

SOCIALIST WOMAN

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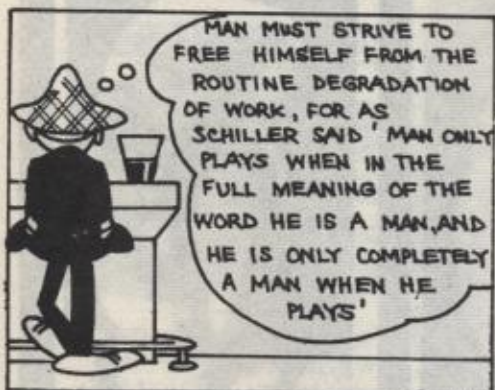
YEAR OF STRUGGLE WOMEN OF 1972

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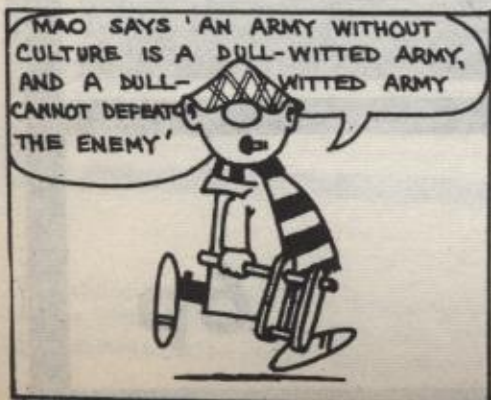
THAT THE WORKERS SHOULD TESTIFY TO THEIR DISAFFECTION BY ABSENTEEISM, STRIKES AND OTHER MANIFESTATIONS OF AN EMERGING PROLETARIAN CONSCIOUSNESS IS OF MORE IMPORTANCE THAN THE SECONDARY EFFECTS OF LOSS TO THE CAPITALIST EMPLOYER



MAN MUST STRIVE TO FREE HIMSELF FROM THE ROUTINE DEGRADATION OF WORK, FOR AS SCHILLER SAID 'MAN ONLY PLAYS WHEN IN THE FULL MEANING OF THE WORD HE IS A MAN, AND HE IS ONLY COMPLETELY A MAN WHEN HE PLAYS'



NOT UNTIL WOMEN ABOLISH THE CHAUVINISTIC MYTH OF INFERIORITY, AND SHED THE ROLES OF WIFE, MOTHER, AND SEX-OBJECT WILL THEY BEGIN TO BE ABLE TO BUILD A TRUE VISION OF THEIR HUMAN POTENTIAL



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EDITORIAL BOARD: Margaret Coulson, Leonora Lloyd, Wanda Mariuszko, Pat Masters, Vicky Robinson, Linda Smith, Felicity Trodd.

DESIGNER: Ruth Prentice

signed articles do not necessarily represent editorial opinion.

EDITORIAL

In a government White Paper published in December Margaret Thatcher outlined plans for the expansion of nursery education over the next ten years, claiming that 'this will be the first systematic step since 1870, when education was made compulsory at the age of five, to offer an earlier start in education'. (1)

How impressive are these new proposals? Why should the government, faced with the current crisis in social expenditure - the need to 'economise' and 'rationalise' its spending on social and educational services, decide to extend nursery education now? How far does this sort of increase in provision open up new opportunities for children and women? How far will it mean more state interference in people's lives?

THE PROPOSALS

The government proposals aim to provide free nursery education for 50% of three year olds and 90% of four year olds within the next ten years; the majority of these places would be half-time, with allowance made for about 15% of full-time places. The proposals largely follow recommendations of the Plowden Report; they will bring provision in Britain into line with other countries in the European Economic Community. (Nursery places are provided for over 50% of three year olds and over 80% of four year olds in France, for over 80% of three year olds and over 90% of four year olds in Belgium, for over 80% of four year olds in Holland, for over 50% of three and four year olds in Italy. In Britain in 1971 less than 35% of children received education during even a part of their fifth year and only 5% of three year olds were in nursery schools.) Seen in this European context the government proposals hardly appear to be radical, but rather a belated attempt to catch up with the levels of provision available elsewhere. The allowance made for building costs (30 million) - with rooms for nursery classes to be tacked onto existing primary schools, and for running costs (23 million per year) indicate that what is in fact being offered is half-time nursery education on the cheap. Thus the government presumably hopes to buy off the campaigners for free nursery education, as the Labour government's equal pay act was intended to buy off the campaigners for equal pay.

NURSERY EDUCATION - AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHER EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

The proposals for nursery education should also be considered in relation to the other plans for school and higher education contained in the white paper. Looking at the proposals as a whole, it is clear that they involve a re-ordering of priorities within education, and not any overall scheme for the expansion of education. Indeed the only part of the paper which may be seen as at all progressive is that referring to nursery education. The rest is fairly clearly concerned with re-structuring the education system so that it may more closely meet the requirements of contemporary capitalism.

However, besides this, the expansion of nursery education can be understood as yet another attempt to obscure the problem of unequal educational opportunity in a class society. The debate about the wastage of potential ability (always in some sense hypocritical in a society which is organised so that most people's potential ability will remain underdeveloped and underused) has shifted somewhat in the last few years from concern with selection for or during secondary education, to the significance of the processes of learning in the pre-school period. The Plowden Report argued that an earlier start to education could help to 'compensate' poorer working class children for the

inadequacies of their 'cultural' environment and help them to 'fit' more easily into school by the age of five; this view is echoed in the section of the white paper outlining objectives of nursery education. But of course no equality can be provided in education when it is denied in all other sources of social life. We totally reject the general conception of this white paper; we reject the idea that the proportion of the national output spent on education should be reduced; and that nursery schools can only be provided at the expense of other educational provision. Such conception does indicate the seriousness of the economic problems facing this society, and the way in which the crisis of declining profits is expressed also in a crisis over social expenditure.

NURSERY EDUCATION - THE FAMILY AND THE STATE

Finally we should try to assess the government proposals in relation to their influence on the family unit, and on the position of women and children. Ever since nineteenth century protective legislation took women and children out of the mines and restricted their conditions and hours of employment, thus (amongst other things) preventing the disintegration of working class family life, there has been increasing state intervention in areas of life which were previously only the concern of the individual family. Most working class families have been brought more and more under the control of the state. As a combined result of developments in technology, the need for more educated and more healthy workers, and the struggles of the working class, educational, health and welfare services have been increased. Despite the huge inadequacies in these services, they do represent important gains for working class people, and must be defended and extended. At the same time we must understand that these gains also have negative aspects to them. They have meant that the state has appeared to take over many tasks from the family in general and the mother in particular, but not in a way which has opened up real potentialities for liberation. The family is surrounded with a range of institutions, services and authorities with which it is supposed to co-operate; while family autonomy and authority are undermined, family and particularly maternal responsibility are not. (For example housing policy has undermined extended family relationships on quite a wide scale, health visitors provide expert advice to mothers on what they must do for their children, and if anything, the ideas about maternal responsibility for the physical, social and psychological well-being of children, have intensified.) The latest proposals for nursery education are no exception to this; the white paper states that 'the Government believe that provision for the under fives should build on, not supplant, parents' own efforts.' An article in *New Society* noted that 'the pre-school operation provides a great opportunity for enlisting the family in the educational process.' (N.S' 11.1.73)

In discussing her proposals Margaret Thatcher has emphasised that she does not want to encourage mothers to take full-time employment, as the very low level of full-time provision itself indicates. There is no recognition here of the rights of children or of women.

