

SOCIALIST WOMAN

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SPECIAL NOTICE

As our readers will be aware, the cost of paper has soared recently. However, we have been able to hold the price of this issue to 10p even though it is our largest issue ever, with 24 pages. This is because our circulation has been growing, so we can take the opportunity to double our print order. We cannot promise to maintain the price, however. We want to return as soon as possible to six issues a year. Both these factors make it imperative that we maintain an increasing circulation.

That is why we ask all our readers to consider taking a bulk order, selling it in their women's group, college, etc. and on demonstrations. This would ensure that any price rises would be delayed as long as possible and kept to a minimum.

One thing we cannot control is the cost of postage and we must increase subscription costs from this issue.

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ABORTION: THE STRUGGLE MUST CONTINUE

SPUC, the leading anti-abortion group, is presently conducting a massive 'write-in campaign' to Barbara Castle and MPs, calling on them to reject the Lane Commission and to vote against abortion when the issue comes up again. After the last election, SPUC called on its supporters to join the parties whose candidates had come out against abortion - regardless of what other views might be held! It is essential that their campaign is countered. That National Ad-Hoc Committee Against SPUC, is producing pre-printed postcards to the DHSS and letters to be sent to MPs. Organise write-ins now! Write to NACAS, 54 Pinner Rd Harrow, for details. Groups must also organise their local campaigns, as SPUC is stepping up its propaganda amongst GPs and schools.

cover pic - John Sturrock Report

As a result of a campaign which involved the Women on Ireland Collective and others in the women's movement in vigils, demonstrations etc, the Price sisters have come off their hunger strike because, it is believed, the Home Secretary has

agreed to them going back to Ireland to serve the rest of their sentence. If this promise is to be made good, it will be necessary to keep up the campaign: to ensure that the sister torture at the hands of the force-feeders was not in vain.



Dolours Price



Marion Price

HUNGER STRIKERS 1974

Women: Key participants in the class struggle

Women workers experience the attack on the working class' living standards in a particularly acute way: they are paid as if they belong to a family unit, receiving 50% of the male rate on average. Yet one out of five households in Britain are headed by one-parent families - mainly women! The economic crisis faced by women workers has forced them on several recent occasions to take notice of the discrepancies in pay between themselves and male workers. At the Lenthalic/Morly factory for example, the shop steward told *Socialist Woman* that they decided to strike in the first place because they found it impossible to cope on their wages, with the rising prices.

However, increasing numbers of strikes to keep up with inflation are neither realistic nor adequate. A sliding scale of wages - so that any increase in the cost of living is matched with an automatic increase in wages - is a demand discussed by several organising committees of the nurses' struggle and one which workers are increasingly realising the importance of - especially as struggles over threshold agreements are spreading. (See the Nottingham Prices campaign article.)

Because all of the major wage claims have been settled and won't be re-negotiated until the autumn, struggles erupting within the next few months will be on a local level. Women will be important participants in these struggles - they will often be spurred into action first simply because their situation becomes intolerable or else because they are forced to defend their jobs in the next wave of redundancies. In the past, women have always been the first to be laid off where they do jobs similar to men's.

The International Marxist Group recognises the importance of any actions taken by women in the next few months. Because women are the weak link in the bureaucracy's hold over the working class, they will be one important group to levy the first challenge to the Social Compact - to challenge the idea that demands to maintain the working class living standards should be shelved while the Labour government is in office.

Any struggles erupting will set the pace for the upsurges when the big battalions of the labour movement put in their claims. However, the capacity of women to play a full role in these struggles will be limited due to specific problems they confront. The organisations of the working class must begin to tackle the oppression of women in an immediate way. For example, the women workers who participated in the occupation at MacLarens' in Glasgow could only play a limited role in the struggle owing to a lack of child care facilities.

The Working Womens' Charter Campaign

One of the most important things about the Charter is that it raises issues such as child-care and contraception and abortion on the understanding that a fight at the place of work will never be adequate or successful unless a whole series of other problems confronting women are tackled.

The campaign can be developed in two ways - first, it can open a debate within the trade union movement on questions such as child-care which are not normally tackled by trade unions, but have been fully debated within the women's movement. Secondly, it can group together women (and men!) trade unionists, those not yet unionised, women's liberation groups, etc. so that any struggle that breaks out involving women workers will have ready support. In addition, any gains won during disputes will make a qualitative impact on the struggles coming in the winter and spring months. These gains and experiences must be shared by the working class.

Despite concession made by the Labour government, these are not adequate to solve the economic needs of women nor will they tempt women to call off their struggles. On the contrary, because of the particularly acute oppression women workers face, it will be women who will often be in the forefront of struggles in the coming months. Women workers will provide a lesson for other workers - that all workers must rely on their own capacity to struggle, rather

than on promises and the initiatives of the Government.

Some women in the women's liberation movement no doubt heaved a sigh of relief with the election of the Labour government. Gone were the tax-credit and anti-discrimination proposals - and instead, an anti-discrimination board, increased married women's student grants, food subsidies and the implementation of the Equal Pay Act were all immediate prospects!

Certainly the election of the Labour government was a victory for the working class - the determination of the miners to continue their struggle in the face of an escalating offensive was a decisive step in kicking out the Tories.

But what is the Labour government up to now? Since its election, the Government has been frantically working out a Social Compact with the bureaucracy of the trade unions. This is Labour's answer to the continuing economic problems.

With a rate of inflation that is one of the highest in Europe, and with the balance of payments deficit now estimated to be £5000 million, the ruling class cannot afford to make any major concessions. Neither wage claims necessary to keep up with the galloping inflation or increases in social expenditure to meet the growing crisis in education, housing, and the health services are on the agenda.

Under the Tories, the ruling class first tried to meet the working class head on - conspiracy charges were laid against 24 Shrewsbury building workers, and the Industrial Relations Act and the pay laws were enacted. The Labour government - which claims to have the interests of the working class at heart - is using its influence in the ranks of the working class to dampen any trade union militancy.

Women and the Trade Union Bureaucracy

The trade union bureaucracy has never showed much concern for the interests of its female members. Now, the one thing they are concerned with - the Social Compact - will make them even less willing to take up demands made by weaker sections of workers, unless they are absolutely forced to do so.

On the other hand, the ruling class will have no hesitation to move against these weaker sections of the working class - students, women and blacks are all the potential subjects of vicious attacks. These groups will be used to teach the working class that industrial action won't be tolerated. The arrests and harassment of the black workers on strike at Imperial Typewriters are clear examples of this tactic. (See the interview with women workers on strike at this Leicester firm).

So the weaker sections of the working class - an important group being working class women - will be hit from two sides: the ruling class and the trade union bureaucracy.

However, the majority of women are not in trade unions anyway. And although women are joining unions presently at twice the rate of men, they are rarely integrated into the life and structures of the union in the same way as are men. As a result, they are often not as responsive to directives given by the trade union leadership and are potentially open to new, highly militant forms of struggle.

The nurses' struggle is an excellent example of this militancy: the leadership of COHSE, NUPE, and to a lesser extent the RCN, are being pushed along in an attempt to keep up with the activities and demands of the rank and file. Many initiatives taken by nurses are almost unheard of amongst the more strongly organised sections of the trade union movement. For example, it would be a rare occasion if the engineers told their leadership to get lost and organised a sit-down in the street to protest against bureaucratic manoeuvring. Yet this is what happened with the Manchester nurses!

But there are also dangers arising from the lack of trade union experience among women - they are also open to individual rather than collective forms of struggle, for instance. Once again, in the case of the nurses, one of the first tactics announced on a national scale by the Royal College of Nursing was the call to withdraw from the NHS and join agencies.

NURSES: A SUITABLE CASE FOR ACTION

Sue Spilling, a community nurse, describes the background to the present struggle and the tasks facing militants

The struggle of the nurses and other hospital workers is not just about pay and conditions. It is about the future of the Health Service and about how resources in our society should be allocated: to make profits or to provide services.

The health service originated in the first place because a healthy workforce was necessary as the stresses of modern industry mounted. At a time of full employment, it was crucial that every work was quickly re-habilitated if injured. The demands of the working class helped to ensure the establishment of the NHS.

Due to medical advances, more and more resources are now allocated to treating those who will never be returned to full-time production. With increasing unemployment on the agenda, now a proper functioning of the NHS is not as crucial as it was in post-1945: injured workers can be easily replaced from the pool of unemployed workers.

The working class remains unaware of the dangers in this situation. True, there have been sporadic struggles in the past - over health service charges, for instance - and it should be remembered that these were first introduced by a Labour government. More recently, as a result of the Briggs report nurses training will be crammed into two years. On April 1st the Health Service was reorganised - a simple exercise in rationalisation in an attempt to make the most of inadequate resources. The Tory government cut spending in all areas of social expenditure to the tune of £111 million in the case of the NHS. Yet their rich supporters continue to swell the coffers of the various companies offering private insurance schemes. And the drug companies grow fatter on the sales of millions of pounds worth of drugs - often of dubious value. Private nursing agencies abound. Someone, somewhere, is making plenty out of others' misery!

Rationalisation means, among other things, a quicker turnover of patients. This makes more work for nurses and it places on the family the responsibility for after-care. (And we can guess who in the family bears the brunt of this responsibility). At all three stages of the wage-freeze, the low-paid in the health service - not only nurses, but also auxiliary workers - have been left with even further deterioration in their pay and conditions.

Many nurses do not understand the need to join trade unions and are confused by the role of the RCN. Because in the past there has been no fight over pay and conditions, nurses have left the service. The tragic situation has developed whereby that which the nurses claim to worry most about - the care of their patients - is being threatened precisely by the professionalism to which they stick.

The unsociable hours force many married women to leave once trained, and to resume nursing on only a part-time basis. Part-time workers as experience has shown time and again are very difficult to organise. So those now struggling to organise nurses have to contend with an industry largely female, imbued with false ideas about professionalism, and with many part-timers.

Increasing numbers of men are now entering the profession,

especially in psychiatric nursing. Men are increasingly taking posts of responsibility in what was one of the few professions where women could advance. The fact that few hospitals have child-care facilities for their staff means that in practice women do not have equal opportunity.

The struggle of the nurses is complex. They are not the only ones with wage claims in. Other medical staff (radiographers, physiotherapists, etc.) have also put in claims. The groups are, on the whole, even less well organised than the nurses.

The large numbers of immigrant workers in the hospitals are a potential weak spot in the necessary unified struggle. Under the racist Immigration Act, militancy can result in deportation. Worried about their work permits being withdrawn some black hospital workers have signed statements that they will not take part in actions. On the other hand, black nurses to be much more militant - they are not so strongly enamoured of the idea of professionalism.

Perhaps the biggest problem is the nature of the work. The problems facing nurses who are being asked to leave their patients in order to take part in actions cannot be avoided. This difficulty highlights the importance of partial actions - refusing to do non-nursing duties, cutting out non-urgent operations, and above all, refusing to allow any new private patients. But *not* must determine who are urgent cases, otherwise private patients could easily afford to given consultants back-handers to get in as 'urgent'.

In addition, short strikes will give nurses free time to go to factories, building sites, rail depots, garages, docks, and markets, to get support *and* action from key sections of the working class - those with economic power. This is vital, not only because nurses do not wage economic power themselves, but also because it is not just the livelihood of a section of workers that is at stake. It is the whole future of the health service. The nurses have the facts which they must take to the rest of the working class.

If nurses are not to remain among the lowest paid workers, two things are extremely important. First, on the wages front a sliding-scale must be fought for to ensure that any increase in living costs is matched by an automatic increase in wages. Second, a whole debate about social expenditure and the priorities in our society must be opened within the labour movement.

Barbara Castle's enquiry is clearly an attempt to prevent militancy developing and to stop the wave of sympathetic action on the part of other workers. So far, it has not been successful in dampening the struggle of the nurses. Now it is even more important that unionisation efforts are stepped up, that joint-shop stewards committees are elected in each hospital, and that each hospital makes links with other hospitals in the locality. Should the enquiry be totally unacceptable, organisation must exist to launch an immediate, intensive response.

