our proposals with respect to Anti-Discrimination and Equal Pay. Our demands must be directly linked to the struggles women are engaged in around these questions.

* For the Labour Government to impose equal pay NOW on any firms where women are engaged in struggle!

* For a workers' enquiry into firms that have re-graded women out of the terms of reference of the Equal Pay Act in the last 4 years!

* For trade union control—subject to veto by a mass meeting of women in the workplace—over regrading schemes!

* For workers' control over job and training applicants to end discrimination against women!

WOMEN AND

On the weekend of 22/23 September, 500 women met in Birmingham for the 3rd Conference of the "Women and Socialism" grouping in the women's liberation movement. Here, the women grappled with an assessment of the past practice of the women's movement and our future strategy.

The starting point of the discussion was a theoretical debate on the nature of domestic labour. It was clear that many women groups have been involved in intensive study groups since the last conference and have explored thoroughly Marx's economics and how this relates to women in the family.

This debate will be opened up fully in the next issue of *Socialist Woman*. However, we must recognise that the starting point for any strategy must be to analyse very precisely the relationship between women's role in the family and her relationship to the means of production.

The remainder of the conference was devoted to a discussion of the radicalisation of women over the past few years and whether the practices and organisation of the women's liberation movement enable it to draw in women fighting against their oppression—be it as housewives, students, teachers, or trade union militants.

MASS MOVEMENT

Many of the papers at the conference argued that the women's liberation movement should become *the* organisational focus for all women fighting their oppression. For them, the women's liberation movement should become a mass movement with a working class base, which coordinates and centralises all the campaigns and struggles around women's oppression. Such a broad based mass movement should have a basic programme around which working class and other women could unite in struggle.

A paper produced for the conference by the IMG accepted that these proposals were a positive realisation of the need to unite with the increasing numbers of working class women taking to the streets

for equal pay, better working conditions, nurseries, increased housing, etc. However, it was argued that the exact forms proposed were unrealistic and impossible.

WIDE SPECTRUM

Firstly, it has been noted many times that the WLM represents a wide spectrum of political perspectives and strategies. The socialist current itself echoes these differences. Any attempt to thrust an organisational form on the WLM based on a common programmatic agreement could produce one of two dangerous results. Either we accept unity at any cost, under some umbrella term of 'sisterhood' and in so doing completely stunt the process of political debate and clarification which at the moment plays such an important role in the development of the movement.

Or, by getting tangled up in a continual debate about what is acceptable as a minimum basis for the movement, we will exclude forces at present involved in the broader movement and place a barrier against its growth and influence.

WORKING CLASS

More fundamentally, the concept of the WLM becoming a working class based organisation must be seriously assessed. For this we must analyse the radicalisation of women in the women's liberation movement and of working class women radicalised outside of the WLM.

The WLM developed primarily from the contradictions within the material and ideological basis of the traditional female identity. These had produced strains at a number of different levels. On the one hand due to the expansion of higher education, women received higher education on a mass scale compared with a favoured few in the pre-war years. This latter group of women could usually find some privileged niche in the educational and welfare hierarchy of British capitalism.



SOCIALISM

The women educated in the 60s, on the other hand, were faced with the contradictions of a job market totally inconsistent with the high expectations engendered by their experiences of higher education and occupations in which sexism was rampant. This combined with a situation in personal relationships where the potentialities for economic independence were completely out of line with the culture of dependence which structured their emotions and feelings.

LEFT ORGANISATIONS

The precise form in which these women organised around these contradictions, i.e. in the WLM, resulted from the lack of perspective offered by the traditional left organisations—the Labour Party, and the Communist Party which accepted the bourgeois family. (In fact, in recent CP publications, the family is characterised as a pillar for future socialist society.)



The WLM, however, did not offer an organisational framework for working class women taking action around their own oppression. For the class position of women inter-

acts with their sexual oppression, in such a way as to mold their specific experience of that oppression.

Such an experience leads to different organisational channels for overcoming these problems. Thus for the educated women, the gap between what was in theory possible (a career, economic independence, etc.) came slap up against traditional barriers—dependence on and commitment to the family.

In a period of general political and social upheaval—VSC, Red Universities, etc.—a rejection of traditional authoritarian relations (including the family) resulted. The organised expression of this was the WLM.

LINKS

For working class women the process was very different. NJACCWER, the Ford women's strike, although adding impetus to the growing WLM had no direct organisational links. Links were made in only very specific instances—cases like the Night Cleaners, and Pat Sturdy where WL groups were prepared to fill in the gaps left by the inactivity of the trade union movement. Such contact did not extend as far as an identification with the framework of the WLM—i.e. a rejection of the norms of the monogamous nuclear family.

In fact, for many of these working class militants, their acceptance of the family role provided a break on militancy—of necessity broken in their period of struggle but very easily reverted to once the struggle was over.

SEPARATE FORMS

An understanding of that radicalisation process of women—the WLM and of working class women

has taken separate forms—provides the basis for any discussion of the organisation of our campaigns.

Although for the reasons outlined above many women from white collar unions are members of women's liberation groups and are developing work in their trade unions, most working class militants do not turn to the WLM to centralise and coordinate their struggles.

STRUGGLES

A mechanical call—to working class militants—to join the WL groups in order to overcome their problems will be culturally and politically alienating except for a few individual working class militants.

Instead we should involve ourselves in existing struggles of working class women, through support committees, Charter campaign groups, trade union women's caucuses, etc. and attempt to develop these struggles in ways that raise the more fundamental questions of women's sexual and economic oppression.

ALLIANCE

What emerges therefore is an alliance between women's groups and organisations of the working class. The two organisational expressions of women's radicalisation remain separate but will often fuse together—sometimes in totally new organisational forms outside both the WLM and the trade union movement. Such fusions will allow important possibilities for the women's movement, the consciousness of women's oppression within the working class. This is the way the socialist current should be moving.

Celia Pugh, Ann Foreman, Dodie Wepler.

SEXISM IN SCHOOLS

At its annual conference last summer, the National Union of School Students (NUSS) carried a resolution that women's groups should be set up at a regional level throughout the union, which has a membership of 12,000. The initiative came from women members in London, who themselves set up such a group last spring. SUSAN ROSTON is a member of this group.

The article that follows is written by a member of this group, and raises some of the general questions associated with women's oppression in schools and the preparations made by the education system for women's role in capitalist society.

Much theoretical work has yet to be done on these questions, not least by school students and teachers, and the women activists in NUSS have not yet determined how they will practically take up the issues which concern them. The article is therefore an initial contribution to the debates which are now necessary.

The leaflet which has been circulated to all branches of NUSS states: 'Few active members of NUSS would deny the oppression of women in our society. Most active members we feel are aware that women need to organise themselves and make themselves aware of their oppression so as to fight against it...'

Women's position in society is reflected in the division of the sexes in schools and in the home. At nursery school age most children are already influenced by their home environment and this continues when they go to nursery or primary school. Here the division is widened due to the different types of attitudes towards girls and boys. Girls are given dolls to play with, and they act out the role of nurse and mother. Boys are immediately taught they are much stronger than girls, play with cars and guns, or act out the role of the father.

TOMBOY

At this age, I can't remember any boys wanting to be girls, whereas many girls did want to be boys—hence the tomboy image. Boys are taught that they have to make the decisions. Attitudes towards aggressiveness in girls and boys are completely different at school. If a boy is aggressive it is considered quite normal while an aggressive girl is told this behavior is wrong and in future she must behave far more passively.

Throughout their school career, most boys are encouraged to study at home (to be equipped to fulfill the role of their father), while girls are generally influenced to fulfill the role of their mother: they

learn housework and how to bring up a family.

All this becomes entangled with your school career, when girls are taught cooking and needlework, and boys are taught metal work and technical drawing.

In addition to this there is a distinct division between the type of sports that boys and girls learn. Boys tend to receive far more training in building up their muscles with such activities as cross country running and weight lifting.

As a result of this extra training men are considered by society to be naturally physically stronger than women, as well as being considered to possess a larger mental and academic capacity, which results from these different attitudes to girls and boys in education.

This distinction between girls and boys is enhanced in single-sex schools. These schools directly teach girls and boys that they are totally different to each other. (like splitting black races from white races). More money is usually given to boys schools for science laboratories and mathematics departments. Whereas girls schools tend to concentrate far more of their money on typing and art subjects, as well of course, as on subjects such as cookery and needlework.

Sex education which in most schools is taught far too late to teach the students anything they haven't already learnt from other (not necessarily so accurate) sources, only aids this system of discrimination between the sexes. Girls and boys are usually split up into different classes. They are given the impression that they need to know different things about sex and the sexual organs of the body than the opposite sex. This results in a tremendous amount of confusion between the sexes.