All this suggests to us the importance of demanding free full-time nursery education, and care and play facilities for smaller children, as of rights. Not according to some 'social criteria' defined and controlled by Local Authorities or similar bodies, which in the end depend on 'the needs of the economy' and not our needs. And it shows the importance of linking the demands for state provision of these facilities to the demand for local community control over them.

WRITINGS FROM THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT



This book is a collection of writings from the women's liberation movement. It consists of four separate sections dealing with women in various situations, with an introduction giving a general outline of women's struggle and oppression.

The first section is a mixed bag of experience dealing with the personal involvement and growing self-awareness of women both at work and at home. Sometimes these remain a self-conscious expression of their own particular oppression, an explanation of their frustrated home life. Occasionally it is generalised showing the exploitative nature of our society.

The women's liberation movement makes up the second section. Sheila Rowbotham traces the growth of the movement through the campaigns of Lil Biloca (a fisherman's wife who attempted to improve the safety of trawlers) and Rose Boland (one of the sewing machinists who brought Fords to a standstill) and the beginnings of NJACCWER. She acknowledges the part played by Socialist Woman and the IMG as well as recognising the problems that an organised tendency faces when working within such a loosely-knit group. In the same section Rosalind Delmar discusses the different views on the development of women's oppression. Criticising Engels when he states that as private property is abolished the conditions for liberation would be established, Rosalind Delmar points to the danger of women, after the revolution, doing socially what they now do privately. However, we are only too aware of this danger and realise that women's emancipation has to be fought for now, recognising the need for women to organise separately to combat our particular oppression.

The third section is perhaps the meatiest consisting of articles on women in society - in the family, at work, in prison and as individuals. A very interesting article by Sue Small shows the role the family plays in women's oppression. She analyses the economic and ideological functions that the family plays under capitalism by tracing its modern historical development and its role today. Examining women's involvement in the family process she shows the inter-relationships between education, family and employment. The question of employment is taken up by Leonora Lloyd whose article on 'Women, work and equal pay' is an earlier version of her 'Women Workers in Britain', which is a more detailed statistical analysis of women in this area.

'Women and Action - Past and Present' make up the remainder of this book. However, it is impossible for a short review to even touch on all the topics covered and ideas raised in the *Body Politic*. This book does not follow any political line but shows the different currents and tendencies within the women's movement. As such it is a useful and interesting book covering a wide range of ideas from 'consciousness raising' to Marxist thought and well worth a critical reading.

Jane Smith

**ALEXANDRA
KOLLONTAI**

**SEXUAL RELATIONS AND
THE CLASS STRUGGLE**

**LOVE AND THE NEW
MORALITY**

TRANSLATED AND INTRODUCED
BY ALIX HOLT

The problems raised by Alexandria Kollontai in these two essays are still with us today - how to resolve questions of personal relationships. When they were first published, in 1919, they may have seemed trivial problems in comparison to the enormous tasks of reconstruction faced by the new Revolution.

But Revolutions are made by people; people who come with the prejudices and backwardnesses of the old society to the new; whose problems of personal living we as important to them as the building of new factories. After all; if the revolution is not about people and their lives it is about nothing.

Kollontai is writing about the difficulties caused precisely because of the prevalence of old attitudes - in relation to women's supposed inferiority, possessiveness in love, and the tendency to shut all others out in love affairs. She argues that women must think of themselves as equal, with equal rights to choose their partners without social condemnation, and must be treated as equal. Until this happens 'free unions' will have even worse features than legal marriage. In general, the expectation or desire for monogamous, life-long relationships, (on the woman's side at present) is against nature.

Kollontai recognises that the problems of personal relationships are not simple. In the difficult times after the revolution, people turned inwards to find emotional satisfaction, leading to over-intense relationships and possessiveness. Until the nations' economic life was improved, this spiritual desolation was likely to be a factor in determining the nature of live love affairs. Until women's life in all areas were changed, they were likely to be treated as inferior.

Kollontai's ideas are still relevant today. In particular, we are aware that 'reforms' in personal relationships cannot be universal or particularly affective, because they arise out of a system still based on class. They was we live arises from the material world, and only idealists believe that changes in individual's life-styles can change that material world. At the same time, there is no excuse for revolutionaries not to seek to improve their behaviour and attitudes towards others. Her ideas in the pamphlet are well worth discussion and consideration.

The Body Politic - Women's Liberation in Britain 1969-1972.
Compiled by *Micheline Wander*. Printed by Stage I. price 15p.

Sexual Relation and the Class Struggle : Love and the new Morality. by *Alexandra Kollantai*. Translation and Introduction by *Alix Holt*. Printed by Falling Wall Press. Price 15p.

Community politics v Industrial politics

This pamphlet consists of a long central article by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, sandwiched between an introduction by Selma James, and an early article by her dating from 1952. Since it is the article by Dalla Costa that expresses the ideas shared by her and James most cogently, it is that on which the discussion is centred. But does a journal like *Socialist Woman* have a right to run a critical review of this pamphlet, and do I as a woman member of the IMG have a right to write one as part of the Womens Liberation Movement? James and Dalla Costa might dispute it, for the pamphlet contains numbers of attacks on the "straight" left. James compares the marxism of Mandel* unfavourably with that of Marx; Dalla Costa points out that the struggle for womens' liberation has to take place in part against the organisations of the revolutionary left, who accept it in theory but in practice relegate it conveniently to some time after the revolution. Where is the stimulating literature of the womens' movement? Germaine Greer, Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millett, Juliet Mitchell, none of them come from the revolutionary left organisations. I think that some of the criticisms raised against us are true and yet that some of us have a right to feel that we are a real part of the womens' movement, and have something to contribute, especially as critics and organisers, and as members of revolutionary organisations.

Women in Revolutionary Groups

There is no doubt that the straight left is male dominated. There are more men than women members, and more men still among the leaderships. This is one of the problems that arises from the fact that the members of a revolutionary organisation are still the products of capitalist society and as such reflect many of the ideas transmitted by bourgeois ideology, albeit unwillingly. However, this does not mean that there should not be a continuous struggle within such an organisation against such ideas, both at a theoretical and practical level. This is particularly so in the case of male chauvinism and our struggle must not and is not limited to the male comrades in the revolutionary left but has to include many of the women comrades. But what this means in practice that as members of a revolutionary organisation (and it must be remembered that we are members of such an organisation because we have an understanding of the need to build a revolutionary party and to overthrow capitalism) we have to strike a balance in our work between what we are trying to achieve inside the organisation and what we want to achieve through the organisation. Of course the two things are very much inter-related and it is that inter-relation which determines what we do at any one time. This is not by any means to counter the two aspects: work within the WLM and work on the question of combatting male chauvinism within the revolutionary organisations. It is by the very existence of such a movement and of us working in it, that can go a long way to dealing with the question of male chauvinism. But the reverse is also true; the members of a revolutionary organisation working within the WLM do have something to contribute, which comes from the great strength of a really revolutionary organisation, namely the ability to find the links between what seem to be isolated struggles, making our understanding part of a total programme and relating organisation and struggle to that programme, with an international perspective. And it is this strength which makes us want to remain in the organised left, to struggle within it, and to persuade other women, without illusions, to join it. This strength also gives us perspectives from which we can make a genuine constructive criticism of some of the ideas emerging from the centre of the womens' movement.

