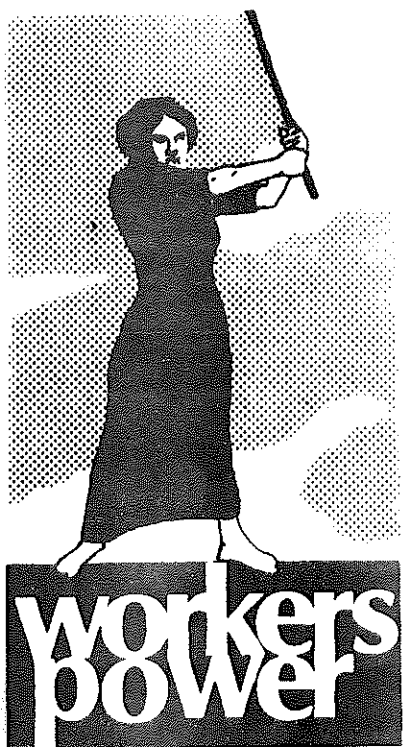


# **WOMEN'S OPPRESSION, WOMEN'S LIBERATION AND SOCIALISM**



**WHY WE NEED A  
WORKING CLASS  
WOMEN'S MOVEMENT 50p**



WOMEN'S OPPRESSION, WOMEN'S LIBERATION AND SOCIALISM

Why we need a working class women's movement

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Produced by WORKERS POWER, May 1985  
Second edition, November 1986

Workers Power  
BCM 7750  
LONDON  
WC1N 3XX



## PREFACE

This pamphlet was first published at the end of the year long Great Strike. During that year the wives of the miners had, together with women supporters of the strike, created a network of womens support groups which became a vital element in the struggle. They grew in numbers and they grew in function. Starting with the essential role of food distribution and fund raising, they became centres from which the women of the mining communities went out to win political support for the strike from other sections of the working class.

At the close of the strike, the majority of wives support groups were determined to continue. They had a variety of ideas for their continuing role. WORKERS POWER argued that the groups should continue the fight against pit closures, helping to minimise the defeat which the NUM had sustained, and should also campaign on other issues affecting working class women. We argued that the support groups could provide the basis for the rebirth in Britain of a working class womens movement.

Such a movement is vitally necessary if the working class is to successfully defend itself against the onslaught from the bosses on questions of jobs, services and on the conditions and pay of the poorest and least organised sectors of the working class.

We argued that if the womens support groups were to survive to build that movement and to fulfil their own particular tasks of defending the mining communities, they ought to be able to hammer out a plan of action and direction at democratically run national conferences. They should have the full backing of the NUM - including affiliate status - but to be able to run their own affairs. There needed to be a national lead and co-ordination for the groups in continuing the fight against closures and in supporting the victimised miners.

The national Women Against Pit Closures organisation has failed to do this. It suffered a blow when affiliate status was rejected by the NUM - after a disgraceful campaign of opposition by local and area officials - but this alone does not account for its failure to become a national campaigning body. The self-appointed leadership during the strike didn't allow a democratic conference to take place at the key moment when there was most determination and interest. Its proposals have remained at the level of bland declarations rather than detailed plans of campaign. The lesson from this experience is the need for open and thorough discussion of policy. It was not 'politics' itself that was the problem, but a certain kind of politics that encourages bureaucratic organisation rather than rank and file control. In the pamphlet we explain our criticisms of the politics of the Communist Party and the Labour Party which we think were responsible for these mistakes.

In a situation of defeat, when it seems as if your own efforts have failed, it is tempting to look to someone else to do the job for you. For the members of the womens' support network, and for thousands of other working class women desperate for change, it is tempting to look to a Labour government to rescue our social services, create jobs and build a fairer society. Labour has promised that if they are elected a Ministry for Women will be established, committed to the provision of services for women. Kinnock has been forced to give this promise because of pressure from women active in the unions and the Labour Party. But to believe that a Labour Government under Kinnock, even with a Ministry for Women, would solve the problems facing working class women would be false. In this pamphlet we show that the record of Labour in office tells against them. The actions of Neil Kinnock - in his refusal to support the NUM's struggle, in his witch-hunting of socialists in the Labour Party, and in his watering down of Labour's manifesto even before an election period - show that he cannot be trusted in office.

