

Socialist Woman

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matchgirls' strike of 1888



A HISTORY OF STRUGGLE

**women in the labour movement,
in the picket lines,
on the barricades.**

Connolly: the Women of Ireland

MILITANCY PAYS!

In the last issue of Socialist Woman we carried a report of the then 10 week old strike of women workers in Ramsgate, together with a letter from their union treasurer and strike leader, Mrs Gay.

In this issue of Socialist Woman we are very happy to report that the militant strike action of this handful of women has succeeded. They won their fight in 14th week of their strike.

Socialist Woman salutes the workers of Electronics Laboratories, Ramsgate. Not only have they struggled for their rights while threatened with the sack, but whilst in the midst of their own struggle they wrote a letter of solidarity with a group women in Nottingham engaged in a similar struggle. Nor do they now see their struggle as finished. They intend to go on winning more workers to the union. Their example should go a long way to ensure this.

We are proud to publish in full the letter informing us of the final success of their strike.

LETTER FROM RAMSGATE WOMEN

Dear Sister, Many thanks for your paper and the nice write up you gave us. You will be pleased to hear our strike is over.

Let me put you in the picture. I sent you the proposals they gave and we turned down. The following week, they put these proposals: They offered to pay £1 for every week you had worked there with a guarantee of re-employment there when the work picked up. They would also recognise the union.

By this time our numbers were down to 21 from 40. Anyhow 8 decided to take the money as the union had found them other jobs at Whitstable (where they will be union members). The 13 left of us started work last Tuesday 15th July, full time.

We know we have a hard struggle ahead of us to get the others to join the union but you can rest assured we won't give up! I would like to thank you for all the wonderful way you have supported us, we could never have carried on for so long as we did (nearly 14 weeks) without it. Once again on behalf of the strikers, many, many thanks. Yours Fraternally, Mrs. F. Gay (treasurer) ENU, Electronics Laboratories, Ramsgate.

* Whilst we were pleased to help the Ramsgate strikers, we feel quite sure that with their determination and militancy, they would have and could have carried on for as long as necessary.

So, militancy does get results. Does it give you any ideas girls! In solidarity we win.

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Contents:

WOMEN IN THE LABOUR PARTY
EQUAL PAY

page 10.
12.

CONTROL OF WOMEN OF IRELAND
UNDERSTANDING ORGASM.

page 2.
page 6.

WOMAN.

James Connolly.

The following is an extract from 'The Re Conquest of Ireland', a pamphlet written by James Connolly, shortly before the easter rising of 1916. We are printing it, not just as a token of respect for the great Irish revolutionary, but also because many of the ideas contained therein ^{are} still relevant today. It is also worth noting that Connolly, in his own career, put these ideas into practise and that women played a honourable and heroic role in the 1916 rising.

In our chapter dealing with the industrial conditions of Belfast, it was noted that the extremely high rate of sickness in the textile industry, the prevalence of tuberculosis and cognate diseases, affected principally the female workers, as does also the prevalence of a comparative illiteracy amongst the lower paid grades of labour in that city.

The recent dispute in Dublin also brought out in a very striking manner the terrible nature of the conditions under which women and girls labour in the capital city, the shocking insanitary conditions of the workshops, the grinding tyranny of those in charge, and the alarmingly low vitality, which resulted from the inability to procure proper food and clothes with the meagre wages paid. Consideration of such facts, inevitably leads to reflection on the whole position of women in modern Ireland, and their probable attitude to any such change as that we are forecasting.

It will be observed by the thoughtful reader, that the development in Ireland of what is known as the women's movement, has synchronised with the appearance of women upon the industrial field, and that the acuteness and fierceness on the women's war has kept even pace with the spread amongst educated women of the knowledge of the sordid and cruel nature of the lot of their suffering sisters of the wage earning class.

We might say that the development of what, for want of a better name, is known as sex consciousness, has waited for the spread amongst the more favoured women, of a deep feeling of social consciousness, what we have elsewhere in this work described as a civic conscience.

The awakening amongst women of a realisation of the fact that the highest honours of society have no relation to the merits of the recipients, and that acute human sympathies were rather hindrance than helps in this world, was a phenomenon due to the spread of industrialism and to the merciless struggle for existence, which it imposes.....Cont.

'The re Conquest of Ireland' by James Connolly is an Irish Socialist Library publication.