Self organisation of women

Dalla Costa's analysis is marxist in conception; it rejects feminism (the theoretical kind that poses the real class struggle as between men and women); it centres on the working class woman; and yet it does not regard production as the main arena of struggle for Women. Dalla Costa argues that in a capitalist society a woman's job is the production of labour power in the home. There, unpaid, in a pre-capitalist

economic situation, she produces new workers and reproduces existing ones. Such a situation produces the dependent psychological characteristics which make our struggle so difficult. Della Costa analysis is marxist in conception; it rejects feminism (the theoretical kind that poses the real class struggle as between men and women); it centres on the working class woman; and yet it does not regard production as the main arena of struggle for women. Dalla Costa argues that in a capitalist society a woman's job is the production of labour power in the home. There, unpaid, in a pre-capitalist economic situation, she produces new workers and reproduces existing ones. Such a situation produces the dependent psychological characteristics which make our struggle so difficult, and involve men as the agents of our oppression, a situation so intricately bound up that many women in achieving liberation from such servitude become gay, in order to escape the power relationship inseparable from male female relationships.



In producing labour power, Dalla Costa argues, housewives are themselves exploited, surplus value producers, and integral members of the working class. The struggle must be waged against organisations of the working class which divide between those producers employed in the factory and those in the home. Capitalist society is in fact on great social factory. The crucial task for the womens' liberation movement is to start the self organisation of women, whose potential social power can be utilised in community struggles. There is no solution in advocating that women should work, for this involves at best a change in the mode of exploitation, at worst the adoption of a double one. Therefore the womens' movement should organise around demands that women should reject housework; meet their husbands on their own grounds outside the home at factory meetings; rent struggles can be fought on the basis that womens' social production in the home has more than covered the rent; hold neighbourhood meetings, etc. The question of wages for housewives is a difficult one, and Mariarosa doesn't come down clearly on one side or the other. On the one hand it might give the impression that we wanted to 'entrench the condition of institutionalised slavery therefore could scarcely operate as a mobilizing goal' - on the other 'it gives an indication for struggle, a direction in organisational terms in which oppression and exploitation, situation of caste and class, find themselves insolubly linked.' (per and 53) The resolution of this contradiction involves the understanding of the nature of demands. For a demand is 'a goal which is not only a thing, but ... essentially a stage of antagonism of a social relation. Whether the canteen or wages we win will be a victory or a defeat depends on the force of our struggle.'

It is impossible in such a brief summary to capture the power and vitality of the writing that makes this pamphlet no stimulating to read. Yet those very qualities conceal what seem to me to be crucial confusions, leading to the division of a struggle where there should be unity.

YOUR JOB AND EQUAL PAY

Report on issues discussed at a recent Tass conference

'Women's work' is a category easy to recognise but hard to define. Nursing, teaching, cleaning, catering — these traditional areas of work are all obvious extensions of women's role in the family, but in many other cases, especially the growth industries or those undergoing technological rationalisation, job categories are constantly subdivided into a new range of job titles. Where this happens, it is apparently anyone's guess how the status and pay hierarchy will end up — though much obviously depends on the degree of organisation of the workers involved, and the cunning of management and their advisers.

One thing, however, can be predicted — women are more likely to find themselves in jobs labelled semi-skilled and unskilled, which are paid the least. (E.G. in production occupations alone in 1971, it was estimated that over three-quarters of female workers were in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations, compared with over half the male workers who were in skilled jobs.) That there is no inherent quality in the jobs themselves to back up the equation 'women's work = low status/low paid' can easily be demonstrated from the well-known fact that Russian doctors — 76% of them women — do not enjoy anything like the same prestige and income as their Western, mainly male, counterparts; or from the example of an electrical firm in West London — Ultra Electronics — who rationalised a skilled male job (wiring a radio chassis) into 'women's work' at five-eighths of the male rate by having the women wire the chassis in halves — an equally skilled job.

Building an Industrial Union

One set of workers particularly affected by the question of the relation between work performed and pay received are the members of the union TASS — the Technical and Supervisory Section of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers. Since its amalgamation into the AUEW a couple of years ago, TASS, formerly DATA, has set its sights on building one industrial union for the engineering industry, and has opened its doors to the wide range of 'allied technical workers', from aerodynamicists and microbiologists to clerks and typists.

TASS Women's School

Given this disparate membership, when the union held a national weekend school for women members on the subject 'Your Job and Equal Pay' last November, the question 'Equal Pay for what?' was naturally posed, and most of the discussion centred around the controversial questions of Job Grading and Job Evaluation.*

The school — held in Newcastle and attended by about 60 women members from all over the country — took the form of introductions by two guest speakers: Harriet Hopper, from the National Committee of the AUEW's Engineering Section and Convenor at Plesseys, Sunderland; and Ken Gill, the Deputy

* Job Evaluation: a scheme to place all jobs at a given place of work (or within a company etc.) within a rigid system of grading so that they are paid according to the value of their content, according to 'scientific principles'.

General Secretary of TASS. Their speeches were followed by discussions in small workshops around questions of a general nature set by the organisers, with a reporting back session at the end. The workshops and framework provided by the questions were very helpful in stimulating, thorough discussion of the points made by the speakers, in small enough groups for most people to feel confident about speaking.

Job Evaluation — For or Against?

Introducing the first session, Ken Gill began by saying that of course the union opposed Job Evaluation, but that we must be practical and recognise that it was here to stay; already 80% of the union's membership were covered by job evaluation schemes. He argued that anyway, in one sense, everyone who worked and was paid was 'job evaluated' and what counted in the long run was industrial strength.

Historically, DATA, and its predecessor the AESD, catering as a craft union for workers in engineering drawing and production, had dealt by and large with a small number of well-defined categories — draughtsmen, planners and estimators — with one female category, tracers, whose separate union had been dissolved into the AESD in 1922. In these conditions, demands for minimum rates could be clearcut — especially since entry was often restricted by apprenticeship requirements. The "women's category", with fewer formal training requirements (or opportunities), had suffered from having its own separate and lower minimum rate, and Ken Gill commented that the union had "perpetuated sex divisions on more crude a scale than almost any other organisation in the labour movement". (The huge differentials which are usual in TASS — £6 to £8 — compared with the £2-3 differentials found in the Engineering section, were also remarked on by Harriet Hopper the following day).

With the coming of rationalisation, these categories had become fragmented into at least 250 identifiably different jobs — covered by over 1,000 titles — and apprenticeship requirements had been relaxed, so that many workers could



'We place foremost in these pages the housewife as the central figure in this femal role. We assume that all Women are housewives and even those who work outside the home continue to be housewives' (p19) ... 'and this social factory has as its pivot the woman in the home producing labour power as a commodity.. (James' introduction p7) 'What we meant precisely is that housework is work is productive in the Marxian sense, that is, producing surplus value.' (p 52) The basis of all the problems lies in these quotations. In fact, Dalla Cosat actually puts the problem in a proper way in the text when she writes, '... within the wage, domestic work not only



produces use values but is an essential function in the production of surplus value' (p31). She then qualifies this in the footnote cited above. Let us compare what Marx actually says about this in *Capital*, not to indulge in quotations, but because both writers take themselves to be basing their analysis on Marx. 'The capitalist does not buy the labourer's means of subsistence but his labour power. And that which forms the variable part of his capital is not the labourer's means of subsistence but his labour power in action. What the capitalist consumes productively in the labour process is the labour power itself and not the labourer's means of subsistence. It is the labourer himself who converts the money received for his labour power into means of subsistence.' (Vol 11 p.165) Dalla Costa confuses the reproduction of labour power with the reproduction of the labourer. The labourer himself (if he is male) reproduces the labour power. Women working in the home reproduce the labourer who sells his labour power in order to live, who also can deny its sale, who forms trade unions and will have the central part in overthrowing the system. Capitalists would like us to believe that workers are just commodities, cost factors in the production process. They would also like us to believe that the essential nature of woman is to be bound to the family, the home and to produce children because this is advantageous to them. And Dalla Costa falls into his trap, as Margaret Benston and many others have done before her.