Whilst we call for a vote for Labour in the next election, and support the idea of a Women's Ministry, we have no illusions that they will solve all our problems. However, putting Labour in office means that we can put them to the test, demand that the Ministry immediately embark on a programme to provide full nursery

provision, a decent minimum wage of at least £120 per week decided by low paid workers not the bosses, equal opportunities for women in training, education and jobs, free health care and cervical cancer screening plus many other key demands which we outline in the pamphlet.

In fact a Women's Ministry would be unable to really improve the lot of working class women while power, privilege and wealth lies in the hands of the few, the capitalist class. We argue in the pamphlet that only if working class women organise and fight for these demands will Labour and the bosses grant them anything. Only the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist class can open the road for a future in which women have the chance to develop their talents and gifts to the full. A working class womens movement has a vital role to play both in defending women's rights and living standards now and in fighting for that future.

The immediate prospects for such a movement may have faded with the decline of the womens support groups. But we firmly believe that the need - and the material - is still there. Alongside those groups still in operation are thousands of determined women organised in trade unions who would be the essential core of the movement. Right now they are fighting to defend their unions in the face of privatisation. They are fighting for the right to join a union in sweat shops and low wage firms. They are campaigning for their unions to take their own issues seriously and fighting sexism in both workplace and branch. They are supporting their fellow oppressed by ensuring South African goods aren't used by local authorities. They have stood firm in the long battle against Murdoch. The urgent need is to step up that activity and not be swayed into thinking that holding back will help get us a Labour Government to come to our aid. That is an invitation to the bosses to do their worst and a recipe for Kinnock to preside over more of the same.

We urge you to read and discuss our pamphlet, and join with us in keeping the fight going in the difficult period ahead.

November 1986

## INTRODUCTION

The 1984-5 miners' strike was one of the most courageous working class struggles ever in this country. One outstanding feature of it was the mobilisation of working class women in the mining areas. The wives, girlfriends and relatives of miners supported the strike with tremendous determination and spirit. Without them the miners would undoubtedly have found it a thousand times more difficult to stay out for as long as they did. The women's support groups have had a great impact within the NUM and the labour movement generally. They are a direct challenge to the patronising male bureaucrats in the labour movement who always argue that working class women are passive and not interested in politics and struggle.

In shattering such myths the wives also experienced a great change in their own ideas. They had first hand experience of the brutality of the police on the picket line and when the riot squads rampaged through the pit villages. They heard the lies told day in and day out by the media about their struggle. They were able to glimpse the real values of the profit-hungry capitalist system which spent millions of pounds trying to smash the NUM, and yet at the same time closes hospitals, cuts services desperately needed by the old and infirm, starves schools and villages of funds and spends billions on weapons designed to kill millions.

Many women have also experienced a change in their ideas about their own position as women. They have been involved in communal food kitchens, organised food parcels, money collections and organised collective child-care. Some have been on pickets, demonstrations and spoken to meetings of workers about their fight. These are things they have never done before.

At home wives have had, and won, arguments with their husbands about going on pickets, taking it in turn to look after the children and do the housework. **"We're not going back . . ."** many wives have said throughout the dispute. They have experienced something better, more interesting and satisfying than being stuck at home, bored and isolated. Those who have jobs also found the wives' groups a source of support and comradeship; **"we'd have cracked up if we'd not had the group"** expresses the feelings of many.

Keeping the groups together is vital to stop the women, despite what they have learnt, being forced to 'go back' into the home. The groups can counter the pressure from many men who, back at work, will no longer see the need for their wives to be organised. They can organise support for sacked and jailed miners, help put the NUM into fighting shape by supporting local struggles. Wives have got representation on the National Rank and File Miners' Movement steering committee. These developments must be built upon and women's involvement in the groups and in struggle expanded, if the gains over the last 12 months are not to become lost and forgotten in the next 12 months.