Also the boy is taught that it is up to him to start off any form of sexual relationship, and this can lead to a very embarrassing situation between girls and boys. If each sex understood what was wrong with his or her sexual partner at certain times there would probably be far less conflict within many relationships.

S.P.U.C.

At my school we had a speaker from the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child to talk to us about abortion and contraception. We were shown horrific films about foetuses designed to put girls off from having an abortion. False and deliberately misleading information

was handed out to the students, and many girls walked out after the lesson saying they would never have an abortion.

No one spoke in favour of abortion, and everyone ignored the oppression that results from women having children they don't want.

A month later, a speaker from the Responsible Society told us of the necessity of getting married, and not having sex outside of marriage. She wasn't married, but she was hoping to be. She handed out a booklet which romantised marriage, and the questions at the back included: 'How would you feel if you were a bastard?'

CAREERS

For most girls it is assumed that their job is not as important as the boys' jobs, as it is very likely that the majority of girls will soon or ultimately get married. This will probably happen but mainly because there is very little else available for women to do. When women get married it is assumed that quite naturally they will divert attention to looking after their family, and a job outside all the work they do in the home is not so important.

Therefore careers talks are mainly aimed at boys, and especially those who are to fulfill the leading jobs in society. These boys are usually the middle class boys who have been taught throughout their school careers by school and society that they are to run society.

Finally, the fact that the two sexes are so often split up just generates the idea that men and women are completely different to each other, and should fulfill totally different roles in our society.





Picket of women students to protest a rugby stag party. Other campus struggles initiated by women students include the nursery struggle at Brunel University and the support action group for Birmingham women caterers.

NUS WOMEN'S CAMPAIGN

January's NUS Conference in Birmingham appeared to mark a turning point in the women's campaign. The high attendance and militant mood of the women attending showed that many women had been drawn both into the recent struggles around grants and into the women's movement which is increasingly responding to the deepening social crisis.

For example, during the NUS Week of Action on grants, the major campaign at Brunel was the joint activity of the women's group and the Students' Union to secure nursery provision. Its success illustrates the potential strength of the NUS women's campaign.

The resolutions passed at Birmingham showed that militants want to use this strength to turn the women's campaign into a political focus within NUS, through a well-defined *action* campaign. The Action Committee was elected to centralise and co-ordinate such activity. But the leadership of NUS see the campaign as simply dispensing information which will raise the consciousness of the NUS membership. Presumably then the membership will take action on the issues facing women students.

The dominant ideas and attitudes of society—male chauvinism and sexism included—permeate the student movement itself. Student unions frequently fail to take up the ideas and campaigns of women's liberation. This means women do not play an active role in the NUS. And a campaign based on propaganda only isn't going to challenge this!

In addition, because most union constitutions state that all unions societies must be open to all members (i.e. cannot exclude men), reactionary student unions have been known to withdraw funds from women's groups.

Thus we must prioritise a number of issues on which women can take action now to challenge sexism in practice in the colleges. We must also ensure all existing impediments to women organising within the NUS are removed. In failing to recognise the importance of both these points the Broad Left leadership of the NUS has ignored two things. First, the principled question of the right of women to organise autonomously. Secondly, the fact is that college groups are essential if women students are to push forward their interests in the NUS. (Indeed, a generalised debate on the question of autonomous organisations can only aid the political development of the NUS itself).

The NUS leadership has a complete blind spot on the key role of women's groups in initiating and directing the campaign. In introducing the false debate that the campaign should include students outside the women's movement they miss the role that the college women's groups *can* play. Of course, the campaign must extend beyond the women's groups—the question is how this can be achieved, given the problems outlined above. It is utopian to believe that most student unions will take up the issues facing women students without prompting. The activity of a women's group within the union is going to be far more effective than a directive through the NUS central mailing!

by Yvonne Taylor

Health workers on

Photo: Chris Davies (Report)



The experience of many workers drawn into a mass struggle against the erosion of their standard of living by the capitalist system is that the needs of the struggle throw into sharp relief the features of their lives which restrict their ability to organise the fight. This is certainly true of health workers, particularly women, battling against the social contract and the crisis in the National Health Service.

It is no surprise that many nursing militants faced with a relative downturn in the struggle at this time and mounting harassment from nursing management, are leaving the NHS. After a Summer of hectic meetings, pickets, political discussion, confrontations with management, new-found friends outside the 'marriage market' of medical students and doctors, life in a nurses' home now seems totally oppressive.

The experience of the struggle has changed years of conditioning into passivity towards authority, subservience towards doctors and scorn for ancillary workers. At the Bolingbroke Hospital, in South London, for example, nurses inspired by their newly-won collective strength, organised a campaign of non-cooperation with particular doctors well known for their bullying and chauvinistic attitudes towards nurses. But such actions have been the exception.

HEALTH ON A SHOE STRING



The struggle of the health workers is a new phenomenon in the present crisis of British capitalism, and in order to understand

its significance it is necessary to examine the NHS and its relationship to capitalist society.

With the end of the Second World War and the subsequent expansion of capitalism, the needs of the ruling class for a large, healthy work-force coincided with an increasing pressure from the working class for reform, in particular pressure for the introduction of a Welfare State. For the working class the inadequate, unequal, often degrading treatment meted out to the sick was no longer acceptable. For the ruling class, the pre-war system with its separate and bankrupt voluntary and municipal hospitals and gross mal-distribution of doctors was too inefficient to maintain at low cost a healthy labour force.

The NHS was set up in 1949 by Aneurin Bevan, and it has been able to provide a tolerably good health service at very low cost - chiefly by paying health workers abysmally low wages. Britain in fact spends a lower percentage of its gross national product on health than any European country.

Wages have remained poor for four main reasons. Firstly, most hospital workers other than doctors are women, and women have traditionally been forced to work for lower wages than men in all sectors. Secondly the proportion of unionised health workers is very low and thus they have never been organised to collectively push for higher wages. Then there is the nature of the negotiating structure, the Whitley system which precludes all direct pay

the march



negotiations with management, both at national and at local level, and serves to keep hospital workers divided sectorally into different councils. Lastly, in common with many other public sector workers, hospital workers have no real bargaining power. There is no direct economic result of a withdrawal of labour, however inconvenient it may be, and the genuine concern of health workers for the patients they are treating, makes them unwilling even to exploit the emotional appeal that they have. These factors make their situation quite unlike that of industrial workers.

CRUMBLING WARDS - MOUNTING MILITANCY

The present economic situation has led to a major crisis in the health service. Not only are health workers experiencing a direct cutback in their standard of living, but also they are faced with a situation of a collapsing health service, made worse by the rising rate of inflation on top of the Tories' £111 million cutback in NHS expenditure. Old buildings are not being replaced; increasing staff shortages mean harder work and intolerably long hours. It is factors such as these which have led to a new level of political consciousness among health workers.

In the last few months there has been a rising tide of militancy on a scale unprecedented in the NHS. In the face of this, the traditional lack of unionisation has had contradictory effects. On the one hand hospital workers often fail to appreciate the need for the backing of a powerful organisation to spread the struggle, which only the unions are in a position to provide, coupled with the naive belief that the strike weapon is all-powerful... a belief which can lead to a sharp disillusionment when it is shown to be false.

On the other hand, their lack of familiarity with traditional forms of trade union organisation has allowed many health workers to go beyond the forms of struggle posed by the trade union leaderships and to use forms of organisation which are far more advanced.

In 1970, the average earnings in the public sector were £36 for men and £21.78 for women. Since 80 per cent of the one million health workers are women, their low pay affords great savings on the wages bill and this continues to be so despite the fact that all sections of the NHS apart from ancillary workers have equal pay. This is because the traditionally more militant

men are bought off by promotion to the higher paid jobs in the career structure. In any case, many jobs are regarded as 'womens' work', such as domestic and ward orderlies, and are therefore set on a low pay scale.

The low pay of women workers in the NHS makes it particularly difficult for women to survive without getting married or, especially among nurses, striving for promotion, which inevitably brings them into the management hierarchy. Nursing agencies exploit this situation by offering a considerably higher weekly wage - on average £12 over the basic NHS pay for staff nurses of £23 and more flexible hours, but without the benefits of sick pay, holiday pay, and security of tenure. They mainly recruit married women, especially black women who, because of the high unemployment among black males, are often the sole wage earners in their family.

These factors result in a number of serious consequences. Firstly family commitments make it extremely difficult for even the most militant women to attend union meetings outside work-time and to take on any organisational responsibilities. Secondly especially in London, the presence of large numbers of relatively higher paid, inorganised, predominately black agency nurses in hospitals allows management to play on the racist tendencies of many white nurses.