Yet if we examine womens' actual position within capitalist society, it is as clear that women have always worked in that they have always reproduced the labourer; and almost all women have worked at some period of their lives in the capitalist market. Also, images of woman as sexual objects with a sexuality, however distorted, divorced from reproduction, have been consistently used by capitalists in order to assist them to sell commodities. Thus women face a complex triple oppression, not analytically reducible to the single reference point of the home. Since the three types of oppression are partly contradictory, they can be utilised in ideology to weaken a woman's position in any one of them. For a woman working may feel she is neglecting her home, or accept poor pay and conditions because she feels she is filling time until the real job of home making begins, a woman in the home suffers from fears that she is no longer attractive (a sex object) to her husband, while a woman who utilises her physical attractiveness in capitalist terms is stigmatised as immoral. And so on. We have to deal with and oppose an oppression with multiple

aspects and while at one point in time or place, one aspect may seem predominant, our strategy in combating that oppression must surely inter-relate the struggles not to emphasize one, even if the most central one to the relative exclusion of the others. Perhaps the clearest case for this yet produced is Margaret Coulson's article in *International* no. 3, "Women's Liberation, Context and Potentialities," which has so far been largely neglected by the movement, and does not even appear in the latest anthology of British writings from the Women's movement. (*The Body Politic*).

Within the home, Dalla Costa is absolutely right to point out that a housewife and mother's position is only apparently isolated and that in fact she fills a crucial role for capitalism in the production of new labourers and the 'maintenance' of existing ones (though her work neither directly produces commodities nor surplus value). But although she is in fact firmly tied to the capitalist system as a whole, her isolation and economic dependence do create real problems of organisation not fully recognised by Dalla Costa. It is no accident that the parts of the pamphlet dealing with the organisation and demand relating to housewives are the vaguest. . Dalla Costa proposes several things that housewives ought to do, but there is nothing on how housewives will come to make such demands their own, and act upon them. Here again it can be argued that developing an understanding of their situation, and demystifying it may be easier where women are outside the home, in collectivities, at school or especially in work - though the movement has hardly turned its attention to the possibilities of working in relation to young women in schools. If the politics of work with women in industry is not confined to narrow economic demands such as equal pay, but if such demands are integrated into an understanding of why economic struggles are different for female than for male workers, a basis for reaching or maintaining relationships with women in the home can be developed. It is unfortunately also the case that because of their economic dependency, and because of the chauvinist attitudes of male workers, who often do not regard women as capable of understanding the issues, only the most class conscious women give full support in strike situations. It is in such situations that the women's movement can utilise the struggle to try and reach strikers wives, again integrating industrial and home based struggles. Such potentialities are not explored in the pamphlet.

Finally let this not be misconstrued into the idea that this means that I am suggesting that the solution for the subordination of women in the home is work in the capitalist market. Although as Dalla Costa herself points out, 'Observers have noted that Lancashire women, cotton workers for over a century are more sexually free and helped by men in domestic chores. On the other hand, in the Yorkshire coal mining districts where a low percentage of women worked outside the home, women are more dominated by the figure of the husband.' No-one in capitalism works from choice, and satisfaction in work forms an infinitesimal part of most workers jobs. Most people, including most women are forced to work in the capitalist market through economic pressure. You work because you get money for it and you need the money. It would be ludicrous to say to women that we can be liberated through work; but until the women's movement can provide an answer to the cash nexus involved in the decision to work, we have no right to try to stop women from working - and that requires a total revolutionary perspective, linking together all the dimensions of oppression that we face, and relating our struggle against them to a strategy for overthrowing the system as a whole. 'This ultimately is the dividing line between reformism and revolutionary politics within the women's movement', and it is the perspective within which we should evaluate Dalla Costa's contribution. I hope that we can have an ongoing discussion in *Socialist Woman*.

Rosalind Davis.

Marianosa Dalla Costa. "The politics of women & the subversion of the community." *Falling Wall* press 1972 25p.

earn their peak wages early in their careers. As a result, the union could no longer rely on the old methods of determining wages.

Workers' Evaluation?

Ken Gill went on to argue that the best way to deal with Job Evaluation was to use it in our own interests. We should preserve the unity of the membership by mutually agreeing on the relative value of our jobs, he said, so that, as union members, we could work out locally our own alternative evaluation and grading scheme to place before management, thus avoiding management evaluation.

Equality, he argued, was to be fought for within the framework of this design: we should fight for equal pay and training facilities for men and women and different age-groups within the same grade. This was fair because in deciding the relative value of the jobs, we should use the *analytical* method of job evaluation and only take into account factors such as educational background and the function of the job, as was already done by unions in bargaining. We would not use the 'factorisation' method which evaluated the individual, and not just the job, in terms of 'punctuality', 'cooperativeness', etc.

Repeating this theme that in the long run, what counted was muscle, Ken Gill said that in all circumstances, we should base ourselves on the *possible* at any particular time, and recognise there was no science or logic in levels of pay.

What's the difference?

One question which we felt Ken Gill's speech raised rather than answered was how union evaluation differed from management evaluation in its practical results (except that possibly the membership might feel more committed to helping the scheme through), since it was more than likely that the union members concerned would simply reproduce the 'unscientific' values and prejudices already represented within the existing job structure and within society in general. We felt that giving positive support to the principle of relative grading between workers could only unite the union members in disunity, since each was then committed to maintaining his or her difference from those on the next rung below (however 'unscientifically' that difference had been arrived at). The same dissatisfaction was expressed by other women members present, some of whom argued that Job Evaluation was used as a substitute for action, and said they resented being 'graded like eggs in a packing station'.

We also disagreed with the principle of arguing on the basis of 'value of work performed' which is implicit in any form of Job Evaluation. In an economic system where we cannot receive the full value of our labour power the only way we can argue on this question is in terms of our relative values from the boss's point of view - which is the last thing a leading trade unionist should be educating his members to worry about. The same idea, in the form of 'equal pay for work of equal value' also came up in Harriet Hopper's speech the next day.

Effects of a Job Evaluation scheme.

Harriet Hopper from the Engineering Section talked about Job Evaluation from the point of view of its immediate practical effects, since she had been involved in the introduction of a Job Evaluation scheme covering four Plessey factories in Sunderland and South Shields, where the vast majority of the workforce were women. A joint panel of management and union representatives had been set up to assess the relative values of the jobs and slot them into a total structure. Although Harriet said she felt 'a fair consensus' was arrived at in evaluating the jobs against each other, she was unhappy about the arbitrary way the final structure was arrived at, and about the fact that the union side made the mistake of not negotiating the rates first. She felt particularly strongly about the question of women's grade rates, since separate male and female basic rates were settled for, and she felt she had been let down by the union side in her fight to get the women's basic rate raised from £11.50 to £13, when the men's minimum was £15. (£12.50 was finally conceded). A solemn management/union undertaking to 'move towards equal pay' had come to nothing, which she also resented.



From some points of view, Harriet felt the Job Evaluation scheme had had useful effects: for one thing, the union was well-organised enough to be able to distort the grading structure via the appeals procedure, with the result that 'the company is in one heck of a mess'. Another effect had been to eliminate the individual favouritism current before, and it had also had the useful result of making women assess their skills and the work they did more objectively, where previously they had tended to undersell themselves. For example they were arguing for women classed as semi-skilled at the South Shields factory, who because of their experience could in fact do skilled work, to be paid as skilled.