In this society women are not equal. Capitalism oppresses women as well as brutally exploiting the working class as a whole. During this dispute many women have come to understand the reality of this oppression and exploitation more clearly than any number of speeches and articles could have explained. People's ideas change quickly and often dramatically when they are involved in struggle. In this pamphlet we start from the experiences of the women in the mining communities and go on to look at the inseparable links between women's oppression and capitalism. We also put forward our programme for defeating capitalism and liberating women. This programme can only be fought for by the working class in a united struggle against capitalism. Women have a central role to play in this fight, as the miners' wives have demonstrated so clearly. But the organised working class must also be made to put the struggle for women's rights and demands to the fore, in order to forge solid unity against a common enemy. A mass organisation of working class women will ensure that both women and men in the labour movement take the fight for working women's rights seriously, and hasten the day when both the exploitation of workers and the oppression of women are ended by the overthrow of capitalism.

## WOMEN IN THATCHER'S BRITAIN

Women workers are considerably worse off than men. The Equal Pay Act and Sex Discrimination Act of the 1970s may have appeared to remove the barriers to equality, but in reality their social and economic position has not been fundamentally improved.

Women have lower pay and fewer job improvement opportunities at work. Women are discriminated against in education, jobs, social security and the law. At work many women suffer sexual harassment. In most cases the jobs women have are extensions of their ascribed role as servicers of men (secretaries), as carers (nurses), cleaners, catering workers etc.

We are still conditioned throughout our schooling, by the press, magazines, advertising and every other method of head-fixing to see women as inferior. Women's jobs and careers are not regarded as being as important as men's. Girls are supposed to leave school and hunt for a potential husband. Once she has found him, he will take care of her as long as she brings up his children, cooks his tea and remains a sex nymph when he is in the mood.

If women dare to resist the pressure to conform to such 'norms' they are described as 'old maids', condemned as child-hating 'career' women or scorned as being unattractive. If the isolation, lack of independence and hard labour in the home makes women depressed, they are fed tranquillisers, told their socially induced misery is an illness and doped up in the hope that this will prevent them rebelling.

With Thatcher at the helm women are becoming worse off. Anyone who voted for her in 1979 as a 'vote for women' must be sick at heart. Thatcher has pursued policies which are designed to make life worse for most women. The Tories do not hide their aims. Back in 1983 the Tory Family Policy Group outlined its plans for women. It aimed:

**" . . . to encourage families to resume responsibilities taken on by the state, for example, responsibility for the disabled, the elderly and unemployed 18 year olds".**

In other words they were saying that a woman's place is in the home doing free of charge work previously done by the welfare state. The Tories want to cut social spending and thereby boost profits by cutting back the gains made by the working class in previous years.

The March 1985 budget confirmed this plan with proposals that a married man's tax allowance should be raised to the same level as it would be if both partners were working, to make it 'economically attractive' for the wife to stay at home. They seek a return to the idea that women work for 'pin money', that the man is the real breadwinner, so that they can slash women's wages still lower and make them give up work to look after children and dependent relatives.

The latest budget had more plans for women who work. By trying to abolish the Wages Councils and cutting the cost to employers of employing low paid workers, the government is actively encouraging bosses to cut wages. It is often women who are in the jobs 'protected' - inadequately - by the Wages Councils, jobs such as shop work and hairdressing. Pay in these jobs is low enough now. Lawson is giving a green light to the bosses in these industries to slash wages even more.

Every area of women's lives is under attack from this government. A look at some of the facts about women under the Tory government dispels any remaining myths about women today being already 'equal' or 'liberated'.

### **Women At Work**

80% of all women are in paid employment. That makes up 44% of the workforce. Yet 67% of these workers are concentrated in just three categories of low paid work: clerical (41%); catering, cleaning and hairdressing (10%), health, education and welfare (16%).



Nearly one million women are officially registered as unemployed. Many more are not on the books because there are no benefits for many married women.

In 1983 there were 50,000 new jobs created by the bosses - and that was supposed to be an economic boom. Even these figures are misleading. There were actually 200,000 more part-time jobs available, mainly for married women, so there was actually a reduction of 150,000 full-time jobs.