There can be no effective fight for a decent standard of living for health workers and against the cutbacks in the NHS without taking up the problems facing immigrant and women workers. This means a clear fight for the sorts of demands raised in the Working Womens' Charter - for free abortion and contraceptive facilities, paid maternity leave, creche facilities and equal pay - as well as for the repeal of all immigration laws and for the abolition of the requirements for work permits that restrict the rights of immigrant workers to be active in trade unions.

APPROACHES TO THE STRUGGLE

The Trade Unions. Initially the recruitment rivalry between NUPE and COHSE led them to outbid each other in calls for militant action which led to an escalation of the struggle. The same is also true to some extent of the other union which has been mostly involved, ASTMS. At the beginning of the actions of the radiographers this union found its own proposals for action to be identical with those of the Society of Radiographers. This forced ASTMS to step up its programme of action in order to differentiate itself from the society.

However the union leaderships have refused to take any action which would begin to bring together even their own members within one particular union - let alone attempt to unite all sections of health workers. They have also fostered the illusion that a high level of militancy by itself can win pay demands.

Action independent of the TU bureaucracy. This has largely consisted of action committees set up at the beginning of the nurses' struggle to debate the tactics of the struggle, and to plan initiatives. In many cases these committees have included workers not initially in any union. The experience of the struggle has shown many nurses the necessity of trade union organisation



Hospital technicians, nurses and ancillary workers unite on the picket of St. Bar's Hospital.

- Health workers on the march contd.



Hospital staff, hard pressed.



resulting in a great increase in union membership in recent months.

The action committees ensured that decisions about action were made by the workers who were involved, not by some distant bureaucracy. In addition to the question of wages, action committees have begun to organise around other issues, such as the Working Womens' Charter which has been taken up, for example, at the High Croft Hospital in Birmingham.

Department of Health and Social Security. Management's response to the crisis in the NHS has been to foster divisions wherever they existed, and to create divisions where they did not. Into the latter category come bonus and regrading schemes which offer some extra payment for greatly increased workloads; reductions in staff, and racism. This category also includes governmental enquiries which allows time for management to prepare to meet demands with the former tactic, that of fostering divisions.

The classic way this technique is used is to buy off the most powerful and militant sections. In the case of physiological measurement and medical physics technicians, the most senior - the supervisory grades - received increases of up to 45 per cent while others of these technicians were to receive only 18 per cent.

HOW WE SEE THE WAY FORWARD



The different sectors of hospital workers have many different needs, but one thing they all share is the experience of receiving low pay in a crumbling health service. The current economic situation, the crisis of British capitalism, dictates that the Government cannot afford to put any more money into the Health service - given its present system of priorities.

If need be, any Labour or Tory government is prepared to sit back and watch patients die, and the mass media will not hesitate to put forward their view of where the blame lies. The only way we can win is by forcing the Government to change its economic priorities. And that will never be achieved with piecemeal action such as we have at present.

The first priority is to unite all health workers in their struggles for better pay by adopting one demand which can be taken up by all sections, and can be fought around; a de-

mand which cannot be used to split one section off from another. Such a demand would be a claim for £15 across the board for all health workers, with a minimum wage of £3 £35 (including for all students). This must be coupled with a demand for a sliding scale of wages, so that every percentage increase in the cost of living index would be met with a 60p rise.

On the basis of such a claim, all hospital workers could fight together to defend their standard of living, and all health-workers should fight in their union branches for the adoption of such a claim.

However, as we have already pointed out, militancy in the health section is not enough. In order to win the claim, we must demand the reassessment of government priorities. And we must draw in other, stronger sections to fight alongside the hospital workers on the basis of defending their own national health service.

In view of the current crisis in the NHS, the first priority must be a fight for an immediate massive injection of money into the health service. However, no amount of money will alter the hierarchical and undemocratic nature of the NHS, or convert it into a fully comprehensive service.

Despite the much-claimed egalitarian nature of the NHS, the working class still suffer significantly more ill health than the top social classes, and have a much lower life expectancy. Working class women showed a drop of 23 per cent in perinatal mortality rates during 1956-64, but the corresponding fall for upper and middle class women was 43 per cent. Availability of abortion and child care facilities is almost directly related to social class. The expansion of capitalism has also initiated the growth of diseases such as lung cancer, road accidents, and occupational diseases.

All of these aspects of life should be included in the NHS, but this requires a fundamental overhaul of the service and a thorough-going workers' enquiry into the way the NHS operates. The call for such an enquiry was overwhelmingly supported by a conference on the crisis in the NHS organised by the central London branch of ASTMS in July. Such an enquiry would be the first step towards a fight for a really comprehensive health service, and would draw in all sections of the working class.

Carol Ackroyd
Patrick Byrne

For more information on the crisis and the NHS and the means of taking up the struggle read:

NHS: a suitable case for socialist treatment, 10p.

Crisis in the NHS: Action Programme.

Available from: Red Books, 97 Caledonian Road, London, N.1

'The oppression of lesbians is not separable from the oppression of women'

By MARGARET COULSON

This is a shorter version of a contribution to the discussion on lesbians and the women's movement which was a central theme for the discussion at the national women's liberation conference in Edinburgh, last June.

A psychiatrist writing to the *Sunday Observer* in November 1973 asserted that women's liberation was only a 'lot of loud-mouthed latent lesbians'. Midge Decter in her book *The New Chastity and Other Arguments Against Women's Liberation* takes a similar line.

This style of attack is neither new nor particularly unusual. It works from the idea that women who challenge their position in society (whether the society be feudal or capitalist) must be less than women, must be 'unnatural' women; and that once the lesbian label has been attached, then our ideas can be dismissed.

In the early stages of the women's movement both in this country and elsewhere the attitude to lesbians was not qualitatively different from that in society in general.

In Britain lesbians first appeared as an identified group within women's liberation at the national conference in Skegness in 1971. There the vicious attacks launched by the women and men of the Union for Women's Liberation produced an immediate, if muddled expression of support for lesbians from the vast majority of women at the conference. Since then lesbianism has not appeared as a national issue in Britain. It has often been seen either as the exclusive concern of gay women themselves or as the 'solution' for heterosexual women.

EDINBURGH

Workshops at Edinburgh allowed us to begin to work through some of these confusions, and the conference unanimously adopted a new demand for the movement: an end to all discrimination against lesbians and for the right of each woman to determine her own sexuality.

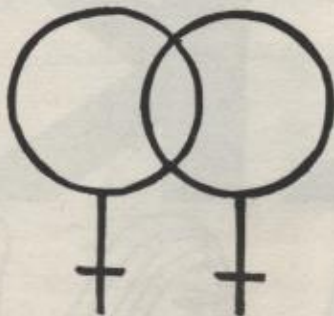
To be a lesbian is to be a woman who has the capacity to love and make love with another woman. To have such an identity within capitalist society is in itself subversive. It

implies a rejection a sexuality committed to reproduction, and the sexual division of labour structured through the family cannot operate 'properly' on homosexual women and men.

Thus homosexuality is often explicitly seen as a threat to family life and the well being of the state. Such a view was expressed during the divorce referendum in Italy. Fanfani, one of the leaders of the right-wing campaign against divorce, argued that the availability of divorce would drive masses of women to lesbianism.

OPPRESSION

Within this society the oppression of gay people has been expressed mainly in religious, medical and—for men—legal terms: gay people are evil, unnatural, less than human; gay people are sick, and immature. They are at best suitable cases for treatment, at worst pathetic ob-



jects of pity. Until the 1967 Act gay men were criminals and they still do not have parity with heterosexual men.

Yet gay men have the advantage of knowing that at least they are men (and with a socially recognised tradition of achievement in certain spheres—especially artistic one), while gay women are not even women. Lesbians have been ignored by the law not because they are more tolerated than male homosexuals, but because the very existence of lesbians is denied on every level.

Part of the oppression of women lies in the subordination and denial of female sexuality except as a

response to the male, or as a means to the only true female fulfillment in maternity. The assumption is of heterosexuality consisting of active male and passive female. Women without men are assumed to be in an asexual state, or to be waiting for a man.

Thus the assertion of homosexual identity in general and lesbian identity in particular has a political significance, and is one important step in the process of challenging our oppression. We are not just seeking tolerance (inevitably as an 'abnormal minority') within the confines of this society.

Liberal tolerance is of most benefit to the liberal himself—now able to boast not only his own 'normality' but also his generous understanding of 'deviants'.

HOSTILITIES

Misunderstandings and hostilities persist within the women's movement in Britain. I'll try to consider some aspects of these. Firstly there is the effect of the assertion of a lesbian identity. The problem here is that at this time and within this society when we say that gay is good, we are asserting an identity which is *denied*. This assertion (if it has any effect) inevitably *challenges* the identity which is *assumed*, namely that of heterosexuality. It seems important to see that within the women's movement the tensions between gay women and heterosexual women develop within this general framework. We have not created or chosen this framework, but we cannot ignore it if we want to change it.