Equal Pay

Harriet stated that from her experience, Job Evaluation was not a clearcut way to Equal Pay, but by extending what she had said about the good effects of making women conscious of their cash value as workers, and therefore more confident in their right to higher pay, she went on to argue for basing claims to equal pay on the profitability of the work performed. At Plesseys, for example, women could now even earn more than men, although they were only on 80% of the male rate, because of their high productivity.

We took this up in the question period by making the point that although the argument of 'equal pay for work of equal value' might produce results of a sort for highly productive engineering workers, it would be of little use to clerical workers or switchboard operators, for example, or for many of the other women members of the Technical Section of the AEUW, for that matter. What was generally agreed on, however, was the need for a national minimum wage which would provide a reasonable standard of living without depending on husbands, parents, etc.

Women's Theatre Group.

A successful feature of the school was the performance by the women's theatre group, the 'Punchin' Judies', of a play which highlighted some of the more blatant con-tricks where women are concerned, including the Equal Pay Act, women's double role as housewife and worker, and the attitude of the unions.

Women in Unions

On the basis of the discussion at the school, one point that immediately emerges is the need for all socialists in trade unions to be extremely clear about and conscious of the social and economic factors operating against women workers - to understand for example the way women's role in the family is used as an excuse to underpay them as workers, as well as making it more difficult for them to organise in unions; and the way in which the government and media can use the resulting conflict of interest to weaken the organisations of the working class.

As long as trade unionists (including many who would consider themselves socialists) go on talking about 'the women problem' in moral terms, or perhaps as an unfortunate psychological failing on the part of the ladies themselves, they are playing into the hands of the employers and government by hiding the fact that the problem lies in the structure of society and by

permitting the unions to reflect that structure instead of challenging it.

Socialist Woman has argued in past issues that one way in which the real nature of the problem can be recognised is by the increased active participation and organisation of women inside the trade unions. Although women represent only a tiny proportion of its membership TASS provides one example of the kind of organisation possible, on an official level, via its national and local women's sub-committees. These are set up 'to consider the particular interests of female members', and active rank-and-file participation in them by women members is possible and even encouraged. When such committees

exists, they should of course be developed and strengthened. In less politically conscious unions with a less democratic internal structure, unofficial and sporadic organisation around particular issues may be all that is possible at this stage.

However, not just in the interest of women trade unionists, but to increase the ability of the working class to organise as a whole against the attacks of the government and employers, it is important that any small beginnings made are preserved and extended throughout the trade union movement.

Felicity Trodd.

The group can be contacted via Barbara Hickmott, 64, Killick Street, London N.1.

TUC equal pay conference

The ostensible purpose of the TUC conference on equal pay in January, the first since 1968, was to discuss the recent report by the Office of Manpower Economics on the progress (and non-progress) towards equal pay, and for those directly involved in negotiating it to discuss the problems they had encountered. The unions were asked by the TUC's women's advisory committee to appoint delegates, and many sent full-time officers. One or two even sent their general secretary. The inevitable result was a virtual white wash of the miserable performance of practically every union on the equal pay question.

As one delegate, a woman deputy convenor from a large electronics factory, said to a reporter: "How could I criticise my union when the executive asked me to come here. They would never ask me to go anywhere again."

What really threw the conference off course was the frozen hand of the State. The Secretary of State for Employment had been invited to address the delegates, and the women's advisory committee had been hoping that he would announce his intention of using his powers under the Equal Pay Act to issue an order requiring women's rates to be brought up to 90 per cent of men's by the end of this year. Much of the energy of the TUC bureaucrats has been spent putting pressure on the Government to implement this clause.

Instead, Macmillan came along to announce what the Government had in mind for women workers under the second stage of its wage freeze. In order to encourage a "more orderly progression" towards equal pay, it would allow (not require) a reduction of the gap between men's and women's rates by one third in 1973. And Macmillan generously indicated that the £1 plus 4 per cent pay limit "could additionally be used to improve the wages of many low paid women in industry."

Chairwoman Audrey Prime, of NALGO, had earlier warned the delegates that they must treat the minister with the respect and decorum the TUC traditionally accords to all its speakers, and after his statement she led the applause. Sadly, many of the delegates joined in.

Neither the minister nor the TV cameras stayed to hear the next speaker, Christine Page, of USDAW, who said that she was sickened that he should have been allowed to address the conference at all, and to hear him say he was trying to help women towards equal pay when he had, for example, prevented women laundry workers receiving an additional 50p on a wage of £12.20 a week under the freeze.

Other speakers proceeded to unpack the package deal. Beryl Hufflingey, of the TGWU, pointed out that the Government was saying: "Divide the cake among yourselves. You women could have 3 per cent and the men 1 per cent". But we are not going to fight your battles for you. We have always said we want a levelling up not a levelling down, and this is another example of that policy. We have got to go on the offensive."

But the only action proposed by the delegates, principally by those who belong to the Communist Party, was to call on the TUC General Council to hold a special congress to step up the fight against the freeze. It was not necessary, of course, to recall the TUC to release the Pentonville 5, but none of the delegates suggested the organisation of independent action by the rank and file.

And while the few women militants at the conference are fighting difficult struggles in their factories and workplaces for equal pay, often against almost as much resistance from the union bureaucrats as from management, no one put forward a strategy for mobilising or even educating rank and file women workers on the issue. Even the TUC's pathetic guide to the Act has received very limited distribution.

There is still widespread fear among women workers that if their rates (not to mention their earnings) are ever brought in line with the men's they will be squeezed out of a job. As Sylvia Sabin, a shop steward in the GMWU, put it: "I speak to girls wherever I go—in grocery shops, Marks and Spencer, my bank, my insurance lady, and I'm trying to get round to see all the chambermaids in the hotel I'm staying at today. They're so afraid, because of their financial commitments, that somehow equal pay will cheat them out of something. No shop steward worth her salt would allow this to happen, but what will happen when these jobs go vacant?"

Relying on the Act would clearly be a policy of defeat. Quite apart from the fact that it is no substitute for struggle, its deficiencies are already making themselves apparent. The distinction between rates and earnings, for example, is crucial, a point which Charles Donnet, the GMWU's national officer for local government services, drove home at the conference: "We have sought to overcome the low pay situation in the local government sector by introducing a minimum earnings guarantee, so that men on a basic rate of £17.45 with no opportunity of increasing it by overtime or bonus earnings would have their earnings made up to £19 a week.

"But this opportunity was deliberately denied to women. When we sought to have it applied to them, the management told us the Equal Pay Act applied to basic rates, not earnings." Donnet didn't say that he suggested to his membership that they might care to reply to the management with their feet and low pay itself—which characterises the situation of women practically throughout industry and the services—was scarcely mentioned at the conference. According to the latest Government figures for the year ending April 1972, the average weekly earnings of full-time women manual workers were £16.6 compared with £32.1 for men.

Another key question is job evaluation schemes, by which under the terms of the Act, women can claim equal rates if their job has been given an equal value in an evaluation study. Where women are doing different jobs from men, as they frequently do, such schemes offer their main opportunity of benefiting from the Act, but as Betty Crawford, of the AUEW, correctly stated: "Evaluation", according to the dictionary, means to find the true value. Value to whom, the workers or the bosses? How many union officers are involved in the practical application of schemes they recommend to their members? The employers introduce job evaluation because they hope to reduce their costs, control wage payment, and get round equal pay by ranking the job that women do at the bottom of the pile. And for the unions it avoids action."