### Working Part-Time

The last years have seen a massive expansion in part-time working. 44% of working women work part-time. That makes up 4.1 million jobs in all. **The Economist** (one of the bosses weekly magazines) explained this increase in the following way: **"part-time women workers in Britain are not just cheerful but cheap"**, they gloated. **"Employers think they are more productive than full-timers. They are also in the lowest paid jobs . . . These are the women earning less than the national insurance threshold of £34 per week (so the bosses don't have to pay national insurance - WP) That would not buy many hours of a miner's time, but it would pay for nearly 19 hours of a shop assistant on the minimum set by the wages council"**. (*The Economist* 29.9.84). They estimated that in the service industries up to 70% of women part-timers are earning less than £35 per week.

For the greedy employers part-time working also means less rights for the women. Only 51% of part-timers get any sick pay, and 40% have no employment protection and can therefore be dismissed at a moment's notice. It's easy to see why the bosses like part-timers, but women often have no alternative because of family commitments.

### Women's Pay

Anyone who thought the Equal Pay Act introduced 10 years ago would really improve women's pay must be disappointed by now. In April 1984 the average gross pay for manual women workers was £92.98, only 61% of the average manual male workers wage of £151.90.

The real problem for women seeking equal pay is that jobs tend to be segregated. 63% of women have jobs where they only work with other women, so there are no men to become equal to, and the legislation has remained as useless as it was designed to be.

In real terms many women have very low wages. NHS ancillary workers doing a 40 hour week were awarded a pay rise of £3.15 a week this year, taking them up to £88.98. This settlement was amongst the lowest in the public sector at 4.8% - compare that to police pay rises of 8.4% of a much higher basic rate. Part-time workers also don't get fat overtime bonuses for fighting miners on the picket line.

### Cuts

Thatcher's commitment to profits means reducing public spending on 'luxuries' such as health, housing, old people's homes, schools and nurseries. For women like her this does not make much difference. They can employ a nanny, buy their own house and pay for private hospital care.

Cuts in social services hit working women two ways. They hit them as workers in those industries where jobs are at risk. 80% of workers in old people's homes are women. So too are virtually all home-helps and school meals staff. The planned cut of 40% in the school meals budget for 1984-5 means a drastic loss of jobs for these women.

Secondly, cuts mean that the task of caring for children, sick relatives and elderly parents falls even more heavily onto women. Already more women are caring for sick, disabled or frail people than are looking after the under-18s.

Tory cuts in subsidies to local authorities have led to a virtual stop in all building of houses. Homeless families and those waiting to be rehoused face a prospect of no more houses being built until working class action defeats Thatcher.

Closure of schools and hospitals with transfer of services to other areas also affects women. They mean more travelling to take the children to school or visit hospitals. At the same time public transport costs have been increased and routes have been cut.

These 'little matters' do not trouble the ministers taking decisions. But they have a big impact if you have to get two buses to go to the next ante-natal clinic when your local hospital closes.

### **Black Women**

78% of ancillary workers in London hospitals are black. They earn low wages and often work in the most run-down hospitals. Now these services are cut, black women will lose their jobs and find it difficult to get new ones given the racist employment policies of the NHS and private employers.

Black nurses are concentrated in grades such as S.E.N. and auxiliaries which have no promotional prospects and lower pay. Many Asian women work in sweatshop conditions for appalling wages as low as £35 for a 40 hour week. Other women work from home, earning from £15 - £20 for about 40 hours work on piece rates.

Black women are also facing increasing harassment from the police and the state. The racist immigration laws make black women particularly vulnerable to deportation at the hands of the police.

If a husband dies or leaves them black women often have no right to stay where they have lived for years and brought up children. These racist and sexist laws are barbaric in their effects on black families.

### **Privatisation**

Not satisfied with making welfare and the NHS a system of 'poor relief', the Tories are now trying to make profits out of these services. In local authorities and the NHS this has meant government instructions to put services like cleaning, laundry and catering out to tender to the lowest cost bidder. This is the reality of 'privatisation' which has given the green light to cowboy companies to pay starvation wages and cut corners in order to come in and undercut the present cost. Strikers at Barking and Hammersmith Hospitals know what this means.