Upon women, as the weaker physical vessel, and as the most untrained recruits the struggle was inevitably the most cruel; it is a matter for deep thankfulness that the more intellectual women broke out into revolt against the anomaly of being compelled to bear all the worst burdens of the struggle, and yet be denied even the few political rights enjoyed by the male portion of their fellow-sufferers.

Had the boon of political equality been granted as readily as political wisdom should have dictated, much of the revolutionary value of women's enfranchisement would probably have been lost. But the delay, the politicians' breach of faith with the women, a breach of which all parties were equally culpable, the long-continued struggle, the ever-spreading wave of martyrdom of the militant women of Great Britain and Ireland, and the spread amongst the active spirits of the Labour movement of an appreciation of the genuineness of the women's longing for freedom, as of their courage for fighting for it, produced an almost incalculable effect for good upon the relations between the two factions.

In Ireland the women's cause is felt by all Labour men and women as their cause; the Labour cause has no more earnest and whole-hearted supporters than the militant women. Rebellion, even in thought, produces a mental atmosphere of its own; the mental atmosphere the women's rebellion produced, opened their eyes and trained their minds to an understanding of the effects upon their sex of a social system in which the weakest must inevitably go to the wall, and when a further study of the capitalist system taught them that the term "the weakest" means in practice the most scrupulous, the gentlest, the most humane, the most loving and compassionate, the most honourable, and the most sympathetic, then the militant women could not fail to see, that capitalism penalised in human beings just as these characteristics of which women supposed themselves to be the most complete embodiment.

Thus the spread of industrialism makes for the awakening of a social consciousness, awakes in women a feeling of self-pity as the greatest sufferers under social and political injustice; the divine wrath aroused when that self-pity is met with a sneer, and justice is denied, leads women to revolt, and revolt places women in comradeship and equality with all the finer souls whose life is given to warfare against established iniquities.

The worker is the slave of capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of that slave. In Ireland that female worker has hitherto exhibited her martyrdom, an almost damnable patience. She has toiled on the farms from her earliest childhood, attaining usually to the age of ripe womanhood without ever being vouchsafed the right to claim as her own a single penny of the money earned by her labour, and knowing that all her toil and privation would not earn her that right to the farm which would go without question to the most worthless member of the family, if that member chanced to be the eldest son.

The daughters of the Irish peasantry have been the cheapest slaves in existence - slaves to their own family, who were in turn, slaves to all social parasites of a landlord and gonbeem-ridden community. The peasant, in whom centuries of servitude and hunger had bred a fierce craving for money, usually regarded his daughters as beings sent by God to lighten his burden through life, and too often the same point of view was as fiercely insisted upon by the clergymen of all denominations. Never did the idea seem to enter the Irish peasant's mind, or be taught by his religious teachers, that each generation should pay to its successors the debt it owes to its forerunners; that thus, by spending itself for the benefit of the children,

the human race ensures the progressive development of all. The Irish peasant, in too many cases, treated his daughters in much the same manner as he regarded a plough or a spade - as tools with which to work the farm. The whole mental outlook, the entire moral atmosphere of the countryside, enforced this point of view. In every chapel, church or meeting-house the insistence was ever upon duties - duties to those in superior stations, duties to the Church, duties to the parents. Never were the ears of the young polluted (?) by any reference to "rights", and, growing up in this atmosphere, the women in Ireland accepted their position of social inferiority. That, in spite of this, they have ever proven valuable assets in every progressive movement in Ireland, is evidence of the great value their co-operation will be, when to their self-sacrificing acceptance of duty they begin to unite its necessary counterpoise, a high-minded assertion of rights.

We are not speaking here of rights, in the thin and attenuated meaning of the term to which we have been accustomed by the Liberal and other spokesmen of the capitalist class, that class to whom the assertion of rights has ever been the last word of human wisdom. We are rather using it in the sense in which it is used by, and is familiar to, the Labour movement.

We believe, with that movement, that the serene performance of duty, combined with and inseparable from the fearless assertion of rights, unite to make the highest expression of the human soul. That soul is the grandest which most unquestionably acquiesces in the performance of duty, and most unflinchingly claims its rights, even against a world in arms. In Ireland the soul of womanhood has been trained for centuries to surrender its rights, and as a consequence the race has lost its chief capacity to withstand assaults from without, and demoralisation from within. Those who preached to Irish womankind fidelity to duty as the only ideal to be striven after, were, consciously or unconsciously, fashioning a slave mentality, which the Irish mothers had perforce to transmit to the Irish child.