Action is precisely what the unions have managed to avoid, and conference of this kind do nothing to inform the rank and file of what the employers and the State have in store for them.

DECLINING INDUSTRIES AN INTERNATIONAL PROBLEM



INTERVIEW WITH A FRENCH TEXTILES MILITANT

Introduction

The problems faced by workers in declining industries is a subject we are becoming increasingly familiar with in Britain. Wages and conditions in such industries are often poor, and do not keep pace with more prosperous sections of the economy. The government of course, in only too eager to exploit the apparent division of interest this raises between different groups of workers,

The question will then be asked: "Is it worth my going on strike when I know that profits are low, and I might lose my job?"

Put in that way, there is no satisfactory answer; the reactions we have seen in Britain over the last year have all had their shortcomings. The leaders of the UCS workers tried hard to prove that really the industry could be profitable to the owners; some of the workforce kept their jobs, but at the expense of signing a punishing agreement which they are likely to regret. The women at the Fakenham leather factory (see *Socialist Woman* Summer 1972) took over and formed their own co-operative, setting an example of what can be achieved by determination and militancy; but as they themselves are the first to admit, "workers self-management" can only be a temporary, personal solution in a competitive market economy.

The movement in support of the dockers' fight to save their jobs was stopped before it had extended far enough to provide anything more than the most limited of guarantees to a very restricted section of the workforce.

We aren't attempting to provide a do-it-yourself instant solution here or to say that it is the duty of workers in such a situation to put their necks on the chopping-block; but just to argue that we can only work towards a solution as the problems of each section are recognised and taken up as the problems of all.

The sell-out of the Brannans strike (see *Socialist Woman*, Oct-Nov 1971) shows the particular relevance of this for traditionally imder-represented and isolated sections of the workforce such as women. Most recently, the Hospital Auxillary Workers—re-

cognising their own weakness—appealed for joint action against the freeze from other union members.

And the final object of such united action by the working class must be the only possible solution: the political and economic overthrow of this system and its replacement by one in which the working class controls society in its own interests.

The following interview with Mlle. Louise Dupont, a union militant in a small textile factory in a town near Toulouse, in the south of France, shows that these problems aren't restricted to Britain, and should warn us against such anti-internationalist "solutions" as that proposed last year by the TUC: turn back the clock and institute import protection measures against "foreign competition" in textiles. With Britain's entry to the common market we should instead be trying to organise joint action in defence of the interests of all European workers against the international bosses' alliance.

The Background

The area around Mlle. Dupont's town has traditionally been important for wool textiles since the Middle Ages, for various historical and geographical reasons—the sheep, the water, the infertile mountain regions where the peasants could not live off farming alone, and the large numbers of skilled Protestants in the region, who being forbidden State Office in the 16th and 17th centuries, turned to industry. The local discovery in 1851 of a method of soaking the wool off sheepskins instead of shearing became another important factory.

However, most recently the industry reached its peak in the early 1930s, and has been in decline since the Second World War, particularly under pressure of competition from the more prosperous North of France and from Italy. This decline, and the generally high unemployment of the region is part of a wider picture within France in the sense that the whole of the Languedoc area in the South has its own identity as an "under-developed area", and has its own "nationalists" who campaign against the Paris government for its policy of running down their industry in favour of the promotion of tourism.

However, the textile and associated industries are still the biggest local employers, accounting for about 7,000 of the 10,000–13,000 workers in Castres. A particular aspect of this is the high mortality rate of small concerns, following on a sudden rush after the War by everyone—“hairdressers and all”—to buy their own looms. Those forced out go to work in the factories or migrate to Paris; those remaining largely do sub-contracted work for the factories, as is the case with Mlle Dupont's brother. Most of the large firms remaining are locally-owned.

The factory where Mlle Dupont works employs about 60 workers—half of them men, half women—after a small start in 1956 with a total of 15. The factory's fancy sign and entrance hall are in contrast to the cramped and noisy conditions inside. Mlle. Dupont complains that the workers aren't even given the space to do their work efficiently. For example, there are no racks where the bobbins of wool can be classified according to colour and quality—it is a matter of lifting out heavy sacks or boxes from a heap each time to sort out the ones required.

Q. Could you say something about the condition in the factory?

“The boss likes to think of himself as enlightened; back at the beginning he would even lay on summer outings and feasts to keep us happy; but the workers have seen through it now. In fact pay and conditions are not at all good, and the management is always trying to save money at our expense. For example, they have introduced new machinery—one loom at double the normal width and some high-speed machines which need far more attention to mend and change the thread more often, as well as being very noisy. But we don't get paid any more. When we complained, the boss said he would perhaps pay more if productivity increased, but we never get further than ‘perhaps’. The staff need a lift too, with the increased work running up and down stairs. The management agrees we should have one, but says the firm can't afford it, so we must walk.” (The goods lift has a big notice forbidding personnel to use it.)

“The weavers are paid more than the others because of their high productivity, but it means they are slaves to the machine; there is no chance to look around, and they are forbidden to talk (though they break this rule as much as they can). We consider ourselves grossly under-staffed here with 6 looms to tend each, and we can't cover if anyone is off; but in some factories they even increase this to 11 or 12 looms per worker. The strains this imposes, and the fact that the new machines have to be kept running at night, means that more men are taking over the weaving process now.

Other work, such as the rectification process, picking out the imperfections from the woven cloth, is considered women's work; it is clean, but very tedious and also tiring. It is a skilled job—it needs 3 years' training in all—but this is not recognised in the pay, and this is something which the union is taking up.

“Other problems are the industrial hazards; for example, the noise of the looms—we all become deaf. You can't wear ear-plugs because of security and communication difficulties. And the fact that the looms are on the first floor should be illegal, as the vibration is very bad for the female organs. The factory security committee should look after this by law, but of course they get round it.

“There are three shifts a day, with extra pay for nights. Most of the women here are married and prefer the morning or afternoon half-day shift, from 5 to 12 or 12 to 7. They have to make their own arrangements for their children, so women with several young children generally don't work; but one woman here works the opposite shift to her mother to solve the problem of who looks after the children, in other cases, women work the opposite shift to their husband.”

Q. Can you tell us something about union organisation here?

“Well, the way it was introduced was rather surprising—people weren't thinking about unions at all. Then one fine day the boss went to a meeting of the *Centre des Jeunes Patrons* a bosses' association—and they were discussing unions. The Head of Staff had told him I was a trade unionist, and he got the idea that I was a workers' delegate. So he called me in to see if he could use me to start a boss's union, and said I could be union delegate.” (The French union system is somewhat idfferent from the



British—you have the *workers delegate*, rather like a shop steward who represents the workers to the boss, and is elected by all the workers, even non-union ones, and the *union delegate*, who represents the union to the workers and boss. In practice, it's often the same person.)

“So I called a meeting of the workers, right in front of the boss, and I told them that it had always been the unions who'd ever won any rights for the workers, and it was up to the workers to pick their delegates—not the boss. We ended up with over 50% unionisation, which is considered high here—mostly in the CFDT but a few in the CGT. These are the two biggest of the 3 main unions in France. The third is the CGT-FO, which split from the CGT after the war in opposition to the CGT's Communist leadership. The CGT-FO is a staff rather than workers' union, and is especially strong in the Post Office. There are also two very small unions: the CFTC (Christian Federation) which split from the CFDT and represents about 5% of unionised workers; and a small fascist union, the CFT, which is not recognised by the government and represents about 1% of unionised workers. The CFT is strong in particular factories such as Citroen and Simca, and also in supermarkets. French unions are more like general unions than the craft or industrial unions more common in Britain.