Privatisation means reduced hours, lower pay, shorter holidays and harder work for the women employed, and it means an inadequate service for the people using the NHS or Council amenities. At Barking, where scab labour is being employed to try and break the strike, the standards are so appalling that women with newly born babies have been sent home early because their babies' cots were crawling with cockroaches.

It is no surprise that the government are attacking ancillary services in the NHS. All strikes and disputes in recent years over pay and cuts in the NHS have seen domestic staff, porters and catering workers in the forefront of the action.

Privatisation plans aim to undermine union organisation in these areas. The Tories also have a special interest in these plans. 17 Tory MPs have direct financial links with the major companies taking over the services.

### **Women's Health**

Still not content with the impact of Tory policies on women's health, Kenneth Clarke decided to try a direct approach to **ruining women's health**. He ordered doctors to restrict cervical cancer smear tests to every five years in women under

35. This is a cut purely for financial reasons, reducing an already inadequate service. The recent death of a woman in Oxford from cervical cancer, and two others who are seriously ill with the disease has highlighted some of the problems of the 'screening' facilities. These women had abnormal smears but had not been given the treatment when it could have cured them.

Lack of investment and organisation has meant that this totally treatable disease, (if it is detected in the pre-cancerous stage by a smear), has continued to kill over 2,000 women a year in Britain. No real decrease in the numbers of deaths has been achieved despite this medical advance. In other countries such as Sweden and Denmark, investment has led to a dramatic decrease in mortality from cervical cancer. Rather than following such examples, this government is reducing the existing service.

### Contraception and Free Abortion

Good, reliable methods of contraception are vital if women are to be able to plan their working lives and their families. The development of the contraceptive pill and the coil have changed many women's lives and have to some extent freed sexual pleasure from the fears of unwanted pregnancy. But the Tories and their right-wing allies in the church have set their hopes on changing all this.

Victoria Gillick, an obnoxious religious bigot with a history of involvement in racist and far right groupings, has been successful in getting a court ruling forbidding doctors from prescribing contraception to under-18s without parental consent. This attack on young women will not stop them having sex with their boyfriends. It will mean more unwilling teenage mothers and unwanted babies.

The twisted Gillick claims she is protecting innocent young women from the 'evils' of sex. For Gillick - and she is merely a mouthpiece for the hypocritical and reactionary moral values that capitalism perpetuates - sex is necessary purely for breeding. Outside of marriage the amazingly simple, enjoyable, emotionally and physically fulfilling range of sexual activities open to human beings are declaimed the darkest of sins. This pleasure-denying morality stinks. The real evil is not sex but the repression of sexuality by capitalism through its reactionary institutions like the Catholic church.

It is a morality designed to maintain the sexual domination of men over women as one component of their oppression. It results in emotional and sometimes physical misery and tragedy. Gillick is inflicting on young women the evil of being repressed by their parents, with all the attendant rows and bitterness. She is forcing girls into the desperate situation of having to get rid of unwanted pregnancies by any means they can. Given the barbaric restrictions on NHS abortion facilities, this can mean physical injury, emotional torment and even death.

Enoch Powell's Bill, which is going through parliament at the moment, is supposed to stop experiments on human embryos. It will actually curtail research on 'test tube babies' and deny many couples who really want children the right to that technology. It will also threaten some methods of contraception which work by preventing implantation of an embryo, such as the coil. It would establish in law the idea of the 'rights of a foetus', which will later be used no doubt to argue for all abortions to be made illegal.

These changes fit in well with Tory 'values'. More women forced to stay at home with more unwanted children keeps them from demanding equal pay, equal rights, and adequate services. It perpetuates the view that women have a primary duty to stay at home with the children, and only a secondary interest in a job which can therefore be low paid and insecure.

### Their Morals And Ours

The Tories say that society is falling apart and that we need more law and order, more respect and discipline. They call for a return to the values of their Victorian

forefathers. They argue that if only the family were stronger, if women did not leave their children roaming the streets whilst going out to work for pin-money, society would be a better place.