We need support, not just sympathy, and we need help'

INTERVIEW WITH STUDENT NURSES AT NORTHWICK PARK HOSPITAL, HARROW

How many hours do you work?

Officially 40 hours a week, not including meal breaks, but we often have to work longer. We can work eight, nine, ten days in a row, then we get four days off.

What is your training like?

At our hospital we get all our theoretical training in the first two years, the final year is mostly practical ward management. After two months theoretical introduction, we get allocated to wards for about 8-9 weeks at a time. We get another 3-4 months during our first year when we go to the nursing school. Everything is crammed in. The exams are getting harder, but we just don't get enough time to do our theory. When you're on the wards, the sisters and staff nurses are too rushed to train you, and you get too tired to study after work.

What about pay?

We're left with between £10-12 after paying for our residences. As your pay goes up during the three years, the percentage taken off for residence goes up. When we got our rise in April - about £2.00 a week - our laundry charges went up £5.00 a year and residence goes up. So we'll get about 30-40p a week out of it.

What do you think about the RCN's proposals to resign and join agencies?

Well, it will split the nurses, because if students resign, that's it - we won't get taken back, and only qualified nurses can join agencies. It's a mad idea - we haven't even considered it in this hospital.

What are conditions like here?

This is one of the newest and best equipped hospitals in the country. We're attached to a research centre. The most militant nurses are those who've worked elsewhere and are aware of the general difficulties. And we have enough cleaners, too, so we don't do many non-nursing duties. We're really lucky here. Our rooms aren't bad, too, although there are petty restrictions. We can't have visitors after 11.30, which with the hours we work doesn't leave us any time for entertaining some days. The canteen food is horrible, so most of us cook our own. Although as students we don't have too much night work - less than in many hospitals - our hours are unsociable. And we often - as first year nurses - get left alone, especially during supper. But the main complaint is that we're treated like shit - lots of petty rules, no recognition of how hard we work, treated like kids although we are dealing with life and death. We like nursing but not the conditions or the money.

How did the struggle start in this hospital?

What sparked it off was the TV programmes on agency nurses, which really brought home to a lot of us how conditions are deteriorating. The problem is that the struggle stems from a few individuals who've either worked outside nursing or are otherwise aware of how badly off we are. The others are content to leave it to the activists and say they didn't come into nursing for the money. Only about 75 out of 400 hundred attended the meetings. Nurses are not union minded and the

arguments between the unions don't help. At our first meeting to elect an action committee, a row broke out between NUPE and COHSE officials, which really pissed some of the nurses off. We've joined NUPE because in this hospital they organise auxiliary workers, too. It's our first experience of anything like this - we don't quite know how to go about things. But we must get unionised - that's vital. Here, because of their good conditions, most nurses don't see that we are also fighting for the future of the NHS, but as the struggle spreads, hopefully they will realise that is what is at stake.

Have you discussed withdrawing care from private patients?

They make a lot of extra work for us and take us away from looking after others. The main advantage for them is being able to jump the queue, and having us at their beck and call. You have to pander to them, but don't get anything extra for it. We got support for that proposal at our mass meeting. We're against private patients being in NHS hospitals at all.

What about the attitude of patients?

They want us to be militant, they're right behind us, because they can see how hard we have to work. A lot of them are trade unionists, of course. Their support in any action we take would be vital.

How was the action committee set up?

First, by some second year nurses taking the RCN petition round. They were asked to call a mass meeting so that the RCN could talk to the nurses. Meanwhile, we independently called a mass meeting - we put posters up all over the place, because we wanted to find out what the nurses wanted. The first meeting was a disaster, and most of the committee were not those who had been doing any of the work. We had another one without the officials, and we've got a better committee now. But the men on it try to impose their will. I think half the trouble is that women are too used to taking orders from men.

It's a real problem, because unless we get nurses to join unions, we can't expect other unions to support us. And without an all-out strike by unions with economic power, we can't win. We need support, not just sympathy, and we need help.



UNIONS AND HOUSEWIVES: the road from Cowley



'Wives of workers are not for the most part members of a union, but they are vitally concerned with trade union struggles.... So unions must take definite steps to involve the families of their members in support of struggles'

Mrs. Miller's 'wives' revolt' at Cowley, Oxford earlier this year dramatically drew attention to the position of women whose husbands are involved in industrial disputes. The episode got a great deal of publicity and was widely discussed, but amidst many misconceptions. We must examine the situation that gave rise to such a situation and its implications for both the women's movement and for active trade unionists.

British Leyland On the Offensive

The back-cloth to the situation is the alienation of many workers in the British Leyland Assembly Plant at Cowley from their union leadership. Three years ago the Company imposed the 'Measured Day Work' system of payment on the workers after defeating a long strike.

Over the past few years the Company has succeeded in holding down the level of wage increases. Car workers' wages are falling below those in many outside jobs. With spiralling costs, particularly of housing in the Oxford area, few families can save anything on a car worker's wage. But while the demand for cars was booming the Company could not afford the confrontation necessary to take on the work-force and get full control of the shop-floor - the other aim of Measured Day Work.

In recent years, with all bargaining over money removed from the shop-floor to annual negotiations, workers have been shut-out repeatedly as a result of sectional disputes. The workers get no pay when laid-off from the factory. As a result of this repeated loss of earnings, many workers egged on by management and press propaganda, blame trade union militancy and the left-wing union leadership for their declining living standards.

This year, with a decline of about 30% in demand for cars, British Leyland has been prepared to go to greater lengths to destroy shop-floor resistance. British Leyland wants to make the workers pay for their crisis of profitability. Taking advantage of the weakness of the workers' bargaining position during and just after the three-day week, the Company has systematically broken a total of four of the factory agreements which protect the workers against arbitrary management action. Each breach of these agreements has been resisted, but so far the management has had most of their own way.

After a recent unsuccessful four-week dispute, involving the entire factory, the Assembly workers were again laid-off without pay. The management had breached an agreement on lay-offs with 150 transport drivers. The workers in trans-

port walked out, insisting that their agreement be restored.

The Company chose this moment of division and defeat to move against Alan Thornett, Deputy Senior Steward of the T&GWU, who is a leading member of the Workers' Revolutionary Party. On a series of trumped up charges, Thornett was refused facilities as a union representative in any capacity and instructed to return to his original job as a driver in the transport department.

The transport workers then continued their strike in defence of their right to chose their own steward: Thornett was also a section shop-steward for the Drivers. The management wanted Thornett out of the way because he was the steward principally responsible for negotiating and enforcing the Industrial Engineering agreement.

Carol Miller Arrives on The Scene

It was in this situation that Carol Miller's 'wives' army' came on the scene. Although right-wing forces helped to organise the wives' actions, it can't be explained simply as some right-wing plot. Once again the wives, split up in scattered family units, struggling to deal with the soaring cost of living often on reduced housekeeping money found no money coming into the house.

The immediate cause of their financial difficulties was a strike over an issue of principle - in defence of the man whom the press, the management, and many of their husbands held principally responsible for their previous losses of income. The situation at Cowley was further sharpened by the fact that the 'wives' army' came from the wives of laid-off workers who had no control of the situation and not the wives of strikers who had chosen to stop work over an issue they believed in.

From the start Carol Miller got the support of the *Oxford Journal* a free advertising paper which is pushed through thousands of front doors in the Oxford area every week. The *Journal* put BBC Radio Oxford on to Miller. Her first demonstration got wide-spread advance publicity from the national and local press and the local radio.

Mrs. MacGibbon, another worker's wife was also given free run of Radio Oxford - to conduct a series of twice daily 'Phone-in' programme. Vicious attacks on Thornett and the unions at the factory were encouraged on the programme. Anyone who rang in to support the strike was treated to Mrs. McGibbon's vitriolic abuse. Mrs. McGibbon was being used as a front for a few right-wing demagogues within the unions who hoped to exploit the management's attack on Thornett.

Mrs. McGibbon, in contrast to Mrs. Miller, argued that it was a man's job to get rid of the militant leaders. She used the local radio to canvass a petition for a special union branch meeting to throw out Thornett. Radio Oxford obliged by giving frequent announcements of where and when the petition could be signed.

For a week the local press and radio gave Mrs. Miller and Co. unlimited coverage. The first demonstration of about 250 women and children got pages of coverage. This happened although it was smaller than many other demonstrations in Oxford in recent months - such as those against rising prices and in support of the nurses' pay claim, which got little or no publicity. The national and even the international pressmen were soon camping out in a local pub, ready to pounce on any sign of the 'wives' revolt'.

The National Housewives Association sent a message of support including the suggestion of a sex strike, which gave the papers still more material for writing 'sensational' reports. This group of women which has minimal support despite grandiose claims, started out campaigning against rising prices. They claimed to be 'neutral between employers and unions'. Their actions to date expose them as an anti-union front, combining demagogic rhetoric on issues like prices with national-

ist poison characteristic of the extreme right.

James Prior, former Tory minister, sent the wives a message urging them to greater efforts! And locally they were given considerable assistance by Margaret Butler, the local Liberal candidate, who saw the chance of votes in getting on the anti-union bandwagon. She turned up at the first demonstration posing as another worker's wife feeling the pinch. She is a substantial landlord in East Oxford and her husband is employed in the Technical Publications Department which is never laid-off. So she has little difficulty in keeping the wolf from the door!

British Leyland management showed how they felt by inviting Miller & Co. into their office for tea and a chat. They encouraged the wives to keep on demonstrating but regrettably said they could not immediately comply with Miller's demand for the sacking of all the militants!

Miller's subsequent demonstrations were poorly supported. But the factory management seized the chance of using the pretext of pressure from the women to re-open the factory and attempt to run it on scab labour. Mrs. Miller & Co. claimed they had won a victory. They decided to picket the factory to encourage the workers to stay at work and scab on the strike of the drivers! There they met for the first time organised resistance from other women giving out a letter addressed to workers' wives 'in defence of the union'.

Women to Defend Trade Union Rights

The women's opposition to Mrs. Miller brought together women trade unionists from the car factory - sewing machinists from the trim shop and canteen workers - wives of striking drivers, other women trade unionists from the town and members of the Oxford Women's Liberation Group. Following the production of the factory leaflet, these women decided to organise for a meeting held by Carol Miller in the Town Hall.

This meeting was to inaugurate an ongoing 'wives action group' to campaign against strikes at the car factory. But the press and TV who came to herald this event instead saw the meeting taken over by Miller's opponents who outnumbered her supporters. Eventually after the chairman had attempted to close the meeting, resolutions were passed for Thornett's reinstatement and in defence of trade union rights.

Mrs. Miller has now been forced to set up her wives action group, with a handful of supporters, from her own living room! Her rout at the Town Hall was a considerable set-back for her reactionary handwagon, but she still gets publicity for any move she makes. Those who organised to stop her will have to be on their guard to preempt any attempts she may make to rally anti-union forces in coming struggles at Cowley.

The support that Miller's campaign won initially arose out of a specific situation at Cowley, which is unlikely to be exactly repeated elsewhere. But the massive press campaign launched to promote Mrs. Miller & Co. demonstrated how important the ruling class saw this development. The mobilisation of the Cowley wives gave the employers the perspective of organising a section of the working class itself who are not organised in trade unions to help to break a strike.

Already attempts have been made to emulate Mrs. Miller's actions in other struggles around the country. Miller herself hopes to spread the 'wives action group' on a national scale. When the AUEW called its members out against the seizure of its assets by the NIRC, Mrs. Miller was on TV that very evening to propose action to get the strike called off.

Carol Miller has been portrayed as a women's liberationist! And some women in the movement were inclined to support her! They saw her campaign merely as a group of women getting organised - a good thing in itself - ignoring what the women were trying to do.