The militant women who, without abandoning their fidelity to duty, are yet teaching their sisters to assert their rights, are re-establishing a sane and perfect balance that makes more possible a well-ordered Irish nation.

The system of private capitalist property in Ireland, as in other countries, has given birth to the law of primogeniture under which the eldest son usurps the ownership of all property to the exclusion of the females of the family. Rooted in a property system founded upon force, this iniquitous law was unknown to the older social system of ancient Erin, and, in its actual workings out in modern Erin, it has been and is responsible for the moral murder of countless virtuous Irish maidens. It has meant that, in the continual dispersion of Irish families, the first to go was not the eldest son, as most capable of bearing the burden and heat of a struggle in a foreign country, but was rather the younger and least capable sons, or the gentler and softer daughters. Gentle Charles Kickham sang:-

O brave, brave Irish girls
We well might call you brave;
Sure the least of all your perils
Is the stormy ocean wave.

Everyone acquainted with the lot encountered by Irish emigrant girls in the great cities of England or America, the hardships they had to undergo, the temptations to which they were subject, and the extraordinary proportion of them that

succumbed to these temptations, must acknowledge that the poetic insight of Kieckhafer correctly appreciated the gravity of the perils that awaited them. It is humiliating to have to record that the overwhelming majority of these girls were sent out upon a conscienceless world, absolutely destitute of training and preparation, and relying solely upon their physical strength and intelligence to carry them safely through. Laws made by men shut them out of all hope of inheritance in their native land; their male relatives exploited their labour and returned them never a penny as reward, and finally, when at last their labour could not wring sufficient from the meagre soil to satisfy the exactions of all, these girls were incontinently packed off across the ocean with, as a parting blessing, the adjuration to be sure and send some money home. Those who prate glibly about the "sacredness of the family circle" would do well to consider what home in Ireland today is sacred from the influence of the greedy mercenary spirit, born of the system of capitalist property; what family circle is unbroken by the emigration of its most gentle and loving ones.

Just as the present system in Ireland has made cheap slaves or untrained emigrants of the flower of our peasant women, so it has darkened the lives and starved the intellect of the female operatives in mills, shops and factories. Wherever there is a great demand for female labour, as in Belfast, we find that the woman tends to become the chief support of the house. Driven out to work at the earliest possible age, she remains fettered to her wage-earning - a slave for life. Marriage does not mean for her a rest from outside labour, it usually means that, to the outside labour, she has added the duty of a double domestic toil. Throughout her life she remains a wage-earner; completing each day's work, she becomes the slave of the domestic needs of her family; and when at night she drops wearied upon her bed, it is with the knowledge that at the earliest morn she must find her way again into the service of the capitalist, and at the end of that coming day's service for him hasten homeward again for another round of domestic drudgery. So her whole life runs - a dreary pilgrimage from one drudgery to another; the coming of children but serving as milestones in her journey to signalise fresh increases to her burdens. Overworked, underpaid, and scantily nourished because underpaid, she falls easy prey to all the diseases that infect the badly-constructed "warrens of the poor". Her life is darkened from the outset by poverty, and the drudgery to which poverty is born, and the starvation of the intellect follows as an inevitable result upon the too early drudgery of the body.

Of what use to such sufferers can be the re-establishment of any form of Irish State if it does not embody the emancipation of womanhood. As we have shown, the whole spirit and practice of modern Ireland, as it expresses itself through its pastors and masters, bear socially and politically, hardly upon women. That spirit and that practice had their origins in the establishment in this country of a social and political order based upon the private ownership of property, as against the older order based upon the common ownership of a related community.

Whatever class rules industrially will rule politically, and impose upon the community in general the beliefs, customs and ideas most suitable to the perpetuation of its rule. These beliefs, customs, ideas become then the highest expression of morality and so remain until the ascent to power of another ruling industrial class establishes a new morality. In Ireland since the Conquest, the landlord-capitalist class has ruled; the beliefs, customs, ideas of Ireland are the embodiment of the slave morality we inherited from those who accepted that rule in one or other of its forms; the subjection of woman was an integral part of that rule.

Unless women were kept in subjection, and their rights denied, there was no guarantee that field would be added unto field in the patrimony of the family, or that wealth would accumulate even although men should decay. So, down from the landlord to the tenant or peasant proprietor, from the monopolist to the small business man eager to be a monopolist, and from all above to all below, filtered the beliefs, customs, ideas establishing a slave morality which enforces the subjection of women as the standard morality of the country.