Secondly there is the confusion over the question of bisexuality.

To discuss this we have to distinguish between the world we are trying to create and the world we live in now. In some future socialist sexually liberated society the bisexual potential (which probably exists in most people) may have the freedom to develop. But in the actual society in which we now live is say 'we are now all bisexuals really' is as meaningful as saying that 'we are all middle class now'. It simply ignores all the structures of exploitation, oppression and repression which stifle and distort our lives and which

(continued on page 18)

Women and Fascis

Reactionary forces are rallying in Britain to-day behind the banners of organisations which have grown to years. The most obvious danger of these are fascist organisations such as the National Front.

However other less explicitly political organisations have attracted increasing support. Already ideologies are clearly emerging between the different elements in this reactionary spectrum. Let's look at some examples.

The festival of Light and Mary Whitehouse wage war on 'permissiveness'. Lord Longford's London rally in September drew a thousand supporters together in search of a 'moral' solution to inflation.

Enoch Powell punctuates his highly publicised racism with sexist assertions which in general boil down to the idea that there is only one place for women — the home. SPUC, Life and other anti-abortion groups focus their attacks on the right to abortion, their election campaigns of leaflets and posters around the slogan 'support your anti-abortion candidate' invited, and gained them, the enthusiastic backing of National Front candidates in many constituencies. In Blackburn where the NF nationally has been focussing its resources for several years, Kingsley Read the local leader, smiling to the SPUC election campaign, has become firmly committed to the anti-abortion cause, and attacks homosexuals and 'reds' as threats to the family.

It is clear from Keith Joseph's recent speech that he aligns himself to the forces of reaction in Britain today.

WHY ARE WOMEN ATTRACTED?

Already masses of women are becoming involved in these organisations; many of them are certainly from petty-bourgeois social backgrounds, trying to save dwindling stake in the nation. But it is also the case that the National Front is drawing some support from amongst working class women, while organisations such as SPUC and Life, with the 'helpful' mediation of the catholic church, are able to attract larger numbers of working class women.

Not surprisingly women want to be able to solve the problems of ever increasing prices of food, and essentials cuts in public and social



The Nazi slogan 'Kinder, Küche, Kirche' (children, kitchen, church) summed up the role women were to occupy under the Third Reich.

m

importance in the past few

and organisational links
of this trend.

services, housing shortages. In any crisis period it is women that feel these problems most actively. It is their extra thought and work as housewives which initially cushions their families against the realities of falling living standards and their paid work outside the home becomes more and more vital to the family budget. Yet throughout capitalist society neither their work within or outside the home gains them much social recognition.

ORIENTATING TOWARDS WOMEN

The Labour Party recently has made a big orientation towards women, who were particularly badly hit by attacks from the previous Tory government (eg. huge price increases, Housing Finance Act, attempts to get rid of family allowances)

The organisations of the extreme right also attempt to draw support from women by appearing to offer solutions to their problems on two levels. The National Front promises to solve the problem of inflation, to reduce taxes, to re-impose law and order, and respect for 'traditional' moral values—both by direct economic measures and by kicking out the blacks and locking up the reds.

Secondly all these organisations offer their followers some form of recognition and sense of purpose. But they do not challenge exploitation and oppression (for example the nation/state, the family etc.)

The National Front, like other fascist organisations, is trying to build a popular movement by persuading people to change the ways in which they perceive the problems and relationships of every-day life, without challenging the roots of these problems. The nazis in Germany rallied their support through the same techniques. By examining their movement of the twenties and thirties we can see in full and poisonous flower, how sexism and racism was integrated in fascism, (the seeds of which are already sprouting again in the ranks



Photo: Peter Harrap (Report)

of National Front.) ANTI-FEMINISM IN NAZI GERMANY

The nazis addressed themselves to the problems and frustrations experienced by masses of women in the Germany of the twenties and thirties. They rejected out of hand any reference to the importance of women's emancipation which Hitler saw as a product of 'Jewish intellectualism', or which was attributed by one Nazi theoretician to 'frustrations set up by malfunctioning sex glands'. Instead women were called upon to recognise maternity as their true and only valid vocation. Goebbels explained: 'When we eliminate women from public life, it is not because we want to dispense with them, but rather we want to give them back their essential honour'.

Women were to find fulfilment in their own slavery. Robert Brady in his book on German Fascism summarises: 'The core of Nazi theory on women runs as follows: woman serves man, man serves the state, the state must become great, great states rest on labour; women create the supply and can render subservient the attitude of labour, hence women must be co-ordinated in service to the state'. Spengler, in 'Years of Decision' put it more crudely: 'Let German women breed warrior men and take pleasure in breeding them. Woman is to be neither comrade, nor beloved, but only mother.' Contradictions of the position of women within capitalism were 'overcome', because only one aspect—maternity—was recognised.

The trends towards liberalisation in social relationships and sexual freedom which had begun to emerge in Germany in the twenties were violently attacked. The nazis determined that there should be a complete return to the traditional authoritarian, male-dominated family, to men who were 100% 'male' and totally geared to production and war; and to women who were 100% 'female', whose world was confined to reproduction. Women's autonomy became unimaginable, women's sexuality non-existent as far as the nazis were concerned. Thus women were driven out of political affairs, penalties against abortion were made more severe and family planning clinics were closed down. Wherever possible women were driven out of paid employment and back into the home. The Nazis claimed they were responsible for a huge decrease in unemployment figures but these were rendered distorted as women had virtually disappeared from them. Women had in fact lost the right to work.

INDOCTRINATION

Eugenic theory provided the most obvious link between sexism and racism in national socialism. The financial inducements to reproduce—marriage loans, child subsidies, family allowances—and the rewards for doing so prolifically—the bronze, silver or gold Cross of Honour of the German mother, were available only to politically pure, racially pure Aryans. The racially impure, the politically suspect, the physically or mentally ill were likely to have abortion and/or sterilisation forced upon them. Male homosexuals were persecuted, and driven into concentration camps where untold masses died.

National chauvinism merged into respect for authority, industriousness, thrift. German housewives must work hard and frugely, choosing only German products, moulding the minds of their children in such a way that their attitudes would fit into Nazi ideology.

Education continued this task of indoctrination which was facilitated by the fact that 97% of teachers were enrolled in the nazi teachers association. Sex discrimination was widely applied against pupils and teachers in the schools. Girls who stayed for secondary education were pushed into domestic science

or languages, and it was made increasingly difficult for them to obtain university places (the nazis reduced the numbers of women students by 80% after they came to power.)

DUAL MORALITY

The sharp and rigid division of labour between the sexes was associated with a dual morality. The Nazis revived and elevated many of the most petty and prudish elements of petty bourgeois morality—both 'boyish' appearance and vanity and frivolity were condemned. While prostitution trebled in a short period, German women were supposed to be virtuous and healthy, and above all good breeding machines.

Undoubtedly the national socialists were able to attract masses of working class men and women through the anti-feminism of their propaganda and policies; and the ineffectiveness of any challenge to sexism within the German labour movement of that period made this relatively easy. Similarly to-day the potential for fascist organisations to exploit sexism within the working class remains great, as the equal pay dispute at SEI Heywood has illustrated so sharply—male trade unionists scabbed daily on their sisters in struggle. And the growth of the range of reactionary organisations opposing abortion, all forms of 'permissiveness' etc provides the National Front with links with a much wider, already partially mobilised, audience—another clear reason why the struggle against sexism within the

working class and throughout society has to be taken up on a much wider and more serious scale.

The National Front to-day clearly stands in total opposition to the political aims principles of the women's liberation movement, just as its predecessor opposed, and smashed the German women's movement, the trade unions and every other independent organisation in the Germany of the thirties. Our struggle against fascist forces to-day must involve extending and strengthening the struggle for women's liberation as well as directly opposing the fascists themselves. Women in the WLM are already organising against SPUC, and against the National Front itself. At the July women's conference co-ordination between women's groups engaged in anti-fascist activity was established, a strong women's contingent was organised for the anti-fascist demonstration at Hyde Park in September, and women are planning intervention in the Conference against Fascism and Racism in Warwick on 23 November.

The working-class has begun to take up anti-fascist activity (eg counter-demonstrations, opposition to NF candidates during the election campaign etc). This provides a further important bridge between the WLM and the working class in that the aims and ideas which have come out of the women's movement can provide an ideological weapon for the working class to use in the fight against racism and fascism.



A section of the National Front march to Red Lion Square, where Kevin Gately was murdered.

-EQUAL PAY STRIKE-



Photo: JOHN STURROCK (Report)

Women occupying the switchboard room at the SEI factory—this was the only area that they were able to hold after management aided by male workers broke into the occupation.

The following interview with NICKY PENNY, a shop steward at the factory, explains the issues in the strike and how the women coped with domestic responsibilities during the struggle.