The reaction of many shop-floor workers was to attack the anti-strike wives for meddling in factory matters which were none

of their business. And this attitude was echoed by several of the union leaders. But this attitude equally plays into the hands of employers, who themselves have not reservations about mobilising forces against the working class from outside the trade unions.

Wives of workers are not for the most part members of the union, but they are vitally concerned with trade union struggles. There is nothing automatic about their support for the trade unions. So Unions must take definite steps to involve the families of their members in support of struggles.

The management has sent out numerous letters to Assembly plant workers, putting their case, raising fears of redundancy and sometimes containing veiled (and often quite open) threats of victimisation. These letters reach the workers at home where they are isolated from the strength of the shop floor, and are reinforced by the campaign that is always conducted in the press against strikers. To counter this the union must put over its case to the men and their wives. Letters should be sent out, meetings held with the wives during struggles to organise support and solidarity such as that seen amongst miners' wives. But it is very difficult to organise the wives of workers on an ongoing basis away from struggles in the workplace - especially

where the workforce is scattered all over Oxfordshire.

Women trade unionists, however, are organised permanently and may provide the starting point for reaching wives, as many are the wives of workers themselves and are in daily contact, living on the same estate. It is necessary for the unions to take steps to ensure the maximum participation of their women members. For this, they need to overcome the special problems that face women trade unionists who are also wives and mothers...for eg. the times of meetings, child care facilities, encouraging women to speak for themselves and to put forward their own stewards, etc. There is a need for women to get together independently within the unions to campaign on these issues.

In the medium term, the forces that came together to oppose Mrs. Miller must be united to campaign around the broader issues of women's oppression. These must be taken into the workers' movement and campaigned on by and among workers - questions of low pay and equal pay, discrimination against women in jobs and education, abortion and contraception, nursery and child care facilities. A national Charter campaign would serve to remove the basis of any support for Miller-type activities.

MARY CRANF

Defend living standards freeze prices, not wages

The staggering price inflation of the last 18 months has had many political consequences. One of the more interesting, yet neglected, developments has been the appearance of action groups which campaign around price rises in the shops.

One of the most successful of such groups, which succeeded in organising a considerable number of housewives, was the Nottingham Campaign Against Rising Prices.

European history is full of examples of housewives fighting against rising prices. Nottingham itself was no exception. In the period prior to the defeat of Chartism, a whole series of incidents occurred - occupations, demonstrations and boycotts led by local women, protesting, and for the most part successfully, against increases in the cost of bread, cheese and meat.

The struggles in Nottingham today are of course a mere echo of these. But whether it was a matter of queuing up for bread when the harvest had failed or walking miles around the shops looking for 'special bargaining' so as to make ends meet on a steadily shrinking budget, in the 1970's, one thing remains true: housewives can explode spontaneously and unexpectedly into the most militant collective struggle.

The Nottingham Experience

The Nottingham Campaign Against Rising Prices was started towards the end of 1973 by a group of socialists in the local Womens Liberation Group. Its initial aim was to unite housewives, trade unionists and womens liberationists into a campaign to draw attention to rising prices through the selective use of pickets, demonstrations and so on. An attempt was also made to impose local 'price freezes' where possible by organising pickets and boycotts of shops well known for their high prices.

A boycott of Fine Fare, for example, over its 'marking up' of goods already on the shelf, so embarrassed the management that they issued a public promise to stop the practice and institute an enquiry. This was one of a number of street

pickets and boycotts have been held, accompanied by placards, leaflets and speakers, and all receiving broad support from passers-by and wide coverage in local press and radio.

During the miners strike we made contact with housewives in Calverton, an isolated mining community in Nottinghamshire, where a similar campaign led by miner's wives during the '72 strike succeeded in reducing some prices, while freezing others at least for the duration of the strike.

Today, there is a functioning Prices Committee, composed of a dozen active housewives and trade unionists, and having the support of the Labour Party wards, trade union bodies and a number of tenants and housewives groups of the district. It has plans to continue the Campaign by attacking expensive and unnecessary packaging, and the speculative 'hoarding' of goods.

The Campaign has taken great care to mark itself off from groups such as the National Housewives Association, which attempt to lay the blame in a major way for inflation on the trade unions. It was the National Housewives Association which recently gave support to Mrs. Miller's anti-union activities at Cowley. Like the extreme-right, they try to paint the picture of the poor defenceless housewife caught between the twin battalions of big business and the unions. We say on the contrary, that the interests of all working class people lie in fighting with trade unionists against inflation, whether the form of struggle adopted be attacks on price rises or wage demands, and not against the unions as both Tory and Labour Governments suggest.

This is why very early on we adopted the slogan 'defend living standards, freeze prices not wages', and why the campaign was launched at a Trades Council Rally in solidarity with the Miners and Shrewsbury building workers.

And we have pointed out that unions have fought not simply the effects of inflation through wage claims, they have sometimes taken action to stop prices rising as well. (So for

EQUAL PAY~ the long long struggle

The only industry with any tradition of equal pay in the nineteenth century was spinning. One reason for this was because in many cases whole families worked together and skilled male weavers unionised the rest of the workforce. In 1833 women spinners and power-loom weavers in Glasgow raised funds in order to fight for equal pay, and by the middle of the century the union in England was fighting for a single 'list' of rates, to apply to both men and women.

Although the TUC first called for equal pay in 1885, it remained a dead-letter until the first world war. Then women entered the labour market in huge numbers, doing jobs previously reserved for men. Munition workers received very low pay. The engineering unions negotiated for skilled workers to receive the usual male rate for the job, but the line between skilled and semi-skilled jobs was ill-defined. The employers' federation advised its members to employ women at special women's and youth's rates.

The Government intervened and an act was passed saying that the usual rates should apply for all work. However, this only applied for piece rates, not time rates, leaving the employers in practise to fix rates as they wished.

The National Federation of Women Workers convened a conference, which called for equal pay for equal work, training, security against unemployment after the war, and for women to join the trade unions. Thousands did, and as a



The fight for equal pay must involve the fight for equality of opportunity. London's bus-women have long fought for the right to drive buses, as women in some other towns are already doing. Pictured here is the first London woman bus-driver, Rosamund Viner.

Photo: Morning Star



example we publicised the example of workers in Allied Suppliers of Glasgow who took industrial action against the hoarding of lentils (the hoarding had almost tripled in price.) Another case has just emerged at a factory in North London where workers succeeded in stopping their boss from raising the price of cakes by 30p in the pound.

What Now?

The enthusiasm for the campaign arose at a time when the Tory Government had insisted that however useless the Price Commission nothing further would be done to curb price rises, and when so many trade unions had capitulated before Phase 3.

Today, the Labour Government has, to a certain extent, distracted attention from the real situation by 'price subsidies'—even though these subsidies make only a couple of pence difference to the weekly budget and are added on to our taxes anyway. And trade unionists find that where they have negotiated threshold agreements under Phase 3 they are now getting a minimum of protection for themselves and their families. It will therefore be difficult for others to follow the Nottingham experience at the moment.

What is obviously needed is for all trade unionists to have automatic protection against inflation—in other words a sliding scale of wages, something which would be extended to all state benefits as well. This means that every rise in the cost of living index should be met with an automatic rise in wages and benefits. Metal workers in Belgium for example have already achieved this.

When the Tories introduced threshold agreements under Phase 3, they hoped that these would never be triggered. Now we see a whole series of struggles in which workers are fighting for these payments from their employers, eg. at Wickman's in Coventry and the workers occupying Plesseys in Beeston, near Nottingham. These struggles can lay the basis for a fight for a sliding scale for all workers. And the work already done by groups such as the Nottingham Campaign has created a good foundation for winning trade unionists in the district to this policy.

Jane Brown

result wage increases for both time and piece work, a shorter working week, and improved conditions were secured.

Many unions opened up their doors to women for the first time, including the railway workers, the bakers, and the bank workers. Women's membership in unions went up from 400,000 to over a million.

Transport Workers' Strike.

Even though improvements were obtained, many male workers received a 'war bonus' which negated the principle of equality. On 17 August, 1918, three thousand women who worked on London's buses and trams went on strike demanding the same five shilling bonus that was paid to the men. Although their union, the National Transport Workers Federation, did not support them, most of their male fellow workers did, and the strike spread quickly.

'Conductorettes' in the Black Country threatened to strike, and by 18 August eight provincial towns were hit. The women at the Elephant and Castle tube station, who received 12s 6d less than the men, came out and by the third day, more underground workers joined in. Wolverhampton and Blackburn decided to settle with their workers and gave them the five shillings. The bus strikes ended after six days when an enquiry was set up.

The tube women, who had the support of the NUR, were very well organised. They held regular meetings, picketed stations, and elected strike committees. They did not go back with the bus workers, and were joined by women from the Great Western Railway. When they returned to work on 27 August, by which time negotiations had been promised, they decided to maintain the local strike committees until they secured their demands.

Not only did most of the transport workers win their bonus, but the Government anxious to avoid a confrontation with the munitions workers awarded them a 5s bonus too.

Between the wars.

It was the experience of the first world war which convinced many women workers of the importance of equal pay, but the inter-war years were not the best time in which to fight for it. The Government could not guarantee jobs for all the returning heroes, and many women lost their jobs. Although middle-class women continued to work, they were required to leave on marriage.

When the depression hit Britain in 1929, the situation changed. Many working class women became their families' sole support. Because women could be paid less than men,

many were able to find work; and with 3 million unemployed the trade unions were hardly in a position to argue that no woman should take a man's place at a lower rate. The years when women workers were neglected and scorned, when the principle of equal pay had become a sick joke, rebounded on the men.

However, the lessons were not learnt. During the second world war, the unions reacted in much the same way as in the first. More unions - notably the engineers - took women into membership for the first time: the sort of agreements as before were negotiated and flouted in the same cynical way.

Women were supposed to receive equal pay for equal work, where they replaced a male worker. But the employer could claim that they required more supervision and it was cheaper to provide a few extra male supervisors that pay all the women more. Men again received a war bonus.

White Collar Equality

After the second world war, there began the same sort of process that had taken place after the first, but this time in circumstances of full employment. One of the most important changes was the dropping of the marriage bar in the white-collar sector, banking being the last. As jobs in the civil service, the welfare state, and office work generally multiplied, so did the demand for women workers. It was in this field that the first demands for equal pay were renewed. In jobs such as teaching, it was fairly easy to demonstrate that women were doing equal work. After a long but not very militant struggle, Government non-manual workers received equal pay in seven stages, beginning in 1955. Following this, most white-collar workers won equal pay, with the banks again being the last among the big employers to make the concession. Employment opportunities, of course, have remained strictly limited, and with or without equal pay, the vast majority of women white-collar workers still find themselves in the lowest paid job.

Hopes for women had been dashed by the Royal Commission on equal pay, set up in 1944. It had brought up all the old hoary arguments against equal pay: women were generally supported by men; they did equal work only seldomly, and if they did then it was almost impossible to prove. But it also pointed out the costs 'to the country' of awarding equal pay. It was this last point which doubtless weighed most heavily.

US women workers organise

Over the week-end of 23/24 March, 3,200 women trade-unionists representing 58 unions, met in Chicago for the founding conference of the Coalition of Labor Union Women.

They came to discuss how to fight, through their unions, the low wages, unemployment and dead-end jobs that American women face throughout the country.

Addie Wyatt, director of the Women's Affairs Department of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen, pointed out that women's wages, relative to men's have actually declined in the last 10 years, and that women remain in the lowest paying jobs. Many women are heads of families and millions have young children. She declared that, just as women were coming together to discuss their problems in other fields, so it was time for union women to do the same. Part of the fight was to get equality of representation in the decision-making in unions.

The large turn-out, far exceeding the expectations of the organizers, was a clear sign that trade-union women do want to unite to fight against their oppression. Large contingents came from such unions as the United Auto Workers, the Teamsters, American Federation of Teachers and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Other unions represented included the Office and Professional Employees International Union, International Union of Electrical Workers, Steelworkers, Retail Clerks, Amalgamated Clothing Workers and Communications Workers of America.