None so fitted to break the chains as they who wear them, none so well equipped to decide what is a fetter. In its march towards freedom, the working class of Ireland must cheer on the efforts of those women who, feeling on their souls and bodies the fetters of the ages, have arisen to strike them off, and cheer all the louder if in its hatred of thralldom and passion for freedom the women's army forges ahead of the militant army of Labour.

But whosoever carries the outworks of the citadel of oppression, the working class alone can raze it to the ground.

Chapter 6, The Reconquest of Ireland by James Connolly. New Books Publications, 1968. 2/6 available from Pioneer Book Service, 8 Teynbee Street, London E1.

WE ARE ALL "PSYCHOSEXUALLY IMMATURE" ... SO WHAT! by Marie Claire

Women's sexuality has been so much denied, abused and degraded - both on "scientific" and not so scientific grounds - that the earnesty of a book such as Sexual Response in Women (by Drs Phyllis and Eberhard Kronhausen, published by Corgi books, 1968) verges on provocation. It is a well-known fact that if a woman is "normally developed mentally and well bred, her sexual desire is small". Kraft Ebbing said so only some fifty years ago and Kraft Ebbing was an honourable sexologist. "Obvious sex interest only happens in lascivious women" echoed another medical authority of the time. Women are therefore condemned either to the lewdness of a brothel or to the boredom of the marital bed. The sexless mother, the sinless sister on one hand - the lascivious woman of flesh, the insatiable whore on the other hand. But Eve and the Holy Virgin are the two sides of the same coin - whether blessed with frigidity or possessed with greed a woman is always deprived of the dignity of an erotic being: sublimation and scorn are now equally effective weapons. The twin myths of the "pure woman" and of the "impure woman" was codified again and again. Freud gave it a scientific gloss. In Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (by no means his major work, but unfortunately the most widely read), Freud states that the transition from childhood to womanhood will only be successful if the clitoris abandons its sexual primacy to the vagina. If a woman does not achieve "the early and complete relegation of the sensitivity of the clitoris" which was the leading erogenous zone of the body of a little girl, she will remain "clitorally oriented" and "psychosexually immature". As the clitoris is an "atrophied penis", a woman is a castrated male who has had to struggle all through her life to accept the appalling fact that she has not been provided with a sex, that is to say with a penis.

Yet Freud himself was not entirely satisfied with his theory and repeatedly admitted that his knowledge of women was inadequate. He hoped that female

psychoanalysts would be "able to comprehend the facts with greater ease". It is sadly significant that the most eager post-Freudians to cling to this most imperfect theory were women psychoanalysts (Marie Bonaparte, Anne Freud, Helen Dutsch ...); women themselves have become convinced of their own inferiority! Furthermore what Freud hoped would be taken as basis for further studies become instead a rigid bible for his successors (A misfortune which he shares with Marx and a few others). For instance, though frigidity should technically be defined as total inability to achieve orgasm, the ultra-Freudians defined it as an "inability to achieve vaginal orgasm", and were thus enabled to say, in 1944, that between 70% and 80% of women were frigid. This would certainly have delighted Kraft-Ebbing and his colleagues!

One of the merits of the book mentioned is to destroy this amazing definition of frigidity. The approach to the problem of feminine sexuality is genuinely scientific and thoroughly materialist. They are concerned with one question only, "What happens to a woman's body when it is aroused?" To answer this question they have taken chemical and electrical measurements over a hundred women who agreed to have their pulse rate, heart beat, respiration, metabolism, vaginal acidity, brain waves etc ... measured during the various stages of their sexual response. They have closely examined the various parts of the body (vagina, cervix, breasts, clitoris etc ...) at every stage of the cycle. They use the latest discoveries in medicine, sociology, anthropology etc.... And they largely quote the answers given by the 500 women whom they interviewed in Europe and America. This is indeed a very useful, stimulating and highly readable book. I am convinced that it can and must be used by socialists as the background for fruitful discussions on female sexuality, for the conclusions severely challenge the myth of woman's sexual inferiority. In fact "woman may very well be the more highly sexed of the human species". The dichotomy of vaginal and clitoral orgasms is proved to be entirely false. We now know, the authors say, on the basis of such solid scientific work as is available, that there is no need for a shift or transfer of sensitivity from the clitoris to the vagina. On the contrary it is not the vagina, but the clitoris which remains throughout the woman's life, the organ with the greatest potential for erotic stimulation. This is because the clitoris has the greatest concentration of sensory nerve endings and, proportionately, much greater erectile capacity than even the male penis! In fact, practically all orgasms are centred around the clitoris whether they result from direct pressure or indirect pressure (the rubbing of the penis during intercourse, for instance). This radically disconnects the man's ejaculation from the woman's orgasm. It means that women do not have to rely on the man's sexual satisfaction to achieve genuine sexual satisfaction. A woman is multi-orgasmic, if she is stimulated after her first orgasm, she is likely to have another, and then another. But, if these orgasms do not vary in kind, they do vary in intensity. None of the women interviewed ever states that it is during intercourse that they achieve their most intense orgasms. Many of them give a very important part to other means (masturbation and cunnilingus in particular). Many widely accepted ideas have to be dismissed as well. It is not true that women are more reluctant to have casual relationships with their sexual partners, it is not true that their sexual response is more likely to be affected by mental discomforts etc ... There is in fact "an enormous sex potential that lies dormant in most women". And they seem to be vaguely aware that they are deprived of something important. The overwhelming majority of the women interviewed say they are not satisfied with their sexual life. Most of them blame their partners for it, which is obviously irrelevant, but it is interesting to note that they are aware of not having exhausted their sexual possibilities.