The Tory moralists want women to take on the role of pulling the family back together, with Mum caring for everyone who is ill, disabled or unemployed. She can have a job as well, providing its not her main priority and can be given up if necessary. Women have to teach their children to respect their elders, the police, the church and the royal family, and we must accept that our rights are always secondary when it comes to anti-abortionists interfering with our lives and telling us what to do with our bodies.

The morality of Thatcherism is truly 'Victorian' - a return to sweated labour enforced prostitution and domestic drudgery for working class women.

### THE ORIGINS OF WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

We are brought up to believe that there is something natural about women's position in society. Women are presented as physically and intellectually inferior to men. Women must be protected by men. It is not 'feminine' for them to be rough or adventurous, to fight, to do physically hard or dangerous jobs or sports.

If they do they are likely to be mocked. Young girls who behave outside of the norms that society considers feminine are called 'tomboys'. If they assert themselves within marriage they are accused of 'wearing the trousers'. All this is seen as some sort of 'unnatural act'. There is often the suggestion that women who do not conform to the notions of what an attractive (to men) girl, or caring mother and wife should be, are lesbians, based on the totally false conception that lesbianism itself is unnatural and terribly wrong.

These attitudes can take very different forms, from patronising chivalry to vulgar abuse. Thus women's role as mother and housewife can be glorified and even sanctified, as it is by the male priesthood of the Catholic Church around the figure of the Virgin Mary. But behind the clouds of sickly incense offered up to motherhood there lies a terrible threat. It is not accidental that the same church which does this also fiercely denies women the right to control their own bodies, to have or not have children when **they** choose. It denies women the right to make use of contraception or abortion. It stigmatises sexual pleasure, separated from the begetting of children, as a mortal sin. It refuses to sanction or recognise divorce, and attacks all sexual experience outside marriage in the strongest terms.

Whilst millions of people have, to a greater or lesser extent, freed themselves from the direct influence of the clergy, the basic 'morality' of Christianity lingers on in peoples heads. This gives rise again and again to the same ideas aimed at limiting women's freedom. The fact that this morality is heavily weighted against women is shown in the attitudes to sexual pleasure. Women are supposed to provide it, to make themselves attractive to men. The vast numbers of abusive comments made about 'unattractive' women testify to this. But woe betide the woman who seeks this pleasure from more than one partner, or takes the initiative. She is pretty soon branded as a 'tart', while men who do the same thing are rarely criticised and often admired.

Women are divided into 'respectable' women, 'faithful' to their boyfriends and husbands, devoted to their children, and the other kind - those who are not respected. But even the 'respect' given to the faithful wife and mother is in fact far from the respect shown to equals. Even these models of what men expect women to be are treated as being dominated by their emotions and incapable of being rational. This is regarded as some kind of natural consequence of motherhood.

In fact the whole set of ideas about women - ideas held strongly by men and by large numbers of women too - are supposed to be grounded in biology. This biological difference is held to account for all the attitudes we have about the male

and female personality. It is brought forward as an alibi for inequality and for systematically discriminating against women from the earliest age.

Certainly biological differences are important - women can bear children and are often unable to continue their usual activities for the last weeks of pregnancy and the first weeks of nursing. But beyond this the fact that women exclusively look after children, the fact that they often have to give up their jobs are social facts based on the way we organise these tasks. They are not biologically determined facts.

Perhaps women's inferiority is due to their supposed weakness. On average they are less heavily built, less muscularly developed and therefore, for certain tasks, less strong than men. Though there are other jobs and physical activities that their physique gives women advantages in. Is one supposed to deduce from men's greater average size and muscular development a crude physical reason for women's subordination? But that is not how rule and domination either came about or is maintained. The bosses - the ruling class - do not rule because of greater physical strength. Even if individually they were a tribe of Tarzans they are a tiny minority.

No, dominance is again a socially and economically determined thing. Those who own or control the means of production, and who exploit the labour of millions, rule society. With their social wealth they create a body of armed people who protect their property and enforce their rule.

Perhaps, then, women are mentally or psychologically inferior or disadvantaged? It is doubtlessly true that women's emotions may be influenced by biological functions specific to women. It is equally true that men are influenced by their biology. But there is no proof whatsoever that this **systematically** incapacitates women for intellectual work. Women's inferior position in education, in science, in technology is the product of the 'specialisation' forced on her at home and at school.