There was also one whole contingent of striking office workers from New York, members of the Distributive Workers of America. These women have been on strike for six months. Members of the United Farm Workers attended, too, and hundreds of women who UFW boycott badges.

Participants at the conference were of all ages, from teens to

Equal Pay Act

Two factors in particular paved the way for the introduction of the Equal Pay Act by the Labour Government in 1970. First, at that time it was Labour Party policy to get into the European Economic Community, and Article 100 of the Rome Treaty specifies equal pay for equal work (but not for work of equal value).

Secondly, and more importantly, a real rank-and-file movement began to grow. In 1967 an equal pay committee was set up in Scotland, and in 1968 there was the famous Ford women's strike, which, while it was not nominally for equal pay, was certainly concerned with the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.

Equal Rights Campaign

One of the officials involved in the Ford strike realised that the tremendous interest aroused by it could lay a basis for a campaign. In October 1968 a meeting was held in the House of Commons attended by about two hundred women and men, most of them active trade unionists, and the National Joint Action Campaign Committee for Women's Equal Rights (NJACCWER) was set up. This campaign rapidly gained support from both unions and women's organisations, including the newly emerging women's movement.

But the original committee set up at the House of Commons meeting consisted of volunteers, many of whom never took an active part in NJACCWER again and the committee rapidly became unrepresentative as new forces were drawn into the campaign. Local NJACCWER groups were set up, and local organisers were appointed from supporters. They were invited to attend the general meetings, usually held bi-monthly, but officially had no vote.

The Charter around which NJACCWER organised called for equal pay and opportunity for women in employment, in education and public life, and promised to 'keep on fighting until the women of this country have full rights in every sphere'. In practice, throughout its 18 months of real activity, it campaigned only for equal pay.

On 18 May, 1969, the campaign's main activity took place: an equal pay demonstration in London, attended by two thousand women from all over Britain. By the end of the year, the equal pay bill had been introduced. It gave a lot less than NJACCWER was asking for, and should have been the focus for a tremendous

campaign, exposing its inadequacies and pressing for equal pay for work of equal value, now. Instead, the campaign jerked unhappily to a standstill.

To a great extent, failure was almost inevitable. The campaign had caught on and been supported to a much greater extent than had been expected, and the organisation of the committee was inadequate to either its growth or its task. In particular, its completely undemocratic structure meant that decisions were taken by a small proportion of those active in the movement, and that frustrations built up among the unrepresented militants. Many of the members of the committee were small-time union bureaucrats; others, such as some of the Ford women who had come onto the committee, were much under their influence.

There were several reasons for the collapse of the campaign. Many of those on the committee were more interested in increasing their power within their own little union kingdoms than building a big, militant campaign for women's rights. By restricting the campaign in practice to the one issue of equal pay, much potential militancy was headed off by Barbara Castle's bill. Many committee members saw the campaign in purely propaganda terms, and it was only after much argument that it was agreed that the committee's money should be used to help women on strike, and that the campaign should organise to support such struggles.

Of course, the passing of the Equal Pay Act was a victory for NJACCWER and other organisations that had campaigned for equal pay over the years. But, as subsequent events have shown, an organisation like NJACCWER was needed more than ever once the Act was passed.

Having conceded the principle of equal pay, what was required was a massive and militant campaign to get it at once, to ensure that employers did not re-organise their work force as they are in the process of doing, to explain the Act's shortcomings, and to campaign for full equality and opportunity.

The Working Women's Charter, started by the trade union movement and taken up by left and women's groups covers much of the ground which NJACCWER did, but goes far beyond it. Let us learn from the lessons of the past, in particular, from the transport workers, and the Ford women - only when women organise themselves and struggle will any real advances be made. As the Charter gains support, those who campaign around it must place support for women in struggle in the forefront of their activity.

sixties, and about 20 percent were black.

The conference produced a *Statement of Purpose*, which includes the fight for passage of the Equal Right Amendment, child-care legislation, maternity benefits, a livable minimum wage, full employment, organising of unorganised women workers, and democracy in the unions.

There was a debate around the UFW boycott of grapes, lettuces and Gallo wines. There was an overwhelming support for the farm workers' struggles and a tremendous oration for Dolores Huerta, vice-president of the UFW, when her name was read out as one of those who had helped build the conference.

Throughout the conference, the influence of the women's liberation movement was evident. Delegates expressed a feeling of confidence and pride in the fact that they were organising around issues of concern to women, issues that have long been neglected.

The evidence of rank-and-file participation in the conference was important and several rank-and-filers were elected onto the National Co-ordinating Committee. An unfortunate aspect of the conference discussion was the amount of time taken up with debates on structure and the general goals of the coalition, which

left little time to talk about the forms of discrimination faced by working women, and concrete activities to tackle them. All the resolutions on these subjects were referred to the new National Co-ordinating Committee.

This conference was only a first step. The test for the new Coalition of Labor Union Women lies in its ability to bring its resolutions to life. If the momentum of this first meeting is to be maintained, local branches of the CLUW will be needed round the country, involving rank-and-file women in activity around the important issues.

Information for the above article came from Militant, paper of the American Socialist Workers' Party. The original article was written by Cindy Jaquith.

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A campaign has been launched in over ten towns up and down the country to fight for the demands in the Working Women's Charter. In March of this year, the London Trades Council circulated the Charter throughout the London labour movement and later called a conference.

At the conference, attended by over 200 women, many of them delegated from their union branches, there was a split between those who saw the conference as a talk-shop to share experiences, and others who wanted to defer discussion on the detailed demands of the Charter in favour of a discussion on how to use the document to initiate action in the labour movement around the problems of women workers.

This disagreement was not resolved by the conference. No clear decision was adopted 'for lack of time'. However, since the conference it is being resolved in practice by union branches, trades councils, women's groups, and individual trade unionists which are now promoting the Charter. It is being used as the basis for a campaign among workers, taking up many aspects of women's oppression and exploitation as workers.

FIRST STAGE

To most women in the women's movement, the actual demands of the Charter will seem unexceptionable. Although the sum total of the demands do not equal liberation or an end to oppression, this is an extremely important document. It represents a first stage in bringing together the ideas and analysis of the women's movement - particularly on the relationship between the oppression of women in the family and their exploitation as workers - with the strength and organisation of the labour movement.

The labour movement generally accepts the unwritten rule that there is a definite sphere of influence for the trade unions: they deal with problems of wages ON THE JOB. Men see a relatively clear divide between problems of home and problems of work, so this unwritten rule seems to be adequate for them.

Bills, household budgets, babysitters, and another baby on the way are all 'individual' problems - not ones to be tackled by the unions. But for women workers, especially for those who are married with children, that kind of separation is rarely possible. Never before has the trade union movement acknowledged this impossibility in such a clear way as it does in the Charter. Alongside demands for equal pay, opportunity, and training are listed ones for contraception and abortion, for nurseries, for changes in the laws relating to passports and hp agreements.

This is neither a haphazard development, nor an isolated one. Only a couple of weeks prior to the London Trades Council conference, the National Council for Civil Liberties held a conference for women trade unionists in London - followed up recently with others outside of London - on the question of women's rights. Over 500 women attended this conference and again many were union delegates. The discussion broadened from the strict 'trade union' issues to one on the interrelated nature of the problems of women workers. Many women identified themselves as belonging to both a trade union branch and a women's liberation group.

AFTER NJACCWER

What has happened since the famous Ford women's strike in 1968. One of the results of that strike

The division between social and economic of the unions, and what the responsibility

The Charter campaign

LINDA SMITH on t

over equal pay and grading was the formation of a national organisation of trade union women to campaign for equal rights. Increasingly, the campaign centred on the equal pay demand. This organisation, NJACCWER, (see pp. 9-10) attracted women from many unions up and down the country. But with the introduction of the Equal Pay Bill, the campaign lost all impetus. It faded away ... just as the new women's movement was beginning to emerge. By the time of the first conference of the women's movement, held at Ruskin College, Oxford, the NJACCWER had more or less died. As there was little overlap between the membership in the two groups, the possibility of a structured relationship between them was stillborn.

Groups within the women's movement wanting to work with working women supported local strikes as they happened, or campaigned with working class women on issues such as nurseries, mainly outside the job situation. But with the death of NJACCWER there was no

We pledge ourselves to agitate and organise to achieve the following aims:

1. The rate for the job, regardless of sex, at rates negotiated by the unions, with a national minimum wage below which no wages should fall.
2. Equal opportunity of entry into occupations and in promotion, regardless of sex and marital status.
3. Equal education and training for all occupations and compulsory day-release for all 16-19 year olds in employment.
4. Working conditions to be, without deterioration of previous conditions, the same for women as for men.
5. The removal of all legal and bureaucratic impediments to equality, eg. with regard to tenancies, mortgages, pension schemes, taxation, passports, control over children, social security payments, hire-purchase agreements, etc.

problems...and between what is the responsibility of the politicians, must be broken down. When could begin this process.'

Working Women's Charter

longer any single focus of this continuing radicalisation among women - it was evident in local struggles but they lacked any national character.

What is happening now bears examination. The women's movement has not grown numerically recently, and has not attracted large numbers of working class women. Instead, there has been a *qualitative* development in the movement: the socialist current has hardened out as is reflected in the increasingly sophisticated debates. Socialists in the movement are seriously considering the relationship between the class struggle and the women's movement. Given this new level of debate, it is no accident that the number of socialist women joining trade unions is on the increase.

In addition to a physical overlap between women trade unionists and the socialist current within the women's movement, there is also the general impact of the women's movement on the consciousness of women (and men) whose experience is strictly trade union. There are cracks emerging which indicate that the old very backward ideas towards women within the trade union movement are beginning to give.

These ideas could be severely ruptured by systematic work and significant struggles over the coming months.

MAXIMUM GAINS

The importance of a document like the Charter in this situation is that it can be used NOW as the basis for campaigning among the *entire* labour movement - but specifically aimed at women workers - to lay the groundwork for the maximum possible gains out of any future struggles involving women. The equal pay struggle at Lenthal's perfume factory in North London in April indicates that women workers are being forced to think of things like equal pay in order to maintain their standard of living against the ravages of inflation.

Although the Equal Pay Act is partially implemented, women still receive only 50% of the male rate, on average. In the next eighteen months before its full implementation, employers will continue to find ways to escape the Act and women will see attempts to maintain the low rates paid to them. So we can expect Lenthal's factory to be only the first in a long line of such struggles over the summer months. In many cases, the battle will be more difficult and prolonged.

Women in struggle need all sorts of assistance. The Charter campaign can draw together the trade union movement to provide solidarity for women involved in a difficult dispute. Male workers will not automatically down tools to support a fight to reduce differentials, especially when their own wages won't be increased at the end of the fight. The Charter campaign can prepare the way for male trade unionists to understand the need for solidarity when such a situation arises.

In London several trades councils are discussing the Charter. Some have agreed to adopt it as the basis for work in their area on problems confronting women workers. In Hackney, for example, a conference around the Charter and its demands has been called for September. Local public meetings, and meetings at trade union branches and places of work will help to build for the conference. A questionnaire is being circulated to women workers in the Hackney Wick area, and sweated labour and outwork is being investigated. Immigrant organisations involved in the campaign have translated the Charter into Gujarati in an attempt to reach immigrant women workers.

The conference will be the result of work among women workers from a wide variety of jobs in the area, and will involve large numbers in discussions and assessment of the campaign in September. The conference itself will be the beginning rather than the end of the ongoing campaign in the area.

CO-ORDINATED CHALLENGE

Preparations like this throughout the country will stimulate the qualitative change already noted in both trade unions and the women's movement. More importantly, it could lead to significant developments in the level of struggles involving women, thereby effecting permanent changes in the degree of male chauvinism within the unions, and the degree of involvement of women in working class struggles. Only then can a much more effective and co-ordinated challenge be raised to the present attacks on the working class as a whole. The division between social and economic problems, between home and work, between the responsibility of the individual and the class as a whole, and the division between what is the responsibility of the unions and those of the politicians, must be broken down. The Charter campaign could begin this process.