Could I ask you to give me a bit of information about the background to the dispute? When did it start, what's it over and things like that?

When did it start? Ten weeks ago. The whole dispute has been going on for fourteen months but the actual strike, or lock-out—as we prefer to call it—started ten weeks ago. But before then we had three weeks of go-slow and downing tools regularly. It all began because we wanted to make proper steps towards equal pay which management refused to do.

So we said they either make proper steps towards equal pay and put it down in writing or we ban the corrupt bonus scheme which we were then working on. Nothing was done so we therefore terminated this scheme and wouldn't work on it.

We then went on a three-weeks go-slow. We then received a letter from the employer which was the letter which sent all our women out. I mean, they were prepared to carry on the go-slow before this, but they sent round the letter which said if we did not carry on this corrupt bonus scheme then we would not be given any other work and we would not be paid from that time.

So that was tantamount to a lockout to us. So the girls just walked out. All 400 of us. We didn't have to be led by anyone. They just walked out en masse. The resulting number that arrived at the factory gate was overwhelming. We were very pleased about it. And that is roughly what the issue is about.

When did you occupy the factory?

Three weeks ago.

What sort of support have you been getting?

Fantastic support, from all over the place.

Have you been getting support from the unions?

Yes, we've been around all the district—Bury, Radcliffe and all the surrounding districts. We've also been out to Leyland who were very encouraging. They also gave us a £200 cheque, and said we were great lasses. We've been to the docks, the airport, Red Star parcels and other points to have everything blacked and this seems successful...we need help on the pickets now, as well as financial help.

Were the women involved in the union before they got active in this?

Yes. It was sort of a sleeping union. We just fought our own fights all along the way but then the union rallied and everyone started paying their membership when they realised something was going to happen. We're all strong union, those of us who are still out.

I understand that you haven't been getting the sort of support that you would like from the men in the union. Could you say something about that?

Support!! No. It's negative support. The men have even actively worked against us. One of our own unions member, one of the men, helped to break the sit-in by smashing down one of the doors. It's really been terrible. We're really disgusted. Well, we don't call 'em men, they're just animals.

I understand you've given them support in their union action before, is that right?

OVER 400 WOMEN ON A TEN-WEEK equal pay strike at the Salford Electrical Instruments firm in Heywood, near Manchester recently returned to work—sold out by trade union officials. For two months, the women battled on their own. In their eighth week of strike, they occupied the factory.

The Working Women's Charter Campaign was instrumental in organising a mass rally to launch a national support committee, recognising the example set by the women in their disregard for the social contract.

Two days after the rally—without mentioning the growing support—the trade union official recommended a return to work.

One woman worker at SEI said: 'We have got 62p on the bonus but lost 80p in the thresholds. That means a cut of 18p a week. We still have not got equal pay on the basic rate. All those weeks of strike just for that.'

The women believe that they were instrumental in getting the men's last strike settled by threatening to all come out. It was settled over the weekend, when the women threatened to come out.

What sort of problems have you had with children? How have you managed that, and other home commitments?

Well, for the smaller children we usually have the local ambulance hall and we have a creche there for them for during the picket hours. But unfortunately the older children have to go to school at the most crucial time which is early in the morning when the blacklegs and scabs come in. And that is when we need most support really because these women just haven't got anyone to rely on to take the kids to school.

Who runs the creche for you?

Our own pickets. We take it in turns.

Do you see problems with children if you take action again? Do you think that a nursery, a proper nursery, provided by the council would be useful?

Oh yes, undoubtedly it would be useful but I can't see the council supplying a nursery. I mean there are a few enough nursery places as it is. I understand that Lancashire has the best ratio nursery places as it is.

Has the strike actually changed how you manage your home responsibilities with the children, your husband, the cleaning and all that sort of thing?

All our homes are mucky! Our husbands are unsatisfied sexually! (laughter)

(to be continued on page 18)

WORKING WOMEN'S CHARTER

by DODIE WEPLER

The campaign to fight for the demands of the Working Women's Charter—launched in London in April of this year—has now been taken up in 23 towns and cities throughout Britain. In London over 300 women and men attended the September meeting of the campaign. The meeting voted unanimously to organise support for three current disputes involving women workers. It was decided to picket GEC headquarters in support of the 400 women on strike for equal pay at the Salford Electrical Instruments firm in Heywood near Manchester—a subsidiary of GEC. A collection of £80 was divided among the SEI women, women cleaners on strike at Vauxhalls in Luton and women strikers at Wingrove and Rogers in Liverpool.

From the beginning, the Charter has been seen as a tool to reach and help organise women who—both at home and at work—are being hit especially severely by the soaring rates of inflation, vast shortages of housing, cutbacks in social expenditure, and chronic low pay.

The Campaign can accomplish two things: first, it can open a debate among large numbers of women and men to draw a firm connection between woman's role in the family and her position in the labour force. For women, home responsibilities directly affect job opportunities and pay. Bills, a baby on the way, household budgets and baby-sitters all have an immediate impact on a woman's decision to work.

Some trade unions have paid lip service to these immediate problems confronting women. The T&GWU, for example, has supported in writing at least—the demand for nurseries for three years. But they have never waged a single fight—or even put their organised strength behind a fight—to tackle the more fundamental questions relating to women's oppression in the home. And they are often just as reluctant to tackle the equal pay issue despite the fact that this is normally seen as a 'legitimate' part of trade union business! The Charter, in including demands for nurseries and abortion and contraception alongside those for equal pay, opportunities and pension rights can begin to extend that debate, which has till now been carried out almost exclusively in the women's movement, into the trade unions.

Second, the Charter campaign can group together all those militants in a locality who are prepared to organise around its demands. Throughout the summer we have

seen a spate of strikes among women, fighting against low pay and re-grading schemes, and demanding equal pay. Often these actions have been seen as one way to fight against the ravages of inflation. Many of the strikes have occurred against the wishes of the trade union leadership who have refused to make them official or have done everything to dissipate the struggle. The trade union bureaucracy has entered into a Social Contract with the Labour Government. They have agreed to keep things calm on the wages front in return for social concessions. Women, however, cannot afford to keep the Social Contract. And any concessions granted so far—food subsidies, rent freeze etc., have been proved to be totally inadequate, when inflation is reaching a rate of 20%. Nor can we expect much of a change to be made as a result of Labour's election promises, either from their 'Charter for women' or from their Sex Discrimination Bill. The promises in their Charter would require a massive increase in social expenditure and, in connection with their promise to ensure full implementation of the Equal Pay Act by the end of 1975, would involve them in a confrontation with employers such as



GEC who have already stated they do not intend to meet it's requirements. The Sex Discrimination Bill, on its own, merely gives us formal rights which many of us, because of lack of money, or too many family commitments, will not be in a position to exercise. So, despite these promises, women will be forced to continue to struggle for all the benefits which Labour acknowledges should be theirs.

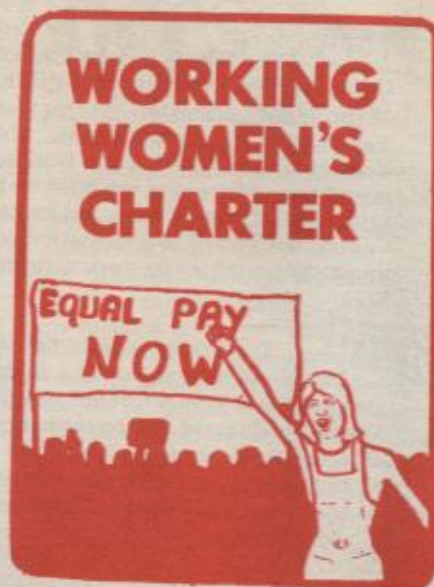
Although Labour attempts to bind women to the Social Contract by insisting that the implementation of these promises depends on its success, it is already becoming increasingly obvious as at SEI, that only by direct action on the part of the women will any progress be made. Because women have never been integrated into the life and structure of trade unions, they are not as concerned as male trade unionists often are to obey directives from the leadership and to follow every dot and dash of the rule book. This means that in every strike action taken by women, in spite of efforts of the leadership, women will pose a clear challenge to the Social Contract. But so that these strikes have an impact - so they can provide an example to other workers and can begin to tackle, through organising, all the social questions which Labour has addressed itself to (through legislation), a strong Charter campaign is needed.

The success of the Campaign will depend upon its ability to fight for and win backing of the organised strength of the working class. This does not mean relying on the good will of the trade union leadership. If Trades Councils agree to sponsor the campaign, they must be forced by the rank and file militants in affiliated unions, to launch a vigorous campaign. The campaign will die if it is built only on paper support.