Girls are denied equal education opportunities, pushed into learning needlework and cookery and encouraged to help their mums around the home. Young women are refused entry into apprenticeships for skilled well paid jobs such as engineering, and pushed into caring roles such as nursing, or servicing like secretaries and shop workers where the skills are less valued and the pay much lower.

Wherever women are given equal education and equal opportunity they show the same potential, intellectually as men. Women's oppression is thus not biological or natural in origin. It is rooted in the way human societies came to be organised. Women were not always oppressed - for most of the lifetime of our species they were not. It only appears to be so, because women have been oppressed for thousands of years - since the rise of **class** societies. The way they were oppressed has itself undergone revolutionary changes just as human society has. It has not always been the same, a fact which is important when we think of how to change society to make women and men equal.

When socialists first began to study this question it was Frederick Engels (carrying on work begun with his comrade Karl Marx) who established the basic understanding of the roots of women's oppression. In **The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State**, Engels established that in early human societies women's position was not systematically inferior. Much research has been done into the evidence about primitive societies since Engels wrote this book in the 1880s, but his basic conclusions remain true. In primitive society women and men lived in groups which survived by gathering vegetation and hunting wild animals. In these groups all labour was directed towards getting enough food to survive and raise children. There was almost certainly a division of labour, with many women spending more time rearing infants and gathering food near the settlement. The men, and some women would go hunting for animals. There is no evidence that women were excluded from making decisions within the group, or that they were any less respected. Indeed the food collected by the women was probably the major source of subsistence.

Engels argued that it was only when these primitive communities developed better

techniques and began cultivating land and taming and rearing animals, that the position of women began to change. As the groups produced more food they became less nomadic and had cultivated land to defend. They also began to produce more food than they immediately needed. This surplus could either be stored or exchanged with other communities. The control over this extra food, land and livestock was not taken by the whole group, but for the first time a ruling group emerged which took matters into its own private hands. This was the start of **class society**, where a ruling elite controlled the distribution and disposal of the goods produced by the whole community. It was with the emergence of class society that the position of women began to change.

Women were less immediately concerned with animals as they did not do the hunting, and so were not the ones who began to possess and breed animals. As the ruling class accumulated some property and wealth it became important for a line of inheritance to be established. For a man to know which are his children, he had to be sure of his partner's sexual activity being restricted, and so a man's control over a woman's fertility developed with a family within which women were considered, along with the animals and the land, a form of property.

Class society has gone through many different stages since that time, and with it the family has altered and the particular role of women has changed, but that basic oppression has remained. Women have been excluded from the decision making and ruling elites, and men have retained a control over women's fertility. Under capitalism this has taken on a new and specific form, and to understand the position today we need to look at that.

### WOMEN UNDER CAPITALISM

Under capitalism women have remained oppressed, even though some gains have been made in the areas of legal and political rights. The problem is that however much women have the right to vote, to own property and not to be discriminated against inequality remains because of the role women have in the family.

It is not good enough having equal rights to own land or be prime minister if you spend all your time cooking the tea and looking after the children. That is the farce of 'equality' under capitalism - it only applies to those who already have the privileges to use it. This of course applies to working class men as well as women, but women are particularly affected because of the family. every aspect of women's lives is determined by their role at home. The jobs women do, the pay and conditions of work, the rights to state benefits all assume that a woman is dependant upon a man, and has a main role at home.

Capitalism needs the family to remain central for women in order that the task of producing workers is done as cheaply as possible. The family is an isolated, private place where women raise children up to working age, and also ensure that the man of the house is ready for work each day. She is expected to feed, clothe, wash and keep the house clean. She creates an environment in which the man can relax and rebuild his energies for the next shift. And the woman, she is expected to do all this hard work as a labour of love.

If the bosses had to pay for this work to be done by wage labourers just think what it would cost. Someone to clean, someone to do the laundry, cooks, nursery workers, someone to look after the older children when they come home from school, someone to look after sick workers and children . . . the list seems endless. If the bosses had to provide all this it would cost a pretty penny and eat into their precious profits. Capitalism rests on the work women do at home as well as the work done in factories, and ensures that this situation continues. All the propaganda in adverts, soap operas, the press about women is directed at sustaining this basic inequality by applauding the role of the mother and the delights of the family.