6. Improved provision of local authority day nurseries, free of charge, with extended hours to suit working mothers. Provision of nursery classes in day nurseries. More nursery schools.
7. 18 weeks maternity leave with full net pay before and after the birth of a live child; 7 weeks after birth if the child is still-born. No dismissal during pregnancy or maternity leave. No loss of security, pension, or promotion prospects.
8. Family Planning clinics supplying free contraception to be extended to cover every locality. Free abortion to be readily available.
9. Family allowances to be increased to £2.50 per child, including the first child.
10. To campaign amongst women to take an active part in the trade unions and in political life so that they may exercise influence commensurate with their numbers and to campaign amongst men trade unionists that they may work to achieve this aim.

Background to the Lip Struggle.

Up to 1970, Lip was the leading manufacturer of watches in France. The slow downfall, was due amongst other things, to the eccentric habits of its' director/owner, Fred Lip. He had the habit of insulting his fellow directors perched from the top of a cupborad, receiving his women inspectors in under-pants, and sounding off at board room meetings from under the table.

In 1970 the Lip Enterprise was bought off by a Swiss concern, who were more interested in the trade marke and its' established distribution network than in the manufacturing aspect. They wanted to get rid of a thousand workers out of 1300. Lip at Besancon in the South Eastern area of France - is an area not noted for its militancy.

The response to the Union's demand demand of a go-slow was small. However, when the plans to dismantle the factory were accidentally on purpose discovered, the workers imprisoned the bosses, and occupied the factory. Under the usual police threats, the bosses were released but a new hostage was found - the product itself.

Thousands of watches were taken in cars and hidden in various corners of France. They were sold and the workers received their first 'illegal' pay. The population of Besancon was called to support this act. A massive turnout inspired the next step of the struggle which was to occupy and still produce.

Lip became immediately fashionable, to buy an illegal watch was akin to an act of 'resistance', even Edgar Faure (Left Gaullist MP) bought one. What the Paris Mondain made of it one can imagine, but the new form of struggle created by the Lip workers not only inspired others to do the same but has burst open the debate on workers' control, the sheer rationality of their actions has confused the liberal bourgeoisie and panicked it's more reactionary members.

The two women workers interviewed represent one of the interesting aspects of the struggle, which is the active participation of women workers who represent half the workforce.

FATIMA: As a worker, I did everything from moulding to control of precision parts of watches. At first, when I started, I talked to no one, I was shy as from childhood I was shy as from childhood I was always 'shut-in'. At the time of the May events I began to understand. In discussing with my colleagues, I saw that my wages were derisory - 400 francs a month. In my workshop there were delegates from the CFDT union I joined straight away. Right now I earn 1,350 francs a month for 43 hours.

Question: *Why did you marry - rather than 'live' with your husband?*

Living with someone is always, rapid, ephemeral, to marry is more serious, longer lasting. For a couple legality is important, elsewhere no... I mean I say that now. I married him because he made me discover everything, he has an extraordinary capacity for learning - at last I could talk to someone. Until the strike we had a passionate 'couple' relationship - Saturdays and Sundays always were spent together. However I really wanted to meet others, to do something with other people. But I didn't know how - when the strike started I joined right away.

Monique Pitan, Technical secretary, nineteen year old daughter began work at Lip in 1968, three years earlier she divorced her husband - a boss.

MONIQUE: I left him because he exploited people, but not only his employees. I have a temperament that needs to express itself and with him it was impossible. In his milieu - I never met anyone with an ideal - so I looked at telly and did lots of sports to give me the illusion I was living.

lip: women workers talk back

Fatima participates in the 'welcome committees' she shows the visitors the factory, receives journalists, sells watches, maps out the way to Lip, etc. Monique works on the propaganda commission - distribution of leaflets - agitation at factory gates, journeys through out France. Without any family obligations Monique, occupied the factory day and night up to the arrival of the riot police. Fatima had to convince her husband.

FATIMA: I had to choose between the life of a woman who stays by the side of her husband and the life of a woman who stays by the side of her husband and the life of a woman worker who struggles. My work, my salary is my independence. I discussed with my husband - fortunately an understanding could be reached, he understood, but I have friends who weren't so lucky, and who have remained blocked. I even taught my husband another way of living, he did not know anything about Lip. I brought him to the general meetings, he witnessed the sequestration of two of the bosses and sometimes he kept me company during the nights of occupation - for me this was fantastic. Now I talk with him about thousands of things that concern us - he's not yet unionised, but he knows the importance of it. I know that due to the struggle, due to my commitment he found his real well being. Last Friday I went to Paris for a demonstration, a rather disappointing one in fact, I came in at 4 o'clock in the morning. He woke up and asked me to tell him everything that happened. I was really overwhelmed. When he can, he comes to lunch at the Lip factory. I'm delighted.

Question: *Has your life outside the factory changed?*

FATIMA: My priorities have changed. Since five months now since the voluntary slowing down of production - I haven't put my feet in a dress shop and I don't miss it at all and the



goes for the cinema and the restaurant.

MONIQUE: Before I did a lot of housework, I would have been ashamed of a house that was not spotlessly clean. Now all that is of secondary importance and I don't feel the worse for it. In any case since childhood, women have been stuck with the role of housewives. Does one force a man to be a mechanic?

Question: And in your family - did this pose problems?

MONIQUE: I managed to drag members of my family in the occupied factory. They saw that workers in struggle don't scream all the time, that they can be happy and quiet. On t.v. they always show demonstrators who scream, and here in the country that frightens us. They went away convinced - that's great.

FATIMA: In the workshop, before the strike, I found lots of girls who were proud or wild or both. In the struggle I really began to like them. At Lip those who work in the watch department, that is those who put the watches together, believed that they were 'better', nigher, than the others. When we talked we would say - 'Sir this, Miss that', now everyone is on first name terms, contact becomes more human, we have the impression that we're linked together. At last we're discovering each other and ourselves. Me, for instance, I'm a sentimentalist, if a girlfriend is in trouble I do all I can to help her even financially. However I saw that despite everything I was still conditioned as a slave to money. On the day after our first workers' control pay we had a collection for the workers on strike at Noguères. Here we know what solidarity means. If the morale is good here its only due to the financial and physical support of thousands of people, nevertheless once the collection is counted, we calculated that each worker gave 35 francs only. So we sat down and discussed this. Some said they had to keep 600 francs for their country cottage, another 400 francs for their washing machine, in brief, everybody was mak-

ing excuses. So we thought about the problem - a real raising of consciousness took place; now I take very real interest in struggles that are taking place - I've given up the idea of having a washing machine. Now when all things are said and done, I haven't that much laundry in any case. Now I don't save anymore, my money is better off in solidarity collection than in a bank account - that's good, no? not to have given in to the consumer society.

Question: And you Monique. What did you discover in the struggle?

MONIQUE: Lots of things. As an example, that people can help immigrants, unmarried mothers, those without housing, without any motivation of self-interest. I learnt to what point workers can suffer from racism. During a Lip journey at Paimpol, I had the opportunity to talk to Arabs, Yugoslavs, Italians, - before I would have thought it a dishonour to be seen amongst them. There I let go all my racial ideas, we talked, some became my friends - but I still have my blocks. I have also understood the role of the police and I hate them, I don't want to know about the 'good reasons' they became policemen or CRS (riot squad) They ought to have chosen the dole. Their choice is as unjustifiable as the one of the girl who dies the streets because she has no money; I am a sportswoman so I participated in the street battles, with a handkerchief on my nose. You know its bloody disgusting and unjust to beat up workers who simply struggle for the right to work to live where they work. I cannot understand how a man can obey an order to beat up another man whom he doesn't even know and who does not even bother him at an individual level. And also I discovered that I can do without a holiday. This time I left for Hycres as usual, and I came back at the end of eight days. I had a Lip symbol stuck on my car, and at the camping site, everybody asked me questions. A little meeting organised itself every evening. But at the end of a few days I couldn't tell them anything more, I lacked information. I preferred to go back to involve myself in the struggle. I didn't have my sacrosanct month off and I've never been so happy. Finally the bosses give us our holidays as a carrot to a donkey. Lawyers and other professions don't take so much holiday as they are passionate about their work. With us, this time it was the same - what we were doing we loved.

Fatima went on a week's holiday with her in-laws.

FATIMA: On Thursday 23rd August young people were distributing leaflets announcing a meeting about Lip that evening. Of course I went. I said I was from Lip and it was I who chaired the meeting - my first meeting - fantastic. I was dizzy and so happy. I had discovered that I was able to direct and animate a debate. Everybody congratulated me, invited me here and there, I didn't sleep all night. I felt a happiness that was unimaginable.

Question: What is happiness?

FATIMA: To feel free and useful - to be at peace with oneself, to dare to do what you want.

Question: When the struggle will be over Fatima, aren't you afraid to feel a little useless?

FATIMA: I have learned to speak - I'll be able to argue with the bosses over conditions of work. And then struggles are exploding all over the place. I have happiness to spare - things are going my way.

The above interview was translated anonymously from an article in *Nouvel Observateur* for a recent conference of the socialist current in the women's liberation movement.

We are reprinting it in this issue, to mark the first anniversary of the Lip struggle which will occur just prior to the printing date of our autumn issue of *Socialist Woman*.

Direct action for NUS women's campaign

Last term, the Women's Action Group at Brunel University joined forces with the Students' Union in a fight for adequate nursery provision in the college. In the Week of Action of the NUS Grants' Campaign, the Vice Chancellor's office was occupied and demands placed on the administration. Through joint action, they succeeded in winning £10,750 for a nursery.

Over the past few years, women's liberation groups have sprung up in colleges, universities and polytechnics all over the country. They have undertaken militant struggles on a wide range of issues: the provision of nursery and creche facilities; against sexist activity on campuses; for free abortion and contraception; countering anti-abortion groups; the married women's grants campaign; and actions in support of women workers in struggle both on and off the campus.

For a long period, the NUS had been able to treat the question of women's oppression in a token fashion, by distributing information, passing resolutions, and setting up committees. But the increasingly organised weight of women students has forced the union to set up a national campaign around the issues confronting women students.

Its Relation to the Student Movement

However, it is important that the Women's Campaign does not take place in isolation from the other struggles of the student movement. The general economic and political situation means that students must fight to achieve the demands of the grants' campaign and defend student living standards in the face of educational cut-backs. There are specific implications for women students.

Grants for married women students are low because they are determined on the basis that married women are automatically dependent on their fathers or husbands incomes. The new grants structure will leave many married women worse off than at present. Single women students with children are also discriminated against through the low allowances.

The demand for adequate nursery and creche provision in the colleges has taken on a new perspective since the cut-backs, and now involves taking on the college authorities and the Department of Education in a fight to increase educational expenditure.

Women campus workers - already a low paid sector - will be especially hit by the job rationalisations which will inevitably come in the form of heavier work-loads and redundancies.

At the present time, these issues must be a priority for the Women's Campaign by virtue of the immediate problems they pose for women students and women campus workers alike. The women's campaign must show that these issues are integral to the central struggle of the student

movement. Only then will they gain the sort of support from students necessary if the demands are going to be met.

The nursery struggle at Brunel provides an excellent precedent for the women's campaign. Within the NUS women are clearly under-represented on all leadership bodies, both locally and nationally. Male chauvinist attitudes towards women student militate against the possibility of women playing a full part in both leadership bodies and the active campaigns of the NUS.

Brunel demonstrates very clearly that it is through placing demands which are of particular interest to women within the main campaigns of the NUS that the possibilities are opened up for women students to participate fully.

Education.

The education system in this country - as in all capitalist countries - is used to re-inforce and uphold a particular set of values. In this way, the exploitation of the mass by a small minority, the oppression of blacks, women and gay people are rationalised as 'natural' and 'inevitable'.