A very significant story is reported by the authors. In Italy the word "adultery" has widely different meanings depending on whether it is used in reference to a man or to a woman. If a woman has sexual intercourse with a man who is not her husband it is adultery. But her husband will have to keep a mistress in his own house or in a "public and notorious way" before he can pretend to be in the same legal position. This, apparently, is a violation of the Italian Constitution which is supposed to grant equality to men and women. Two women who had been convicted with adultery appealed to the Constitutional Court, on these grounds. The Court eventually decided that "in conformity with common opinion", it "constituted obviously a more serious offence". The law, as the (all male) court explained, aimed at "protecting the unity of the family" - the patriarchal family, needless to say. This is the heart of the matter. After Kraft-Ebbing had asserted that the sexual desire in women was very small, he made this very illuminating comment: "If this were not so, the whole world would become a brothel and marriage and a family impossible". Marriage and a family - as we know them - are impossible if women are sexually fully mature, that is if men and women are equal. To preserve the family structure women have to be kept in a state of inferiority, economically, legally, socially and sexually. This is the only reason why feminine sexuality has been so savagely repressed. The little girl is told "It's not the same thing for a woman". It is only natural therefore that she should remain a virgin until her marriage and a faithful wife afterwards, thus giving to her husband the certainty that his property will go to his own flesh and blood. For the monogamic family structure was a convenient way of stabilising private property upon which capitalism is built and it is now a convenient way of maintaining it. In retrospect, Freud's theory appears to be an obedient rationalisation of the denial of women's sexual rights. The need for a transfer from the clitoris to the vagina and the superiority of "vaginal orgasm" are attempts to liquidate feminine sexuality. Because "vaginal orgasm" is difficult to achieve, for anatomical reasons. And above all because vaginal orgasm depends upon the man's ejaculation. The Victorians (and it is not mere coincidence that the men of the Industrial Revolution should be the "Victorians", that is to say the men who have been the most eager to annihilate woman's sexual rights) honoured only one aspect of sex = ejaculation, which had the double advantage of being strictly necessary to the survival of the species and undoubtedly male - here again Freud humbly plays his part. To my knowledge, the only definition he ever gave of perversion was "sexual satisfaction which does not aim at reproduction". Is perverted, therefore, every sexual activity which is not connected with ejaculation and this must include the whole of specifically feminine sexuality which, as we have seen, is strictly independent from ejaculation.

Many people will argue that all this is completely obsolete. Sex is no longer taboo. Women are allowed to expect pleasure from their "married life"(!). There are "serious" books available on the subject and your Family Planning Centre will be glad to advise you. It is true that today very few people would agree with a Dr Isaac Brown Baker, a surgeon who performed numerous cliteridectomies on women to prevent any danger of sexual excitement, which, he was convinced, caused "insanities", "catalepsy", "hysteria" and other diseases. But in fact very little has changed. Most of Victorian ideas which would perhaps be dismissed in their original form, have been passed on to us through the channel of pseudo-scientific literature. Marriage manuals for instance are viciously prude. If the subject of sex could not be avoided any more it had to become harmless, mechanised, meaningless, boring and acceptable. No sensuality - the pubic hair was shaved, the human body deodorised. All very nice and "Scandinavian". By dint of (watered down) quotations of Dr Freud