A large number of Trades Councils have agreed to organise conferences in late autumn. For many campaign groups, the period building up to the conference will be an important part of the campaign. Using the introductions provided by the Trades Council, supporters of the Campaign will be addressing factory meetings, meetings of Tenants Associations, and meetings of women who are non-unionised;

An urgent necessity for the campaign is the development of a national perspective. The Cambridge Charter Campaign has agreed to publish a national newsletter. And the call for a national conference once the local conferences are over is imminent. National actions - around prominent struggles of women workers or at the Labour Party conference - next month - will help to widen the campaign. Throughout the campaign, groups will develop immediate focuses such as equal pay strikes or campaigns to fight inflation and unemployment, but it is important to weld these local experiences together so that a national impact is made.

EDINBURGH The Trades Council adopted the Charter and Edinburgh women's group and two unions - ASTMS and TASS - have adopted the Charter. The ad-hoc committee to organise the campaign includes women from NALGO Action, the Nurses Action Committee, Rank and File Teachers, etc. A day conference will be held on September 21, sponsored by the Trades Council.



COLCHESTER

A local conference called by the women's group and backed by the Trades Council attracted women from a local factory which was non-unionised. One positive result of the conference was that it sparked off unionisation at this factory. A Charter campaign group was set up with a regional co-ordinating body, including representatives from Cambridge, Colchester and Chelmsford. The Trades Council are organising a conference in April or May.

NOTTINGHAM

At an NCEE conference on women's rights, a workshop was held on the WWC. It was decided to plan a meeting for October 19 at which the campaign would be launched. Members of Nottingham branches of the NUT and ASTMS have got their unions to call one-day conferences on Women at Work.

MANCHESTER

The Trades Council has adopted the Charter and has set up a sub-committee. The personnel will be elected in October. The Manchester Women's Rights Group have discussed the Charter and individual members of the Group have been on the picket line with the women on strike at SEI. The SEI women have shown an interest in the Charter.

BIRMINGHAM

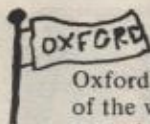
A meeting to launch the Charter campaign sponsored by the women's group and the Trades Council, attracted 60 women and men.

LANCASTER

An initial discussion about the Charter at the Women's Centre reached an agreement in principle to approach the Trades Council suggesting they get a speaker on the Charter and call a conference. The Trades Council has agreed to hold the conference on September 29, and an informal group from the women's centre are working to help build it.

BRISTOL

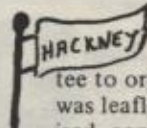
An initial public meeting of the Charter campaign attracted 40 people. It was decided to establish two work groups - one dealing with research and the other to organise a conference. The group held another meeting at which 60 women and men discussed the basis of the campaign. The Charter has been distributed to women in the printing trade. The conference will be held in late October. The group also approached the nurses during the summer and offered help with picketing.



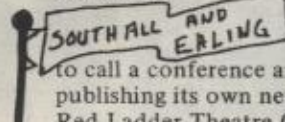
The Witney Trades Council (10 miles from Oxford) called a meeting on Equal Pay at the insistence of the women delegates. At this meeting, the Charter was adopted as a basis for work. The Women and Socialism group in Oxford is also working around the Charter and have pushed for the WEA to hold a series of educationals to tie in with the campaign. The Oxford Trades Council has agreed to a resolution put by ASTMS to set up a sub-committee to work with the Witney sub-committee.



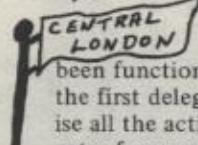
The Trades Council has agreed to sponsor the campaign and have asked for a delegate from the campaign to attend Trades Council meetings as an observer. They have donated £20 to the campaign and made available information on local factories employing women. At the Brent Fair, the Trades Council decided to have an equal pay stall and the Charter campaign organised it. The women involved in the campaign recently put out a leaflet to a local factory where a grading scheme was being implemented. The Trades Council has invited the campaign to send speakers to a large number of Tenants Associations. Plans are now underway for their conference to be held in November.



The Trades Council has set up a sub-committee to organise the campaign. A factory in Hackney was leafleted because although it has just been unionised, conditions are appalling. A public meeting held after the leafletting attracted over 50 people—although not many from the factory itself came. The Charter campaign has held discussions around the condition of women employed in sweat-shops in the locality and also problems of reaching women who do not work outside the home. A conference is being planned for November.



The Trades Council has agreed to call a conference and the organising committee is publishing its own newsheet. They have also had the Red Ladder Theatre Group to perform in their locality.



An organising committee has also been functioning on an ad-hoc basis. On October 26, the first delegate conference has been called to centralise all the activities of the local trades councils. Delegates from any group that can demonstrate it is organising around the Charter will be accepted, but observers are both encouraged and welcome.

(continued from page 11)

'The Oppression of Lesbians...'

are not overcome by some individuals claiming to be bi-sexual.

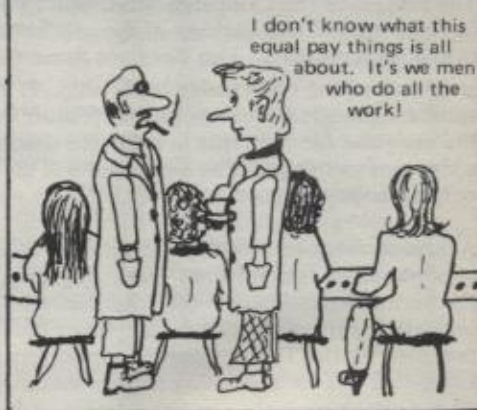
Thirdly there are fears amongst some women who consider themselves to be heterosexual that lesbianism threatens the women's movement. They think that to take up the cause of lesbian liberation is to make the movement more unpopular especially amongst working class women who we are trying to reach. There are sometimes veiled assumptions that lesbians are all middle class and that working class prejudice against homosexuals is stronger than among middle class people. Both these mistaken propositions are used to justify these fears. If we are really struggling for women's liberation—not just for equality within this society—then we cannot commit ourselves publically only to those causes which will be most immediately popular or most respectable. Few of the issues for which women have fought—for example the vote—seemed at all reasonable until the struggle for them was begun.

Fourthly there is the question of separatism, as a strategy and/or as a solution for women's liberation. This is the political perspective of many lesbians within the women's movement, but not of all. Thus the discussion about sep-

aratism and about lesbian liberation are not identical. A commitment to lesbian liberation may involve a commitment to separatism, but it will not necessarily do so.

Lesbian liberation is not just the concern of lesbians, just as abortion or equal pay are not just the concern of women who themselves want and do not get these at this moment. It is integral to the struggle for women's liberation. The oppression of lesbians is not separable from the oppression of women, but is an intensification of one aspect of that oppression. It contributes to the maintenance of the general system of oppression and exploitation within which we live and which we have to change.

MARGARET COULSON



(continued from page 15)

SEI Women Strikers

Are they really pulling their weight more in the house now do you think?

I think that for those girls that have got husbands behind them, most of the fellas have been bloody great. They've given them all the support they need, I mean there have been girls out on all night pickets and the fellas, they're just not bothered at all. They've given them all the support they need.

Do you think that this will make a difference to when you go back working normally to how much work you have to do in the home?

Yes, I think it will for some women, I mean I'm very fortunate. I've got a completely emancipated husband, but some of these women, yes, I think their husbands have learnt to fry themselves an egg now.

Interview at the Support Rally done by Celia Pugh.

NEW PAMPHLET

THE HOUSEWIFE AND HER LABOUR UNDER CAPITALISM

Wally Secombe ISBN 0 85612 002 2

This pamphlet is an extended version of an article which first appeared in NEW LEFT REVIEW in February 1974. Written by a member of the RMG (Canadian sympathising section of the Fourth International), it is an incisive intervention into the lively debate on the status of housework as a labour form under capitalism. A5 32 pages October 1974

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Charter conferences

SHEFFIELD

The Sheffield Trades Council Conference on the Charter held on 26 October followed hard on the heels of the defeat of the SEI women's equal pay strike in Manchester. Women at the conference, who had been involved in raising support for the women at SEI, argued forcefully the Charter campaign in Sheffield should learn the lessons at SEI, prepare the fight on equal pay in Sheffield, and centralise support for any ensuing struggle.

Sylvia Greenwood, chairperson of the shop stewards committee at a large engineering firm and a member of the Transport and General Workers Union Equal Pay Committee, summed this point up: 'Equal pay and equal opportunity are not going to be achieved by looking at this piece of paper (the Charter)' she said.

'So many times we've passed resolutions only to have left them gathering dust. We want to use the Charter, so that when there is an equal pay strike, we can mobilise support and help the women win it.'

Although most of the speakers at the conference stressed that exploitation of women in the job situation was related to, and heightened by the position in the family as wives and mothers, there was a certain amount of confusion. A number of trade unionists and members of the Communist Party tended to ignore this point by insisting that the exploitation of workers, was simply a class question. Whether they were male or female was largely irrelevant. This left out the whole dimension of discrimination against women not only by the employers, but by the trade union movement itself.