Thus the education system plays an important role in re-inforcing women's position of inferiority. An ongoing task for the women's campaign must therefore be to challenge this education both in terms of the access which women have to it and in its content.

The Campaign must do this by taking up and organising around demands for equal entrance qualifications, the introduction of more training courses, apprenticeship and day release courses for women; for an end to quotas which discriminate against women, and for the introduction of women's studies courses.

Finally, an important aspect of the Women's campaign must be to encourage wide support within the student movement for issues which have a general importance for all women, and which are being taken up nationally by the women's liberation movement: issues such as the rapid growth of the anti-abortion groups like LIFE and SPUC. The campaign must demonstrate that not only is the reactionary ideology put forward by these organisations a threat to women, but that it is also a potential threat to the student movement.

The women's liberation groups in the colleges have consistently fought around these issues in the past and it is now their organised strength and developed analysis which is going to play a key role in the success of the campaign. It is essential that they now develop an awareness of the issues which are affecting students so that they are able to push forward on demands which concern women in a way that will force the whole of the student movement to support them.

Yvonne Taylor

NEWS NEWS NEWS NEWS

IMPERIAL TYPEWRITERS

by ANNE CESEK

About two hundred strikers from Imperial Typewriters recently came to London by the coachload to lobby Transport House. They sent in a delegation from the strike committee to call for an inquiry into the activities of the TGWU officials - especially District Secretary Bromley who has refused to recognise or represent the strike. They also demanded the strike be made official.

The demonstration was militant - with shouts of 'Make the strike official' and 'We want justice'. Drowning out the leading chanters were a section of the women who were the first shop to walk out of the factory. Their militancy is not surprising considering the conditions these women had to endure.

As Ms. Doshi of the strike committee explained: 'We are treated like dogs in the factory by the management and by the white shop stewards alike. Although the women are only paid 50% of the male rate, the Asian women receive less wages than the white women.'

Discipline is strict - no talking on the line for the Asian women but the white women can carry on. White women get one set job a day and are paid for that whilst the Asian women work five or six different jobs per day and get paid for one. These women get no tea breaks.

These Asian women have no adequate trade union representation and as most can not speak English very well they can't communicate their grievances to the white shop stewards. This has led to direct harassment of the Asian women by the white shop stewards who are not at all interested in what the Asian women have to say. They are just told to get back to work. One woman was physically intimidated until she burst into tears in an attempt by a white shop steward to force her to speak English.

Harassment of the Asian women has extended from the shop floor - by the shop stewards and management - to the picket line. As several women explained: 'The police are in cohorts with the management and on the picket line the police have specifically harassed Asian women - one was dragged to the police station by her hair and sworn at in an attempt to intimidate and dissuade women from carrying on the fight.'

Despite all of these intimidations, the women are still out on strike - on the picket lines - and on demonstrations. As they said on the Transport House demonstration: 'We are striking for our rights and we are going to win.'



Strike at Lenthalic/Morny Perfume Factory

There was a Transport and General Workers Union meeting at the Lenthalic/Morny factory in Harringay on April 3. At this meeting the women workers on the production line heard that they were being offered a 40p. wage increase in May if the standard of living had gone up a certain amount by then. Ninety-seven people out of one hundred voted to go out on strike there and then. What they wanted was at least a three pound rise to bring up their wages to the equivalent of wages paid at Yardley in Basildon, a firm that used to be amalgamated with Lenthalic/Morny. The storemen have also come out and supported the women on the picket line, where they managed to stop nearly all the lorries going in.

Speed-ups go on unofficially all the time on the production line. In the past, when the women asked for a wage rise, the management told them 'speed up the line and we'll ask the boss about the rise when he gets back from his holiday in Italy.' They never got the rise. At the moment the women produce 7,000 four guinea bottles of perfume a day and the management are trying to drive it up to 9,000. This was the first strike ever in this factory, which has been unionised for about two years and although since they have had union representation not so many people get the sack for letting the productivity level drop, any rebellion against the speed-ups still seem to go on only at an unofficial level of the women at the beginning of the production line just going slow.

On April 5 there was another meeting at which the women were offered a £1.75 increase, but they still stayed out and continued to picket. The following Monday there was another meeting at which they were offered £2.25 and an extra 80p. for the women in the powder room for 'dirty' work. This the women decided to accept.

But hopefully by this point a lot of the perfume will have evaporated and gone off anyway. Although the firm is a huge American-owned company who own all the tobacco fields in America, and the flower fields, etc. and have huge profits of millions of pounds, the strike should have cost them a few quid. As one woman said, 'People think they are buying really expensive seductive perfume. What they don't know is that if you have your hands in it for a couple of hours it stains them and leaves your nails so cracked you have to cut them off.'

- reprinted from People's News Service, April 20, 1974

Three Marias call for Portuguese Women's Movement

Lisbon, Portugal, May 18 (PNS) - On their acquittal from charges of 'offences against public morality' on May 7 the three women writers known as the 'three Marias' spoke of plans for organising a women's movement in Portugal, according to Liberation News Service.

The trial of the three women, Maria Teresa Horta, Maria Isabel Barrene and Maria Velho Da Costa, had been going on since October 1973; it concerned the book *New Portuguese Letters*, published in April 1972, which attacks the oppression of women in Portugal. When the secret police moved to seize the book two months after publication, only 100 of the 3,000 copies of the first edition remained.

The three said that with the freedoms resulting from the April 25 coup, they would begin organising a women's movement with the legalisation of abortion as its first priority. Maria Isabel Barrene said that thousands of women resorted to abortions performed clandestinely 'under deplorable conditions'. 'Today's decision is only the beginning', she added. The small courtroom was packed with women who chanted 'United women shall never be vanquished', a variation of a popular chant 'A united people shall never be vanquished'.

-reprinted from People's New Service, May 18, 1974

In pre-war capitalist Poland women were quite explicitly oppressed in all areas of social life. The bourgeois legal code and Catholic religious doctrine combined in proclaiming the complete dependence of the woman on her husband. Divorce was impossible except on the grounds of a change in religious faith. Abortion was forbidden. Only a quarter of the paid work force consisted of women. Women workers received barely more than half male rates of pay. Educational provision was minimal (in 1931 half the women aged between 25 and 49 were illiterate). Pregnant women had few rights: they could quite legally be sacked from work, thus losing any right to even the meagre social provision to which they were entitled for the period of confinement. Maternity pay was unthought of.

Following the establishment of the popular Polish republic in July 1944, a series of decrees and constitutional changes announced immediate improvements in the position of Polish women. They were to have equal rights with men in social, political, and economic and cultural life. They were to have the right to work, and to equal pay for equal work; the right to leisure, to social insurance, education and public office. Laws were passed providing protection and facilities for mothers and children - maternity services, crèches, nurseries, and other collective facilities. Pregnant women gained some security of employment and some rights to maternity allowances. Divorce became legal and easily available. Important though these changes were, they were little more than a caricature of the changes which had been made in the Soviet Union after the 1917 revolution, (most of which were subsequently halted, reversed, or undermined). Thus, for example, the law forbidding abortion remained until 1956. This was in line with the Soviet Union's law of that period, and was a capitulation to the pressure to increase the birth rate after the tremendous losses of the war years (6 million dead, 2 million emigrants).

So how far have Polish women actually progressed in the past thirty years?

In a letter to the Polish journal *Kultura* a working woman described an average day in her life. She would get up around 5:30 each morning. Her husband took his breakfast and left for work at about 7:30, while she got their son up, and gave him breakfast. She then took him to the creche, which was some long way from home, before dashing to work herself around 8:30 - often arriving late.

She was always tired. During the day she would have to leave her office to go shopping because the shops near to her home were very poor, and she had little time for shopping after work. At 4:15 she would leave work, collect her child (her husband hardly ever went to the creche) and return home. She hardly ever went out again and couldn't remember the last time she went to the cinema or theatre - who would look after the child?

Her husband had wanted the child. When she found she was pregnant she'd suggested that she should have an abortion, but he'd been very indignant about that. Now he didn't help her at all. The woman asked why there was so little help for working mothers - so few crèches and other provisions for children - when so very many women work (in her office 70% of the workers are women).

This woman's experience is shared by masses of women in Poland today and is very similar to that of women in the other East European states. Her account shows with a better clarity the complete inadequacy of state provision and how patriarchal assumptions persist amongst the post-war Polish generation, both at the level of the Communist Party and the state.

The officially sponsored Polish League of Women is no longer concerned with challenging this situation but instead

HOW POLISH WOMEN CONSOLIDATE THE

helps women to cope with it. Thus it provides educational and propaganda material to promote patriotism and civic responsibility amongst women. Through local circles it provides advice to mothers about child care and education, the organisation of housework, etc. It even does research into more efficient methods of housekeeping!

As in other Eastern European countries, women in Poland have established their place in the paid work force - more rapidly and generally over a wider occupational range than have women in the capitalist countries. However, even in this sphere, they have not achieved equality in earning capacity. They remain concentrated in the lower levels of each occupational hierarchy. But it is the double burden of work in paid employment and work in the still private and exclusively feminine domestic sphere which characterises their situation.

This double burden is particularly acute for both economic and ideological reasons: for example, the immense scale of the housing shortage - not enough houses, not enough rooms, lack of basic facilities in much of the housing. The limited availability and high cost of household equipment means that household chores for most women still involves heavy work. And there is a shortage of creche, nursery school and after school study and play facilities for children. The problems in getting abortion and contraception have again become greater as state concern to increase the birth rate has re-emerged. Men resist any idea that domestic or child care tasks are a responsibility of theirs, despite the clause in the family code stating that children are equally the responsibility of mother and father. (One study showed that only 3% of fathers supervised their children's meals and only between 18% and 22% played with their children!)

What structures the oppression of women and the development of the family in Eastern Europe?

The contradiction between socially organised general production and the private sphere of reproduction characteristic of the bourgeois family is played out, but within the context of different social relations than those operating within capitalism. The family, far from being replaced or transformed, particularly in recent years, has been consolidated. In the Soviet Union the family is often referred to as the 'small collective' whose task is to prepare the young, in co-operation with the schools, for their part in the larger collective, the state. The family continues to structure a sharp social division between women and men.

In Eastern Europe generally, we can identify three phases.

LAND IS DATING FAMILY

in official policy concerning women. The first followed the establishment of the new regime and was primarily concerned with the creation of legal equality, drawing women into paid employment on a wider scale. This effort was accelerated by the urgent tasks of post-war reconstruction. Communal facilities, especially for children, were opened in this period and verbal attacks on the family were launched - particularly locating reactionary and anti-communist values in the family.

The second phase saw the official enthusiasm for these policies evaporate. The third phase is marked by a re-sanctification of the family, by the introduction of measures designed to boost the birth-rate. This made it more difficult for women to control their own fertility. Some attempt was even made to push women back into the home to care for the children. Rhetoric about the liberation of women and the development of socialism has justified these policy shifts throughout.² These shifts can be related to other policy changes the bureaucratic leaderships of these states have tried to establish to retain their positions and cope with growing economic problems. The case of the most recent changes show this relationship clearly.

Both an economic and an ideological rationale underlie the changes in policy affecting women and the family, now as in the past. The bureaucracy's policy has been related to its assessments of (1) the requirement for women in the labour force (2) the size of the future national labour force necessary for a given rate of economic development (3) the potential of the family - to avoid and fragment opposition and to promote acceptance of the existing social order.

A national priority in most of the states of Eastern Europe over the past few years has been to boost the birth-rate. It has led to many legal and policy changes which reduce women's rights and access to contraception and abortion. In Poland a new harmony has begun to emerge between 'science', church and state in the idea that women's primary social task is procreation. The mass media promote the image of the happy large Polish family and school education is to contribute more to the preparation of boys and girls for their respective roles as fathers and mothers. Proposals for material incentives are clearly based on traditional patriarchal ideals. For example, it is proposed that couples without children should be taxed and women who stay at home to look after their children should have increased allowance. Money for collective child care and education facilities are sorely lacking.