an extra pressure was put on women. They now feel that they must at any cost experience vaginal orgasm, both to gratify their husband's phallic pride and to prove to themselves that they are not freaks. So, once again, women are associated to the destruction of their own eroticism and bullied into conforming to the norms of their own sexuality, set by men to benefit men. And yet men are victims of it as well. I refuse to believe that in a society where feminine sexuality has been so carefully destroyed, men can be totally mature sexual beings. The double obsession I must come/she must come cannot be anybody's ideal of a satisfactory sexual relationship. It is true that such relationships will only be possible where men and women have achieved equality: erotic fiction (if I may say so) must have a socialist society for background. But I believe that such books as Sexual Response in Women can be useful. It can help women to become conscious of their own enormous sexual potential and try to define themselves their own eroticism. This does not mean that we shall have to substitute the mystique of the clitoris to the mystique of the phallus, obviously. It means that any attempt to define feminine sexuality will have to involve careful investigation of all the physical and subjective factors which affect it. This is the necessary first step towards an authentic sexual liberation of both men and women.

(Some of the material used by Susan Lydon in her article "Understanding Orgasm" published by the American magazine Ramparts, Dec 14-28, 1968, has been used in this article. Susan Lydon was reviewing a book by Dr William H Masters and Mrs Virginia E Johnson Human Sexual Response which comes to very similar conclusions on the question of feminine sexuality.)

With this issue of Socialist Woman we say adieu to Marie Claire, one of our editors. Marie has been a real activist, involved in all our ventures during the past year; an ardent saleswoman of SW, a participant in our political debates and a most cheerful comrade. A builder of barricades during the May days in France, she returns home to continue the fight.

WOMEN IN THE HISTORY OF THE LABOUR PARTY.

Nore Vange.

Looking at the usual predominantly male attendance at this year's Labour Party conference, it is hard to believe that women's participation in the Labour movement is as long as the men's. In 1756, the Manchester Small-ware Weavers' Association included women who paid the same dues and received the same strike dues as the men. During a strike of their union in 1808 they proved "if possible, more turbulent and mischevous than the men!"

Women played their part in the machine wrecking of the late 18th century and after the Combination Acts were repealed in 1824, became active again in trade unions like the men. They were members of the printing unions, among others. In 1832 a strike of card setters, mainly women, called for Equal Pay and the Leeds Mercury of May 4th, 1832 had a significant comment: "Alarmists may view these indications female independence as more menacing to established institutions than the education of the lower orders." Some people's views have not changed much since then! Robert Owen's Grand National Consolidated Union in 1833 was open to women and many female lodges were formed.

The first charter drawn up by William Lovett in 1837 included women's suffrage, though this proved to be ahead of its time and was later dropped. But women joined the agitation and 8,200 signed the charter in 1842. After the collapse of the Chartist movement apathy set in until the 1850s, when the new model unions were formed. The most significant of these were the Lancashire Cotton Unions, whose recruitment of women in the weaving sections was vigorous. Because no differentiation between male, female and juvenile rates was made there was no question of separate unions for women and by 1896 15,000 women—about half the total membership—were in the union. They had the same rights and responsibilities as the male members.

In 1874 Emma Paterson formed what later became known as the Women's Trade Union League which was called upon by many unions to help organise women workers. In the 1880s began the New Unionism—the great movement among the unskilled and semi-skilled to build unions as the craft workers had done already. The Matchmakers strike in 1888 started as a result of an article by Annie Besant in the "Link", exposing the terrible conditions of work, set off a series of revolts by men workers too—the Gas workers, Dockers, Seamen etc. The new unions that were formed took women into membership, unlike most of the craft unions, but usually in separate women's branches. During the latter part of the century, many areas of work opened up to women and with them great increase in trade union membership.

Meanwhile, of course, the workers had realised that industrial action was not enough as a sole weapon. The first trade union M.P.s were elected in 1874, followed by three I.L.P. members in 1882. The Labour Representation Committee was formed in

1900, and from its inception women played a role. In the election of 1906 many women helped the Labour candidates and as a result the Women's Labour League was formed; this was not affiliated to the Labour Party. The fight for the franchise marked not merely a stage in the achievement of equality, but also a belated recognition of the importance of women to the political parties. The Labour Party can be proud of its support of the women's claims, with such people as Keir Hardie lending their weight to the women's fight. We generally think of the suffrage movement as being a middle class movement, but that is only half the story. The Labour Women's League fought not only for their own suffrage, but for that of working class men as well. Once the war was over and the older women had their franchise, in 1918, the Labour Party under its new constitution made provision for

individual membership and the Women's Labour League became the Women's section of the Labour party. A big recruitment campaign began and five full-time women organisers were appointed by 1919. The women's membership grew much faster than the men's (most of whom were still only affiliated through their union) and by 1922 there were over 1000 sections. In 1929, the first General Election since total franchise was held, and there were 14 million more women voters than men. Women membership reached its high point in 1953, with 420,000 and has been going fairly steadily downhill ever since.