“Then we had some trouble with the factory committee. These committees were set up by De Gaulle, with representatives from management and unions—the committee president is always the boss, of course. The idea is to get the workers to ‘participate’, to avoid disputes. Some of the delegates were confused by this; they thought that by talking nicely to the boss on this committee, they could get more out of him than by being caught between boss and workers as workers' delegates. They soon found out otherwise. But what happens more often is that we caucus before the meetings and just put up the same demands that we've already put up at our regular monthly meetings with management and get our bargaining done in both places. The boss complains that we've got the wrong idea, and tries to keep them separate. So really the scheme's backfired for them.

“But it's still an uphill struggle. Most of the women just don't have time to be active—though five of the delegates are women—and people are afraid of unemployment. Even if we went on strike, we'd have trouble to maintain it. But things are changing slowly: one of the biggest factories round here went on strike for 25c some years ago. They only got 5c. in the end, but that's not the point—the important thing was the opening up of the spirit.

We take part in national and regional strikes called by the union, and the events in 1968 had an effect—some people became more militant and some less, but we came out on strike for three weeks. With the general change in the industry too, the workers are becoming more conscious. They go to technical schools now, instead of serving apprenticeships, and they're beginning to think in terms of conditions instead of just money.

“The most recent event is a small illustration. We don't have any union facilities here—not even a notice board. So when the delegates wanted to call a meeting, we struck the notice on the clocking-in board. The next thing we knew was that we each got a letter from the Boss saying that if we did such a thing again without permission, we'd be out. So now we're fighting for our notice-board, and we'll go on till we get it.” (Since the interview the boss has agreed to supply the notice boards).

Interviewed by Marilyn Scotcher

FIRST WOMAN INTERNED!



Free Liz McKee and all other internees

As the fanfare for Europe began to sound in the New Year, 19 year-old Liz McKee from Andersonstown, Belfast was arrested by the British Army. She later achieved the unenviable distinction of being the first woman to be interned in Ireland during the present struggle.

Liz McKee has been charged with no crime for which she could be convicted in an open court. Instead, the paraphernalia of Whitelaw's Gauleiter Courts, with Special Branch men and police spies hidden behind curtains, giving hearsay evidence on which they cannot be cross-questioned, will be used to get her behind bars.

Liz McKee was an active member of the Andersonstown community helping victims of Loyalist pogroms and British Army raids, leading the women 'sisters' who warn the community of an impending British Army attack - she was once threatened with shooting by a member of the Royal Artillery Regiment for this.

The British tactic of killing the IRA by kindness to the Catholics, as part of their overall strategy of imposing a British solution on Ireland, is in shambles. Repression has been mounting steadily against those sections of the population who want to break from British imperialism, and especially in Andersonstown, which as Bernadette Devlin has said, is as brutally occupied as was Warsaw during the second World War. Its aim is to crush the will of the people to resist.

That this has failed, that people are still prepared to confront the Army on the streets, to refuse to pay rents, and to support the IRA in its military campaign, continues to prevent British imperialism from imposing its solution on Ireland.

Liz McKee's 'crime' against British imperialism was that her activity was contributing to maintain the morale of the nationalist population.

Her arrest has been condemned by the whole anti-Unionist population in the North, and has brought a stream of protests from local people and organisations, including a 1,000 strong march by women from Andersonstown.

The support shown by British supporters of the Irish struggle is crucial to the outcome of that struggle, for it has a direct effect on the morale of the anti-imperialist population.

The arrest of Liz McKee must be condemned. But this can only be effective as part of an on-going solidarity campaign against British imperialism, which takes as its starting point the right of the Irish people to self-determination.

Such a movement, the Anti-Internment League, exists in Britain, to mobilise the maximum number of forces in solidarity with the Irish struggle. It has branches throughout Scotland, Wales and England, and can be contacted at, 37, Gordon Mansions, Torrington Place, London W.C.1.





mother jones with the miners children.

MOTHER JONES

One of the most forceful and picturesque fighters in American labour was Mary Harris Jones, who from the 1870's until her death in 1930 at age 100 became known as Mother Jones. Born in 1830 in Cork, she moved with her family to Toronto, where she was educated in normal schools, and for a short time became a teacher in Monroe, Michigan. She soon gave this up and became a seamstress, for, as she said, "Sewing is better than bossing little children". By 1861 she had married, moved to Memphis, and was in the process of bearing four children. Her husband, a staunch member of the Iron Moulders' Union, imbued her with much of the union consciousness that was to direct her life—and the bosses did the rest. In 1867, her entire family died in an epidemic of yellow fever, and "before the deaths cart carried them away" she had obtained a permit and was nursing the other sick in Memphis who were not rich enough to have moved away to avoid the plague. "This I did until the plague was stamped out".

Again eking out a living as a seamstress, she spent the years from 1867 to the 1870's in Chicago, attending meetings of the Knights of Labour and organizing with them. As the Knights were still meeting in secret, little is known of her precise activities, but in 1877 she was well enough known in labour circles to have been called by striking railroad workers in Pittsburgh to come to their aid. During the strike, the owners, in order to turn public opinion against the strikers, set fire to more than 100 of their own railroad cars. Government troops were called out. In one night of fiery flames and steel bayonets many workers died, and Mother Jones later recalled, "I learned then and there that labour must bear the cross for others' sins and must be the vicarious sufferer for the sins of others."

Women and the Vote

Her lack of involvement with the feminist movement of her own time flowed from her union consciousness and her own brand of socialism. Her view that: "you don't need a vote to raise hell", turned many feminists away from her. At one meeting in New York in 1913, where she chided feminists for thinking the vote would bring "Kingdom-come", they accused her of being "anti," to which she replied, "I'm not anti anything which will bring freedom to my class. The women of Colorado have had the vote for two generations, and working men and women are still in slavery." She said another time, "organized labour should organize its women along industrial lines. The plutocrats have organized their women, and keep them busy with suffrage and prohibition and charity". Our present struggle is testimony to the correctness of her views, for the vote did little to ensure women workers the dignity and equality on the job, or in society generally, for which they must now fight.

Non-violent Tactics

This experience impressed upon her the need for workers' organisations and discipline among the workers—a discipline which imposed education and reason over violence as a tactic in winning labour struggles. Her advocacy of non-violent pressure became characteristic of her tactics in later struggles, and was certainly molded by her experience in Pittsburgh and the Haymarket Massacre of 1886. In addition to this she recognised the importance of mobilising community support for workers'

struggles. For example in a Miner's strike lasting many months, in Annot Pennsylvania, she not only organised an army of women to keep scabs away from the mines, but also went into the surrounding countryside and held meetings among the farmers and won them to the side of the strike."

The primary organising tactic she perfected was highlighted by marching women with brooms and pans as a challenge to scabs and encouragement to join the union. One of the most famous of these marches occurred in Pennsylvania in 1900, where in the Hazelton district more than 150,000 miners were on strike. In one town where she was forced to speak in an open field as the priest was speaking in church, calling miners "children of darkness" and exhorting them to "obey their masters and take their reward in heaven," she responded, "Boys, this strike is called in order that you and your wives and your little ones may get a bit of heaven before you die." The strike vote was unanimous. Here she learned of a camp 15 miles away across the mountains called Coaldale, where Government troops were blocking the area to keep organisers out and prevent the strike from spreading. She went to the women of the area, asking them to help her, and proposed that they marched to Coaldale to spread the word. Three thousand women marched the 15 miles with their brooms and pans, the last mile taking more than 2 hours as they moved through the Government troops. In the morning when the miners woke, they were greeted by the women banging their pans and yelling, "Join the Union, Join the Union". More than 5,000 joined that day, and, according to Mother Jones, "When there was nothing left to organise we marched back across the mountain singing."