The combined effect of such proposals is to sharpen the sexual division of labour and reinforce the woman's depen-

dence on the man. These trends are all legitimated in the name of 'progress'. They are reinforced by the beginnings of 'family consumerism'. The most privileged strata find these beginnings appealing. Their commitment to the family involves a recognition of the way in which cultural, and to some extent material advantages, can be passed on to one's children.

That women in Poland today are oppressed is obvious. There is a great deal of discontent and frustration amongst women. Because of their position in the family and in the labour force they are likely to find themselves at the centre of many social struggles. Women are likely to be particularly sensitive to any attacks on working class living standards - because of their double work load, the low standard of living, and the shortages and erratic supplies of consumer goods of all types.

In December 1970 in the Baltic ports women were amongst the first to agitate against the increase in food prices in the working class revolt which brought down Gomulka's government. And yet there is little sign of any coherent understanding of their oppressive situation. Exhaustion, atomisation, and the repressive political situation may provide an immediate explanation of this apparent passivity but these are also vast ideological barriers to be overcome.⁽³⁾

There has been some public debate about the contemporary situation of women, but this has tended to be a safety valve for the problem or an attempt to justify and mystify reactionary policies and proposals. Neither a Marxist nor a radical feminist analysis or strategy has been developed.

The double burden of the working woman, of the resistance of men to any part in domestic work is recognised, but discussed largely in terms of the defects of 'human nature' or the resistance of men to change. Thus the problem is recognised only at the individual or psychological level.

It is exceedingly difficult to develop a Marxist analysis in Poland, because the regime has claimed Marxism as its own exclusive possession. The development of a critical Marxism has to overcome the bureaucracy's distorted approach. Besides, like most other Communist Parties in Eastern Europe, the Polish party has not evolved any concept of socialist values. The significance of socialism for the development of people themselves is largely ignored.

The ideas of the western women's movement are virtually unknown in Poland. There is no discussion of sexual repression, and though some old communists remember Kollontai's hopes for 'free unions' between men and women, her emphasis on the importance of developing a revolutionary ideology of sexual relations has been forgotten.

Notes:

(1) Report of a sociological study summarised in *Kultura*, No. 14, 2.4.74.

(2) Socialists ever since Engels have emphasised the importance of women's participation in public production, but socialist theory has been very confused over questions relating to population policy and women's rights to control their fertility; the switches in policy in this latter area have not had to re-unite socialist commitments to women's rights here because none have clearly existed.

(3) And yet we should not write off the potential for such important developments occurring. In Czechoslovakia during the 1968 period women began to organise around their oppressive situation in that 'socialist' society and the question of women's liberation began to open up as an area of debate and agitation, until Soviet backed control was restored in Czechoslovakia.

REVIEWS REVIEWS.....

Review of Shoulder to Shoulder, BBC TV

The major weakness of this six-week production - a dramatised version of the struggle for the vote - was that it centred on personalities rather than politics. It did not do enough to place the struggle in an overall political context. For example, although the Government was faced with an escalation of the Irish question at the time of the suffragettes' militant campaign this was barely touched upon. And the great working-class unrest of those years - including waves of strikes of women from 1911 to 1913 was not mentioned at all.

In fact, the working-class got pretty short shrift altogether. The series continued the myth that the struggle for the vote began more or less with the Pankhursts, and was just a middle class movement. In fact, Female Reform Associations (entirely working-class) started as early as 1819. It was not until 1867 that the first Female Suffrage Society was formed, with the Manchester Committee.

The series left many questions unanswered. For a start, why did women want the vote at all? During the nineteenth century, middle-class women successfully fought for reforms in the fields of education, marriage and child-guardianship. One is tempted to believe that it was not fear that further improvements were unobtainable, but rather the fact that *working class* men were getting the vote, which worried the middle-class suffragists.

Up to 1905 all the suffrage groups campaigned by peaceful means - with mass petitions, demonstrations, etc. When Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenny interrupted a Manchester Liberal Party meeting in support of Winston Churchill's candidature, they were sent to prison. From that time, the use of militant tactics mounted, causing a split within the suffrage movement.



One of the gaps of the television production was that it concentrated entirely on the glamorous aspects of the suffrage movement. It ignored the equally large, but less flamboyant, aspects of the non-militant campaign.

More importantly, there was no examination of the reasons why the Pankhursts turned to increasingly militant tactics. There was a good deal of working-class activity, around repressive trade-union laws, and the question of Home Rule also occupied the political arena. So one motive for these tactics may have been to keep the suffrage question well in the foreground.

Another reason may be that the repressed lives of middle-class ladies laid the basis for their looking for the sorts of outlets that the 'Womens' Social and Political Union (WSPU) offered.

The personal factor cannot be left out of the explanation. The movement came to be increasingly dominated by Christabel Pankhurst, Mrs. Pankhursts' favourite daughter. It is not possible to speculate how far Mrs. Pankhurst was a genuine socialist at any time, and how far she was under her husband's influence, but certainly Christabel was no socialist.

This resulted in two disastrous developments for the movement. First, the discouragement of Sylvia's East End activities, which ended in a final split in early 1914, signifying that any attempts to extend the movement into the working-class were dropped. Secondly, the inexplicable attitude of Christabel to the Labour Party.

In 1907, Mrs. Pankhurst left the Independent Labour Party. During the years of industrial unrest, the WSPU called for strikes to be made illegal. In 1912 the Annual Conference of the Labour Party went on record for the first time in favour of women's suffrage.

The same year, George Lansbury retired from Parliament to stand in Bow and Bromley on the single issue of women's suffrage. Christabel, while giving him nominal support, effectively sabotaged his campaign. Meanwhile, other suffrage groups decided to actively support all Labour Party candidates, but the WSPU attacked them along with Liberal and Irish candidates, putting their faith in the Tory Party!

When war broke out, the group's rightward move continued. A rally was held at which Mrs. Pankhurst announced that the militant activities were to cease, the name of the paper, the *Suffragette*, was to be changed to *Britannia*, and that the group advocated military conscription for men, industrial conscription for women, and the internment of all people of enemy race of whatever age. The money for the rally - banners, leaflets, etc. - came

out of government funds.

In 1916 when Asquith said he supported women's suffrage, Mrs. Pankhurst said they did not want it whilst men who were saving the country did not have it.

Only Sylvia's East London Federation, of all the suffrage groups, continued to campaign for the vote during the war years. She also campaigned against conscription. At the time of her death, in 1928, Mrs. Pankhurst was a Conservative candidate.

Another problem not touched on by the programmes was the odd fact that all the suffrage associations, whilst campaigning for increased democracy, were themselves entirely undemocratic. The one exception was the East London Federation. Its democratic structure was one reason why Christabel expelled it. Why did none of the women taking part in the movement take initiatives to query their autocratic leaderships? If they did, this series did not mention it.

With all these reservations, the series did make a start on the long-neglected history of the women's movement. And two very important things emerged.

First, what did come over was the fantastic militancy and courage of the women - at a time when 'feminine behavior' was even more restricted than today.

And secondly, the horrors of force-feeding undoubtedly brought home to many the torture being inflicted on the Price Sisters and others.

It is to be hoped that this series can be shown again, to enable more people to see it. Better yet, it could be followed by further programmes examining - hopefully in more depth and with more political insight - other aspects of the struggle of women for their liberation.

Leonore Lloyd.



PROBLEMS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

The subject of this book is the relation between our everyday existence, culture (in the widest sense) and the making of a socialist society. Trotsky didn't leave a stone unturned in unearthing and examining the problems of home and family life, work and leisure time, education, religion, media, and so on. Why is this all so important in relation to building a new society?

Most of the articles in the book were written soon after 1917 in Russia. They deal with the problems of socialist reconstruction after the revolution. The main economic contradictions of society, between owners and producers, exploiters and the exploited, had been broken down. But in the isolation and backwardness of Russia, the material preconditions to make the economic anti social revolution a reality did not yet exist. The tasks of industrialisation - aimed at developing the means of production to begin to fulfil the needs of the new ruling class (the proletariat) - were enormous. And these were by no means merely technical. For instance, the new proletarian state power needed the support of the peasantry - who desperately needed machinery if they were to feed the towns without starving themselves. But they also needed convincing that the new ways were really going to work work out better in the long run. Trotsky was aware of these problems, and of the need to train and educate people capable of carrying out this work.

Laying the material foundations of the new society and convincing people, by propaganda and example, of its superiority over the old are fundamental tasks of socialist reconstruction. But no-one knew better than Trotsky that many of the problems encountered may have roots deeper than we at first see, and that overthrowing and transforming the old society cannot be understood or accomplished without this change permeating every nook and cranny and facet of life. He made the point in one of the articles on education that people (most people) learn from their own immediate experience - from problems and contradictions in their own lives, which explode at various times into wider struggles opening up wider social and political contradictions. During times of great social upheaval, people will assimilate experience quickly and act decisively, because they will be involved in making their own lives and because there will be a necessity to make decisions politically and to take

sides. This happened in 1917. But what is the situation for most of the people most of the time?

In 'normal' times under capitalism, economic exploitation and ideological oppression prevent participation by the mass of the people in public and political life. Day to day existence is necessarily concerned with personal matters which appear quite separate from the world of politics especially. As routines, customs and traditions grow up around this everyday existence, they become 'implanted at an unconscious level. And, as Trotsky points out, unconscious existence is the slowest and most difficult to alter: "Custom finds it harder to discard ceremony than the state. The life of the working family is too monotonous, and it is this monotony that wears out the nervous system.....Hence comes the need for the church and her ritual. How is a marriage to be celebrated, or the birth of a child in the family? How is one to pay the tribute of affection to the beloved dead? It is this need of marking and decorating the principal signposts along the road of life that Church ritual depends." In such a way, a million petty customs prevail, having long ago lost their original meaning, but persisting mainly through unconscious force of habit.

The 1917 revolution and its immediate aftermath threw all these old habits and customs into the melting pot. Women, for instance, demanded (and won) the right to abortion and divorce on demand (marriage became merely a civil contract dissoluble by either party at will) and real beginnings were made in the direction of communal restaurants, creche facilities, and so on, to lay the material basis for the withering away of the bourgeois family. But this was not to last.

In 1936 Trotsky wrote "The Revolution Betrayed" analysing the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet worker's state. He showed how the leadership of the party and state was won by a political tendency representing the conservative interests of a developing state bureaucracy, and how the empirical adaptations made by that leadership to the specific backwardness of the Soviet Union and its isolation after the failure in the west reflected those interests.

In one chapter of "Revolution Betrayed" (reproduced in "Problems of Everyday Life") Trotsky analysed the specific effects of this degeneration upon the position of women - noting, particularly the retrogressive legislation which was introduced on abortion, divorce, homosexuality, and the revival of the cult of motherhood and the family.

The return to the old ways (except that the bourgeois family, for instance, was now exalted in the guise of the 'socialist family) in these fields was of course facilitated by the fact that the old customs and habits were too recently overthrown to have been destroyed

at the unconscious level. The mere failure to nurture and encourage the new revolutionary ideas on these subjects would have led to lapses. But the bureaucracy felt obliged to encourage the backward elements, to use them as a weight against the most advanced workers whom it could not trust.

When Trotsky writes therefore that the problems of everyday life come down to those of economic and cultural construction on the one hand and cultural and educational influences on the other, included in this is the unearthing and combatting of unthinking routine and tradition on which ignorance, poverty and passivity breed. This is a task of making the unconscious conscious and the conscious realisable. This is what 'Problems of Everyday Life' is about.

CASE-CON women's issue

This collection of articles has been written by a number of women social workers and covers a wide range of topics, which broadly speaking fall into two categories. The policy of the Welfare State towards women, who significantly happen to be its principle clients, and some of the first attempts so far to analyse the development of the Welfare State within capitalism, its policy towards the family and the role of the social worker, the majority of whom are also women.