In the early days of the League and Women's sections, the members seem to have been fairly militant and ahead of the men on many issues. The "Labour Woman" of today is a mere shadow compared with the paper of the same name produced by the pioneers. "Socialist Woman" is the true inheritor of its traditions. At the time the paper was the only one officially produced by the Labour Party and is now the longest running organ of the L.P. The women pushed the Party into campaigning for many necessary reforms; naturally they tended to concentrate on such issues as baby clinics (the League established one of the first in the country) education, maternity services, clean air etc. But nothing was outside their range and they had a still strong sense of Internationalism; every issue of their paper had news and often contributions from abroad; Clara Zetkin, secretary of The Women's International Council of Labour and Socialist Organisations, often wrote for Labour Woman, and when war broke out, a manifesto was published in the paper, which was sent to many countries. Throughout the war they maintained contact with women in the 'enemy' countries. In 1915, the women declared their opposition to conscription.

In 1918, a resolution at the L.P. conference, drew attention to the changes wrought by the war and urged that work or maintenance be provided for all women displaced from employment to make way for men returning from war service, that the principle of Equal Pay for Equal Work be everywhere adopted, that T.U.s accept women as members in such trade unions in which they were employed, and that such women should be employed only at union rates. Amongst other things for which we still wait six Labour governments later, the resolution asked that married women, for the purposes of income tax, should be treated as 'independent human beings'.

The overall impression one gets after studying the early publications of the Labour women is on the one hand, the tremendous strides made in the field of the Welfare State, improvements due entirely to the unceasing and heroic efforts of the men and women of the Labour movement; and on the other hand how little change there is in the status of women. The conditions of life for the average woman have changed beyond the wildest dreams of those early writers, she has greater opportunities than ever before for education and employment, yet still society disapproves if she seizes these opportunities fully, she still has to choose to a large extent between home and family and certainly in one sphere- that of the care of her young children while she works- she may be worse off, now that the 'extended family' has passed into history. Woman is still seeking her identity, still trying to be a person in her own right and not merely an appendage to some man. The reason is plain to see- in spite of all those social reforms with all their undoubted benefits, we are no nearer a Socialist society than when 'Labour Woman' first saw the light of day. What would those early contributors have said if they could have known that six Labour Governments later we would be as far away from Socialism as ever.

The men of the Labour movement today must look to their own record on their treatment of women. In a recent Labour Party publication, 'Discrimination against Women', for which the research was done by the women's sections, the party takes a fairly honest look at itself. In the section 'Politics and Politicians' the rank and

file is rather bitter about the attitude of male members. 'Male members of the L.P. do not accept us as real equals and still look upon women members as merely tea machines for the bazaars'. 'Any woman who gets through to election for public office has to be twice as good as a man.' But why must women still have to be exceptional when so many third and fourth rate men can and do get into every position in the L.P. and T.U.'s? The same excuse that Capitalist employers use against employing women are used against electing women as delegates to conferences, etc. (she has family responsibilities). Women don't want to be patronised, they want the same opportunities as men to educate themselves politically and to take their full place in the labour movement. Let us hope that the delegates at this years conference will ensure a full debate on the Equal Pay resolutions, that they will attend the N.J.A.C.W.E.R. meeting (don't leave it all to the women) and return home determined that through their unions they will play their part in making equal pay a reality before next conference. Lets make 1970 the year we need no more resolutions on that subject! But the men must all also look within themselves, to their attitude towards their women comrades and sisters in the movement, to their wives and daughters too, and ask themselves if these attitudes are all they might be. Women's place is not only in the home. It will never again be bounded by four stifling, limiting walls, but it will be beside the men, helping to build a Socialist society. We're going to be there, like it or not, because as the women of the labour movement have always known, it is our task as much as the men's. Our children will benefit from the struggle which the heroic women of the past began and which we continue today.

THE MONUMENTAL NATURE OF EQUAL PAY. By Jo O'Brien.