Her broom brigade was used again successfully in Colorado, near the scene of the Ludlow massacre, where hundreds of miners and their families had been murdered by Rockefeller nightraiders. Scabs had been brought in, guarded by Government troops, to protect the Rockefeller mines and break the strike. Again she organised the women, who marched to the mine entrance with their brooms, chasing the scabs away, sometimes with a tap or two from the blunt end of the broom. In 1910 in Greensburg, Pa., her entire broom brigade was arrested for disturbing the peace. Upon the advice of Mother Jones, the women went to jail, taking their babies with them, and day and night sang songs amid the wailing of the babies. The complaints of sleeplessness were so numerous among the townspeople that the Sheriff was finally forced to implore the judge to release all the women.

Maimed Children

Her fight for better working conditions for children was well known, and she appeared before many investigating committees, bringing the maimed children with her as evidence of her plight. Her march tactic was employed in this arena again in Pennsylvania in 1903. In a strike in the Kensington district among millworkers, of more than 75,000 strikers 10,000 were children. When enquiring at the local paper why the working conditions of the children were not being publicised, she was told that the mill-owners had stock in the newspaper. "Well I have stock in these children," she said; and "borrowing" them from their parents, she gathered a band to march for ten days as far as Hoboken, raising money for the strikers and calling attention

to the inadequacy of child labour protection. This march was successful in amending Pennsylvania work laws for children from 12 to 14.

Rank & File Unity

She fought also against the union bureaucrats and for the unity of rank and file working people. This was exemplified in the 1903 miners strike when union leaders tried—and eventually succeeded—to send the northern miners back to work before the demands—for 8 hour day, for payment in money instead of tokens etc) by the Colorado miners had been won.

On hearing that John Mitchell, President of the union wanted the northern miners to go back she said:—"I am going to tell you that if God almighty wants this strike called off for his benefit and not for the miners, I am going to raise my voice against it. And as to President John paying me.....he never paid me a penny in his life. It is the hard earned nickles and dimes of the miners that pay me, and it is their interests that I am going to serve."

And speaking to the northern miners:- "You have a common enemy and it is your duty to fight to a finish. The enemy tries to conquer by dividing your ranks, by making distinctions between north and south, between American and foreign. You are all miners, fighting a common cause, a common master. The iron hand feels the same to all flesh. Hunger and suffering and the cause of your children bind more closely than a common tongue. I am accused of helping the Western Federation of Miners, as if that were a crime, by one of the National Board members. I plead guilty. I know no East or West, North nor South when it comes to my class fighting the battle for justice. It is my fortune to live to see the industrial chain broken from every working man's child in America, and if then there is one black child in Africa in bondage, there shall I go."

Mother Jones exemplified the period in which she lived and worked. She had a completely developed union consciousness, and although she called herself a socialist, she never affiliated with political parties. Often speaking on behalf of Debs, promoting his candidacy and defending the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World). from the slanderous attacks against them, she devoted her entire being to promoting union consciousness and building workers' organisations. Heroic as her efforts were, her consciousness never went beyond



union building as a solution to workers' problems and pressure on Government politicians as the end of her political aims.

Margaret Coulson

(Source and quotes: *The autobiography of Mother Jones* Chas. H. Kerr & Co., Chicago 1925—reprinted 1972).

FIRST CLEANERS' TRADE UNION BRANCH FORMED.

On December 12th, 1972 an historic meeting took place in London to set up the first London Transport and General Workers' Union branch for cleaners.

The Secretary and Chairman of the branch have been appointed. They are Secretary: May Hobbs and Chairman: Jean Mormont.

The Branch Committee has not yet been formed and the Branch Secretary requests that cleaners who are members of the T.G.W.U. and would like to be considered for membership of the Committee should get in touch with her. (May Hobbs, 13, Middle Lane, London N.8. Tel: 348 3594)

This is the first cleaners' branch to be formed anywhere and which we heartily welcome. We feel sure that organisational problems are now well on the way to being defeated with the formation of our own branch and we hope that proper use will be made of the machinery we now have.

INTERNATIONAL WOMENS DAY



At various different times in history, women have used their economic power as consumers to fight rising prices; thus, at the time when bread prices rose to ever new heights during the 1840's, women way-laid farmers on their way to market and made them sell the grain at reasonable prices. The introduction of early capitalism, meant that both women and men were the producers of commodities, and women early learnt to use their economic strength in this field too - the earliest strike of women workers is recorded in the 1750's.

However, working women's economic strength remained comparatively weak as did their political strength, and this led to them concentrating on trying to get the vote and other bougeois rights. Even where women began to get the vote, it was often based on property rights, and this led to American socialist women organising working women to fight for the vote, leading to the first women's day on February, 28th 1907. The second International Conference of Socialist Woman called for 19th March to be made International Woman's Day as from 1911. In Russia, under the old calendar, 23rd February (now March 8th) was Working Women's Day.

Demonstration
Saturday March 10th
International Womens Day

4th NATIONAL WOMENS LIBERATION CONFERENCE

The fourth National Women's Liberation Conference held in London in early November was the most significant since the first conference at Ruskin which set up the W.N.C.C. It was the largest with 1,700 women attending and the most positive politically. The women's liberation movement although never homogenous, has been through even a greater period of disintegration and confusion since the conference at Skegness. Most groups have been content in 'doing their own thing' with the only attempt at co-ordination at the bi-annual conferences, the only national event of any significance. The latest conference represents a new development in the movement. Women are now prepared to recognise that personal liberation is not possible without a total transformation fo society. No revolution without women's liberation, no women's liberation without revolution encapsulated the mood of the conference. Discussion therefore at the conference centred on the relationship of WLM to the trade union movement and to left wing groups. We have yet to see whether this discussion will carry forward into co-ordinated action.

It was in this atmosphere that Selma James' pamphlet 'Women and the Trade Unions' was discussed and rejected. However the pamphlet had the positive effect of stimulating political discussion so lacking throughout the movement. The

resolutions passed at the end of the conference effected the significant political development of the movement. A speaker from the official wing of the IRA calling for immediate withdrawal of British Troops was passed with a large majority. Other contributions included a speaker from the Indo-China Committee and an aboriginal woman who discussed the problems of her oppressed race.

Two future important schools have been arranged. One on 'Women's Liberation and the Trade Unions' called by the Bristol Women's Lib group and IMG comrades who wrote the pamphlet 'The Choice before us'. The purpose of this school is to co-ordinate activities within unions around such issues as equal pay and to set up inter-union women's committees. The second school in early February is on 'Sexism and Capitalism'. Obviously the movement has not yet found a new coherent policy of future aims but I think a step in the right direction has been taken for the more positive political development of the WLM which might lead once more to a more meaningful organisational development.

Wanda Maciuszko.

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TAILORS & GARMENT WORKERS UNITE

Women & the Bill

LETTER FROM HELEN KELLER TO THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT
TELEPHONISTS ON STRIKE

Kate Millet: Sexual Politics

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Lancaster Cleaners Strike

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

by Alexandra Kollontai



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THE SOCIALIST WOMAN CONFERENCE

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