This lack of understanding was ironically highlighted by the organisation of the conference. In spite of the fact that there had been a resolution to the Trades Council for a crèche to be provided at the conference, the women who turned up with young children found that no facilities had been made available.

The discussion on organising

around the Charter centred on the need for a broadly-based campaign. The local council's proposals to slash nursery provisions; the lack of abortion and contraception facilities (in Sheffield there is a 6 months waiting list for the pill); the struggle of students for nursery facilities, and the fight for equal pay should all be centralised through the Charter.

Again Sylvia summed up the spirit of the meeting by suggesting that women from the women's movement, students and trade unionists should unite on the Charter as a common cause.

Proposals passed by the meeting were firstly: to initiate a campaign on the Charter culminating in a nation-wide demonstration during International Women's Year (1975). And secondly, to invite trades councils to a national conference on 8 March—International Women's Day—to plan the demonstration and extend the campaign. Hopefully this second proposal will be amended to include all activists involved in the Charter.

Ann Foreman
Sheffield IMG

LONDON

Little, unfortunately, was resolved at the first delegate conference of the London Women's Charter Conference, held on 26 October, and called by an ad-hoc organising committee which was first formed shortly after the campaign began last March.

But the problem, so far as determining future perspectives, and even electing a committee were concerned, was the lack of structure for the main policy session. This has necessitated a recall conference.

In spite of these problems, which understandably led to the frustration of many of those who came, decisions were taken to hold a national Charter campaign conference, and to publish a national bulletin. This national focus is essential in a period where mass redundancies are at the top of the

agenda, and women are likely to find themselves with little support from the unions, who can be expected to argue that married men must take priority in the struggle to retain jobs.

The International Marxist Group put forward a resolution calling for a meeting to be organised during the Labour Party conference, to which Labour MPs and women involved in current and recent struggles would be invited to speak.

The fact that Labour has come up with proposals relating to women has enabled us in the women's movement—as socialists—to open this debate sharply in wider section of the labour movement.

This would enable us to counterpose very sharply the necessity of women launching their own struggles to fight for equal pay to the legislation offered by Labour. And the demands we could put on the Labour Government in that meeting would be firmly linked to the self-organisation of women and their demands raised in the course of struggle.

However neither this resolution nor one calling for a national demonstration on the demands of the Charter to be held on International Women's Day were put to the vote.

The only proposal put forward by members of the International Socialist group was that the demands of the Charter—and principally those of 'direct relevance' to women on the shop-floor should be taken up at their Rank and File conference. It was pointed out that at a previous R & F conference, the demands for free abortion and contraception would not fit into a programme which could gain maximum unity among workers.

Members of the Communist Party, who, when the Charter was first drawn up had argued that it was merely necessary to have it adopted by union district committees and executives, said that all the talk about 'union bureaucrats' was unfair. They should be made to support the Charter. The CP members failed to point out that in the vast majority of cases it requires mass struggle to achieve this.

REVIEWS REVIEWS.....

PSYCHOANALYSIS PSYCHOANALYSIS AND FEMINISM

First instalment of a review of Juliet Mitchell's *PSYCHOANALYSIS AND FEMINISM*

Hilary Wainright

One of the ways in which the women's movement challenged the complacency of liberal feminism was by rejecting its basic method of identifying oppression only in terms of whether women complained in an articulate way about their situation.

This definition of the problem fuelled the ideology of the fifties and sixties which assumed that the majority of women were 'happy' with their lot as housewives and mothers. Through questioning the idea that women had 'chosen' this lot, through providing a context in which the daily, guilty neurotic, private expressions of ambiguous discontent could become politicised, the women's movement identified the hidden shapes and mechanisms of oppression - an oppression which is objective, which exists whether or not women are fully conscious of it.

Once the objective nature of our oppression had been identified in this way, it was no longer possible to take as natural the psychological characteristics that have been woven within us in the formation of our female identities. Characteristics which have formed an intricate web of emotions and myths, blurring our consciousness and deadening our capacity for change, turning us into 'happy' housewives.

Our analysis of this process is relatively underdeveloped compared with both our analysis of the material basis of this culture and with our initial rejection of bourgeois definitions of discontent. One reason for this underdevelopment of our understanding of how sexist ideology actually works is examined in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. Here Juliet Mitchell implies that we have thrown out the baby with the bathwater by rejecting psychoanalysis as a tool because of the use to which it has been put, for example, by the tendency to establish femininity in a patriarchal framework. She argues the need to re-consider using this particular tool within the framework established by the women's movement. This would not only

open up new horizons for the development of theory within the movement, but would also serve to counter the 'integrationist' use to which psychoanalysis is put. This use has interacted with the development of the science and has overlaid it with massive ideological distortions, particularly in the direction of biological determinism.

But, as Octave Mannoni[†] argues, 'Freud never concerned himself with the adaption of his patients to the society of his time: he enabled them to solve their problems themselves, and their relationship to their milieu was one of them - no more and no less - for example - than their marital relationship, one he did not treat at all on a realistic plane as a counsellor would have'. There remains, however, the problem of the ambiguities in Freudian theory which made its ideological use and development possible and Juliet Mitchell does not avoid this question. For example, she goes into considerable detail about the changes and consequent lack of clarity involved in many of his uses of the concepts of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'.

She also accepts the fact - which inspires the majority of feminist attacks on Freud - that in his personal life Freud was thoroughly imbued with the patriarchal culture whose workings in the formation of mental structures he sought to understand. But she argues that this is irrelevant to his contribution to our understanding of its workings.

What then is this theoretical contribution that, in spite of these problems, Juliet argues we must study and develop into a full theory of our distorted femininity and of the conditions for liberation? Freud's concern was to explore the mental processes involved in the entry of the human animal with its bisexual psychological dispositions, into

human culture and the laws of sexual differentiation - the laws of patriarchy. His major theoretical concepts such as the Oedipus Complex and the related Castration Complex, penis envy, and Narcissism refer to relationships and desires involved in the process whereby this bisexual creature develops a sexed identity and comes to mentally live its biological distinctiveness according to the laws of the culture it has entered. These concepts cannot be evaluated or developed without an understanding of them as the theoretical hypothesis of the science of unconscious mental life. That is what psychoanalysis is; it attempts to discover the laws of the unconscious and its relation to normal thoughts.

The unconscious is not mysterious and unknowable. We have indications of its existence through dreams, our use of language, the jokes which occur to us, the apparently inexplicable emotions we feel towards other people and in particular contexts. It is made up of normal thoughts and desires which are repressed because of their culturally determined unacceptability to consciousness and are, therefore, transformed by the unconscious into acceptable thoughts and emotions. The wishes that are repressed and transformed in the course of our entry into human culture and in the course of the formation of our sexed identities,



through our first human relationships - within the family - are thus ever present, speaking to us from our unconscious mental life. Their presence is continually indicated by being re-evoked in socially acceptable forms by certain situations and relationships. In the case of women they express themselves in those psychological characteristics of passivity, vanity and so on which have ties us to our subordination, and have made us agents of its reproduction through the types of relationships that we enter into. In explaining this relationship between conscious and unconscious thoughts, Juliet gives the example of penis envy and its transformation into the culturally legitimate desire

for a baby. The latter is not a basic drive on the same level as penis envy, it is the culturally determined expression of this repressed desire. As Juliet says, 'The two wishes are in fact one, and will continue to be active in different parts of the mental apparatus: the penis wish will remain repressed in the unconscious, the baby wish will be consciously expressed'.

The anti-Freudian feminists, whose arguments Juliet, rather sketchily, criticises, have not evaluated the steps that Freud made towards a theory of femininity in their proper context of his theory of the unconscious and its culturally produced laws of transformation and repression. This has led them to inaccurately attack Freud for implying that the baby wish is biologically determined, flowing from a woman's physical lack of a penis. It also leads them to paint an over rationalistic picture of mental life and therefore to underestimate the insidious workings of sexist ideology. They imply that it has been transmitted to us merely through a process, admittedly very thorough, whereby role expectations have been continually imposed on us through, for example, being dressed in pretty, pastel shades, given dolls to play with, criticised for aggression, praised for coquetry and submission, taught to read with books that hold up marriage and motherhood as the models of adult life and so on. Flowing from this they imply that combatting sexist ideology is merely a question of consciously rejecting these expectations and roles. These aspects of our socialisation are important but they do not in themselves explain the deep rooted nature of our sexual identity as it has been formed within bourgeois society. The first Red Collective pamphlet *The Politics of Sexuality in Capitalism*, indicates why these theories of socialisation are so inadequate. Their discussions about themselves show how, in spite of the fact that they were not brought up according to the traditional sexual stereotypes, nevertheless in their relationships they found themselves reproducing all the characteristics of the traditional 'couple' and thus setting the scene for the continued stability of the Bourgeois family. An account of women's socialisation that takes no account of the unconsciousness also underestimates the problems of struggle against sexist ideology. Commitment to women's liberation does not immediately rid us of the psychological characteristics created by this ideology. We still have the emotions and fantasies that our feminist consciousness finds shocking and contradictory. Juliet Mitchell's reinterpretation of Freud seems to me to provide some basic tools for coming to grips with the significance of these experiences of the subterranean operations of sexism and with making sexuality a terrain of political practice in order to undermine these operations. However, it is not possible to evaluate the extent to which she does this without reading Freud independently. I have only read Juliet's interpretation of Freud which is why this is only a first instalment and is intended to recommend that people read this book rather than to provide a full critique of it. In the next instalment I intend to look more critically at the limits of psychoanalysis and particularly at Juliet's conclusions for the struggle against sexism.