One of the most important articles by Angela Weir argues that both social work and a woman's domestic labour within the home are necessary for the efficient reproduction of labour power. Due to this there are structural similarities as between the nature of social work and the role of women as wives and mothers. The series of reforms which led to the development of the modern Welfare State as we know it were primarily concerned with forming the necessary material basis for the creation of working class family life, with women playing the key role as wife and mother.

It was hoped in this way to stem the growing tide of political unrest among the working class, so creating a labour force which would conform more efficiently to the relations of production required by capital.

Women's role in the family was the linchpin to this whole system, hence the glorification of motherhood by many of the early social reformers. In response to this, social work became increasingly bound up with the treatment of any deviation on the part of women from this all important role bestowed upon them.

The actual policy of social work in any one period has been largely determined by the standard of living of the working class and the actual availability of resources. The current organisation, following the Seebohm Report, is an attempt to cut down the allocation of resources to the social services by farming out tasks previously undertaken by the Welfare State to the community, such as

the care of the aged, the mentally handicapped, etc. It is obvious that this will mean an increasing burden falling upon the woman in the family. What other articles also point out is that it will be women as social workers who will be faced with the task of implementing this new system.

It is around this central contradiction that women social workers have radicalised opening up new perspectives for action in solidarity with their women clients, who after all foot the bill financially and emotionally for this new policy. Many of the articles in this issue are concerned with working out what sort of action women as social workers should be taking, and the sort of demands which they should be taking up. Suggestions in this issue of *Case-Con* range from campaigning for more free full-time nurseries, concern about the conditions of women at work, fighting against legislation in the welfare field which forces women into a dependant status, i.e. the co-habitation ruling, etc.

The impetus for women social workers to take up these demands is also reinforced by the position in which they find themselves as social workers. As is pointed out in a number of articles women social workers do a job which is largely an extension of their traditional 'caring' role, while men tend to take the top jobs organising and administering their work. (Seeborn reinforces this trend).

Social work falls into the category of low status work with low pay and unequal opportunity. As Vanessa Stilwell points out in her article, women social workers in NALGO, the union, must raise demands in relation to this state of affairs, campaigning for equality of opportunity, equal pay, etc. However, as she points out they must not just stop short at raising demands relating to their own particular work situation, but raise broader issues within the union such as nurseries, housing, etc.

Although Vanessa Stilwell does not reach this conclusion her article is in fact an excellent notation for social workers to take up the Working Women's Charter, mentioned elsewhere in this issue. The importance of the Charter is that it does precisely what Stilwell argues is crucial - it goes beyond taking up demands which relate only to the working situation and includes demands for nurseries, abortion, etc.

-JENNY FROST

Marxism and Feminism Charnie Guettel
Canadian Women's Educational Press 1974.
(Reprinted from the Old Mole—The Paper
of the Canadian Revolutionary Marxist
Group).

We welcome Charnie Guettel's *Marxism and Feminism* as a useful contribution to the discussion of a theory of women's liberation. This book provides a clear overview and stimulating critique of the writings of its major theorists over the past 100 years—John Stuart Mill, Engels, the early suffra-

gists, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet, Juliet Mitchell and Shulamith Firestone.

In simple, but not crude terms, Guettel outlines some of the basic Marxist perspectives for understanding women's oppression and the means to liberation. She criticizes radical feminism as well as bourgeois feminism for its liberalism—for its tradition of personalized solutions—where freedom for women becomes a question of changing women's consciousness without understanding that such a change necessitates an entire reorganisation of the social relations of society.

The traditional *separation* of a strategy for women's liberation conceives of the transformation of sexual relations apart from the revolution of the dominant economic relations of society. This split is itself a reflection of the complete separation in capitalist society between the public realm of generalised commodity production and the private realm of family and personal relations.

Split Of Personal And Political

Although Guettel criticises the traditional 'separatist' approach and at the same time shows a new concern with the realm of personal relations, she shares with the feminists their inability to connect the politics of the private world and those of the realm of public production.

Her failure must be seen in the context of the political failure of the Soviet Union and the CP's in the west to connect work within the trade unions with the struggle of women outside production against their oppression. Guettel works from within this tradition and is only partially able to break out of its more stultifying limitations.

Although the basis has recently been laid for integrating the struggle against women's oppression with the anti-capitalist struggle, both theoretically and in practice, only small steps have been taken in this direction thus far. But while we fully appreciate the difficulties of bridging this gap, we must state *frankly* that Guettel largely fails to grapple with this problem or provide building blocks for such a project.

Guettel perceives housework, for instance, as maintenance work and 'unproductive consumption'. But this ignores the full role of the housewife, economically and ideologically—in the socialisation of children, in general family tension management, in the organisation of the family's commodity consumption and as an ever-accessible sexual partner on her husband's terms, tied to his timetable of work and leisure.

Essentially Guettel's analysis is economist—not vulgar, but economist nonetheless. Thus, she does not draw on any of the salient aspects of radical feminism. Accepting the terms of debate between 'feminism' and 'Marxism' her work is lopsided, limited to an analysis of the 'economic'. Like the feminists, Guettel continues to see the family as a separate sphere of life divorced from the larger society. This equates work with wage labour and production with the production of surplus value. It fails to

identify women as housewives and mothers as workers in relation to capitalist production—effectively excluding the housewife from socialist politics.

Women, Production, And Alienation

Guettel implies (p.49) that women's subjection is due entirely to the fact that she lacks access to the wage labour market to support herself and her children. The remedy prescribed for a complete cure is still 'full integration in production' and a breakdown of sex-typed roles, without which childcare and social services would remain female occupations. The way to struggle for the latter does not even emerge in her strategy at the end of the book.

Guettel recognises the need for conscious political struggle in these areas, but it is implied that this is to wait until socialism has been won. Here, she retreats to a theory of revolution by stages. Because she sees the possibility for women's struggles in this society in such a limited way, Guettel inevitably opens up a division between the maximum demands under capitalism. This lays the door open for a naive over-estimation of the potential of struggles for democratic rights in and of themselves.

Guettel's vagueness here is made most evident in the final section of the book where she deals with strategy.

One of her three strategic demands is for 'a mass movement to tax the corporations for universal state daycare democratically controlled.' She makes a fantastic assumption that state day care could be democratically controlled. 'Daycare would be an extension of the public school system' (p.61). As if the public school system was democratically controlled! As if any state institution was not primarily serving the interests of the ruling class! As if the science of childrearing and infant care could serve the workers real interests!

Inadequacy Of Strategy

Guettel's other two demands are: 1) struggle at the work place and in the trade unions for equal pay for work of equal value, and 2) organising the unorganised. What has happened to the crucial problems of sex-typing of jobs? Of the entrenched roles of woman as 'mother' and 'wife'? Of the need to share parenthood? As long as childcare is female no matter how public, certain inequalities will persist' (p.29). Too true. Why is it necessary to wait until the working class seizes state power, in order to begin the struggle on these issues?

For the most part Guettel is suggesting reformist strategies for the struggle under capitalism and utopian demands for 'after the revolution'. The way to cut through this split is to pose transitional demands such as *workers and parent control of daycare*. Guettel does not provide for a link between immediate demands, such as daycare and equal pay for work of equal value, and a strategy for the general transformation of women's place in this society.

STRIKE WHILE THE IRON IS HOT

Red Ladder is a professional group that normally performs for Trade Union audiences. It presented this production at a meeting organised by the Ad-Hoc Committee against SPUC, to a packed and very appreciative audience.

One of their longest plays, it explores the question of women's oppression. From starry-eyed bride to harassed mother, the woman at the centre of the play at first plays the conventional female role. But when she returns to work, to earn some money and escape boredom, she comes up against problems both at home and at work. How she starts to find a way to solve those problems, to break with 'normal' female passivity and the 'normal' female role, is the theme of this highly amusing play. It does not duck the difficult problem of male chauvinism and the divisions it can create inside the working-class. The points are got across without dogma.

Red Ladder ends its shows with a discussion both about the politics and presentation of the play. Unfortunately, time prevented much discussion on this particular occasion and this makes it even more important that as many people as possible should have the chance to see it and discuss it on further presentation. Trade unionists, Women's Charter groups and others should organise meetings at weekend schools, conferences, etc. at which this excellent play can be seen.

Natalie.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEN

AND WOMEN

Background notes on social studies. Published by Workers' Educational Association Service Centre for Social Studies, Temple House, 9 Upper Berkeley Street, London W1H 8PY
18p each, post free; reduction for bulk.

This pamphlet is especially useful for its extracts and summaries of the debates on the various Anti-discrimination Bills, the Green papers produced by the two parties, and comments on all these by various bodies (the TUC, etc). It also contains a number of useful facts on women's employment*, education, day release, etc;

There is a summary of the Labour Party's pre-election proposals and promises, which should be compared with the reality; we now know that "no discrimination on grounds of sex" only applies if it does not conflict with the need to keep potential immigrants out and that the promised revision of "grants to married women students taking degree level or teacher-training courses" will actually leave many married women students even more dependant on their husbands than at present.

A very useful little pamphlet that covers areas of information not previously available in such a handy form.

N.B. As we go to press, the National Council for Civil Liberties has published a 'model' anti-discrimination bill. We shall be reviewing this and any proposed Government legislation in our next issue.

**IF YOU WANT TO USE
THE PLAYS OR WOULD
LIKE FURTHER
INFORMATION
PLEASE CONTACT:**

**RED LADDER THEATRE
58 HOLBEIN HOUSE
HOLBEIN PLACE
LONDON SW1**

**Tel: 01-730-5396
01-263-1053**



THE CASE OF JEAN JEPSON VICTIMIZATION, BUREAUCRACY AND MASS STRUGGLE

Recently, hard-won trade union rights have come increasingly under attack, mainly through the use of the Industrial Relations Act and the Conspiracy laws. Fundamental class weapons, such as the right to strike and to picket, have been endangered.

This year, we have seen another crucial right being challenged: that trade unionists may choose their own representatives. The women's movement has rightly attacked the undemocratic nature of the union bureaucracy, but too often (as in *Women, the Trade Unions and Work* by Selma James) forgets that at the shop-floor level a tradition of elected representatives, directly responsible to their membership, has grown up, often in the face of official opposition.

The most publicised recent case of attacks on elected shop-stewards has been that of Alan Thorne (see elsewhere in this issue) but equally fundamental issues have been raised in that of Jean Jepson.

Jean was a convenor at Armstrong Patents Ltd. near Hull, with a fine record of winning wage demands for her members and fighting for equal pay. During the three day week she fought to maintain the guaranteed working-week, in line with the official national policy of her union, Transport and General Workers. As a result, she was sacked.

The story of her fight for re-instatement - a fight which, sadly, is by no means over - is a complex one. It raises numerous issues: union democracy, the importance of solidarity actions in industrial disputes, the extremely vulnerable position of women workers, and the whole question of how the employers are preparing now to take on the working-class.

The story is related in a clear, detailed way in a pamphlet produced by Hull International Marxist Group as a contribution to the campaign of the Armstrong Defence Committee. Whilst its portrayal of the part played by the union and others does not make for happy reading, there are also some brighter aspects: the tenacity of Jean herself and her supporters, the solidarity of the dockers and other workers, and the description of the way in which the left has taken up the fight against victimization.

This pamphlet should be read by all trade-union militants and by those in the women's movement, as a necessary preparation for further struggles of this kind, which are certain to come. In addition, it should be seen as part of Jean's defence - this campaign should be vigorously taken up by all sections of the labour movement now.

L.L.

The Armstrongs Defence Committee can be contacted at 7 Parkside Close, Park Avenue, Hull, Yorks (0482-492850) Donations and messages of support should be sent to: Strike Committee, 39 St. Hilda's Street, Bridlington, E. Yorks.

JEAN JEPSON

Women unite!



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