Ministers like to build monuments particularly to themselves. Jennie Lee has the open university, which is not open at all. There are reservations on who can enter the courses and its aim is not the pleasure of understanding but the creation of more technocrats. Through its courses the student will change his working role, but he will change from being one kind of producer to being a more valued kind. That is how they will always be defined in this society - as producers. Mr Wilson, of course, has the whole system as his monument. The rejuvenation of the bourgeois state appears to be his life's work. This involves an increase in production, which will produce a useable surplus of funds. The funds, of course, cannot come from the employer's profits. Every move made, from wage restraint to attempted control of the unions, is a move made with surplus production in mind. We are producers you see- invented sometime between the wheel and the internal combustion engine - infinitely more reliable and more adaptable too. Mrs. Castle's monument, though she doesn't know it, is a regular time bomb. We must be quite clear about the issue of Equal Pay for work of Equal Value. In the terms in which it is discussed by the Government it has nothing to do with equality and everything to do with productivity. Equal pay is only an issue at all because the Wilson Government sees it as leading to:-

- 1) a greater labour force.
- 2) a labour force whose productive value will be almost doubled because night work restrictions will be removed.
- 3) a labour force whose productive value will be increased because equal pay can be coupled with productivity agreements, which will involve a speed up of work, a shortening of work breaks, etc.
- 4) a useful excuse for controlling working class wage increases.

If the government looked upon the issue of equal pay in terms of equality and justice it would provide for the extra pay to come immediately from the employers' profits. But this would be nothing less an open challenge to Capital-not Wilson's way at all. Right, so they reverse the whole situation, they negotiate, not so much with the employers for justice as with the workers for increased amounts of work. In return for an early removal of night work restrictions and an accepted continuance of wage restraint, we may over a period of 5-7 years, have at least the semblance of what is rightfully ours. See how increased productivity can at once be organised, whilst justice is a far more complex affair! At the T.U.C. conference Mr. L.A. Matthews of the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers emphasised the lengthening of periods of work without adequate breaks for women and young persons. He said many of the recommendations of the working party dealing with hours of employment of women and young persons in factories were regressive. Production had been the yardstick in dealing with the welfare aspects of the Factories Acts. If new regulations were to be put into force, it might mean women would have to work for 6 hours without a break. There was a suspicion that the measures were to be part of the price women might have to pay for equal pay!

Mr. Matthews has understood well that equal pay on Mrs. Castle's terms will in fact be an extension of that sort of bargaining between Labour and Capital which results in the Productivity agreement. It's the sort of bargain in which Capital will give increased benefits, in return for a speed-up of work which will increase their profits. Now because of economic pressures, H.P. commitments, and a standard of living they want to maintain, the workers have in the recent past increased their pace of work in return for what the employers offered. But th

What the worker soon finds, however, is that when you're working flat-out, with only short breaks, fewer hands, night-shifts and the lot, you're exhausted and trapped at thirty and at forty the pace is too much or just irrelevant. This is what Mrs. Castle is offering women. She wants us to become fully integrated into a system which will wring us dry. This is also what is being offered to us by certain women trade unionists who maintain that in return for equal pay, we must be prepared to work nights etc. They want us to become totally submissive to Capital. They want women to be instrumental in establishing that workers are productive units that must function both day and night, regardless of the effects on what is left of their non-working lives and health.

And why is Mrs. Castle's monument a time bomb? The confederation of British industry have of course rejected equal pay. Wilson insists that it must be coupled with wage restraint, whilst most unions insist that it must not. It would seem that there are ~~too many~~ conflicting perspectives for agreement to be reached. But this does not constitute the explosiveness of the situation. Agreement may in future be reached. Capital can not resist the possibility of a speed-up of production: this is what is going very shortly to be necessary for it's very survival, it is what Mr. Wilson wants, and the unions may well be too used to thinking in terms of exchanging some more of their members' sweat for a little justice, to agree to such conditions for equal pay. The situation is explosive because it spells out to women, and also to men that they are regarded as no more than human conveyor belts. We must increase their awareness of this. We are not going to be instrumental in establishing night-work for another section of the working class, rather we shall try to bring it down. We are not contributing to the wage bargaining perspective which works people into ill health and apathy, for a little more from the employer. This requires a defensive mentality, which we do not have. We are giving nothing in return for equal pay. Let Mrs. Castle suggest that we should, and she will find out just how offensive we can be!

next issue!



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