† 'Freud: The Theory of Unconscious' NLB page 183. This is an overall sketch of Freud's work which can very usefully be read along with Juliet Mitchell's book.

Danger! - Women at Work

Ed. Patricia Hewitt. NCCL, 1974. 50p.*

In February this year, the National Council for Civil Liberties organised a conference on women's rights, attracting nearly 600 women. The aim was to provide a setting for the discussion, sharing of information, and organising of activity on problems faced by women in employment.

A number of unions sent delegations along, and a wide variety of women also turned up in other capacities—schoolgirls, pensioners, manual and professional workers, housewives, unsupported mothers, claimants, and students.

Danger! - Women at Work is the NCCL's report on that conference. Reflecting the workshop structure, the pamphlet has sections on the major areas in which working women are penalised by their social role and which represent the main institutional channels by which their oppression is perpetuated:

Equal pay; anti-discrimination; maternity and childcare provisions; protective legislation; social security, national insurance and pensions; training and further education; and the general problem of women's relationship to the trade unions.

The booklet reproduces the background papers produced for each workshop and attempts to summarise the main points

Mothers in Action, and gives a comparative table of arrangements in EEC countries.

The broad nature of the conference meant that a variety of experience was brought to the workshop discussions, which is useful in highlighting problems that might not be immediately obvious—for example the fact that women given 'equality' by being allowed to clean dangerous machinery would get less compensation if injured.

The negative aspect of this, which is noted in the introduction, is that opposing points of view couldn't be worked out in the time available, and there was little chance to formulate plans for action, except in a very general sense.

A number of the background papers and contributions are unduly weighted towards legislative and reformist activity: the proposal for workplace nurseries in the childcare background paper was criticised in workshop discussion, but the social security discussion report has the group apparently agreeing that women should be assumed *innocent* of cohabitation until proved *guilty*!

BEYOND REFORMISM

However, the background notes on training and further education prepared by Arsenal WLG go beyond the usual statistics and proposals for reform to try to set the problem

trade union movement about women's position in industry', and propose joint women's liberation/trade union discussions on the question.

STRUCTURES OR ATTITUDES?

The nature of the problems likely to be encountered in this field is highlighted in the report of the women and trade unions discussion. The report summarises reasons for the unionisation of women workers (begging some questions on the way—eg in proposing a 'fair rate' for 'genuinely and objectively evaluated jobs') and the main difficulties—briefly: prejudice, women's dual role, the exclusion by unions of activity on the 'social' issues which affect women, the extra effort needed to remedy this, and the need to get women's right to work accepted.

The priority given to subjective factors is echoed in the speeches of guest women unionists: in particular Pat Turner of the GMWU, apparently assuming the trade union movement is structurally OK, blames women for not putting themselves forward and for their lack of confidence—and later takes the same attitude to low-paid, unorganised workers.

Overall the pamphlet provides a useful starting point for further investigation and or activity, and is well worth the 50p for the summary it provides of a wide range of

MEN'S WORK

WOMEN'S WORK

WORK



NOW

1975: AFTER THE 'EQUAL PAY' ACT

which arose in discussion of each topic.

FACTS AND PROBLEMS

Not having attended the conference, I found this method of presentation provides a very clear and useful introduction to the basic facts and problems of each area: for example, the section on maternity leave summarises the TUC's activity on the question, lists the demands worked out by

in a wider social context and to consider the attitudes girls leaving school have to their own education.

They stress the need to 'connect the ideas in women's liberation about the way girls are moulded into a stereotyped femininity, the effect of women's essential work in the family on the position of women in the labour market, to the detailed but often separated knowledge which exists in the

basic information. A guide to further sources is also included.

Finally, Liz Mackie's cartoons alone speak volumes—and at a guess will be cropping up in women's papers and leaflets for some time to come.

FELICITY TRODD

*Pamphlet available from NCCL, 186 Kings Cross Road, London WC1X 9DE

REVIEWS

Elizabeth Wilson's pamphlet is an important contribution to the discussion on the demands of the women's movement and to an understanding of the Welfare State in Britain. It is one of the first attempts to attack the myth, perpetuated even by 'radical' sociologists, that the welfare state has improved the position of the working class and especially of women.

Instead Wilson examines through an historical outline of the development of the Welfare State as a form of class domination how it has distorted the quality of life, not improved it.



The theorists of the Welfare State were Keynes, who proposed taxation policies, plus full employment and increased consumption, designed to prevent a repetition of the pre-war crisis; and Beveridge, who was the architect of the social security scheme intended to carry this out in practice.

Wilson shows that they were aware not only of the 'economic' problem—how to get more surplus value out of labour—but also the 'political' and 'social' problems that workers, especially women, might organise independently of the State. The Welfare State and free collective bargaining Keynes and Beveridge helped to construct were posed as a 'middle way' between capitalism and communism.

The Welfare State's provisions (housing, education, health service, and so on) were aimed at people as part of a family, tying women closer to the home, or to their dual role as mother and worker. Thus it reinforces the ideology of the woman bringing comfort, happiness and creating the loving heart of the family. Wilson examines the whole baggage of mysticism, supported by psychology, of gender roles and sexuality.

WOMEN AND THE WELFARE STATE

This is why she thinks we must be clear on why and how we struggle for the four—now six—demands of the women's movement.

The demands relate to the Welfare State, and the State has always had a direct relation to the family unit and to the situation of women within it.

The pamphlet traces the changes in women's position from the time of the Industrial Revolution, through the period of laissez-faire capitalism, the First World War, the general strike, and the last war. It was in 1945 that the Welfare State as we know it really began.

The final section of the pamphlet covers the present crisis of the Welfare State, and how this affects women: the problems of inflation, prices and incomes policies, and welfare cuts.

The pamphlet is seen as part of an ongoing discussion. In this context, two points in particular need to be taken up.

First, it is crucial to have a clear analysis of ruling class strategy. When outlining the early years of the Welfare State, Wilson is clear that it represented the interests of the ruling class. That she is not clear that this is still the case is shown when she states that

only the Labour Party wants to keep it, and even then only *pretends* to defend the symbol of the Beveridge ideal.

She sees this as a result of the contradictions within the Welfare State. What she fails to grasp is that the contradictions are within the capitalist system as a whole. The ruling class wants to maintain the Welfare State, but at the expense of the working class.

So far from wanting to ditch the Welfare State—so useful in the past—ever since the '60s the bourgeoisie has been looking for resources to finance it. On the one hand, we see the growth of private schemes in health, housing and pensions. On the other, the systematic division of the working class into the better-off, and the poorest, with the latter being saved from destitution at the expense of the former.

Hence the increasing use of such devices as Family Incomes Supplement, and rent and rate rebates, as well as the greater emphasis on 'community action'. New ideas are constantly floated—prison 'reform', the Tax Credit Scheme and so on.

The implications for the women's movement and for revolutionaries are that the proposed anti-discrimination legislation and Equal Pay Act will try to channel women's struggles into further reliance on the State. The Housing Finance Act and NHS reorganisation make it more urgent for women to organise against any further oppression.

Secondly, we must also be clear about an important point Elizabeth Wilson only touches on in her pamphlet, when she says we must 'initiate forms of struggle to extend our control over the Welfare State's benefits'. If such struggles are not to end in reforms of the present system, the extension of control must be *independent* of the State and pose alternative organs of power.

This must be inherent in developing the campaign around the Working Women's Charter. It also means we have the task of intervening in struggles like that of the health workers, to pose the need for workers' control of the NHS, demanding not only creches and higher wages, but also calling for more resources for contraception and abortion, an end to the private ownership of drug companies and the abolition of private practice.

In short, we must pose demands that serve our needs—as opposed to those of the capitalist system—and which carry forward the revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of that system.

DORIS ELLIOT



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