The role of women in the family helps capitalism in another way. It provides a large group of people who can be brought into industry if more workers are needed, can be given low wages and poor conditions, and then kicked out, back into the home full-time, when capitalism is going through a bad patch. For example, during the Second World War when women were needed in production in large numbers, all at once the ideas about a women's place being in the home were quickly shelved. Instead women were told they could be good workers and good mothers by 'backing Britain'. Nurseries and canteens sprang up in order to make it possible for women to work in the munitions factories. In the 1950s and 1960s, with a shortage of labour, women were again encouraged to work. But now that capitalism has hit another crisis and needs to shed workers, cut production and savage public spending, a new attack is being launched on the 'working mother'. Thatcher starts to talk about a return to Victorian values. Its purpose is to weaken the defence of women's jobs and open the way to pushing them back into the home.

### Personal Life

Women's role in the family also has far-reaching effects on personal development and relationships. In our society it is overwhelmingly women who must be attractive to men, who must conform to certain ideals and standards that stare out at us from every magazine, from the TV screen. In millions of images, and not just in what people recognise as pornography, women are degraded from full human beings into being objects at the disposal of men. This finds its worst expression in rape and sexual assault, but most women at some time or another find themselves embarrassed, mocked at, humiliated, or 'put in their place' because they are women. If they fight back they are accused of nagging and making themselves un-attractive to men.

It is the misery-inflicting inequality of sex under capitalism that we socialists despise, not sex itself. In the face of the ruling class' hypocritical 'puritans' we demand early and non-discriminatory sex education so that children of both sexes can learn about and prepare to **enjoy** sex. We are for free contraception and for abortion on demand so that sexual pleasure, especially for the young, can be free from the fears and pressures that their absence brings. We are for fulfilling sexual relations on a basis that frees physical love from the myriad of taboos, inequalities and distortions that wreak emotional havoc on so many people. We cannot guess what sexual relations will look like under socialism, but we can say that love and attraction will, unlike their fate under capitalism be freed from exploitation.

The distortion of sexuality and personal relations affects all women under capitalism, not just working class women. Yet it is wrong to think that women are equally oppressed or have an equal interest in getting rid of capitalism. For the wives of bosses things are slightly different. Obviously they do not maintain or reproduce workers for the production line and therefore haven't got the same economic role under capitalism as working class women. In fact ruling class women are producing the next generation of bosses. Men's control over this production of the parasitic layer is very important for them - since it is vital that they pass on the wealth they steal from the workers to the right son. This requires that women of the upper classes are also primarily concerned with family and home, but they then get plenty of compensation for it in terms of their cushy living standards.

So whilst it is true that all women suffer some degree of oppression, even Margaret Thatcher must have met prejudice and discrimination on her road to the top, the women of the ruling class can unload most of the oppression onto the backs of working class or lower middle class women. They have cooks, nannies, nurses to look after their husbands and children. Since they share the benefits of their husband's exploitation of workers, they have no interest in freeing working class women.

Working class women are the most cruelly exploited and oppressed in capitalist society. Often they bear a double or triple burden. Exploited at work like men they are, except in certain professions or white collar jobs, relegated to lower paid jobs

or grades. Added to low pay and bad conditions at work is their 'job' at home. Working class women have thus the most to gain from their class's liberation **and from their liberation from domestic slavery.**

In addition, working class women have the collective power, with working class men in the trade unions, the workplaces and communities, to overthrow the system which condemns them to drudgery. The organisation of that power, the mobilisation of working class men and women is an essential and urgent task. The miners' wives have shown an impressive ability to organise. By spreading such organisation across the working class, by building a truly mass movement of working class women the forces of socialism and women's liberation will be at least doubled.

### WOMEN FIGHTING BACK

Working class women have fought back over the years against the oppression and exploitation they suffer under capitalism. Even in the early years after the Industrial Revolution, when appalling conditions at home and work ground down the working women, their spirit was never completely crushed. They joined the newly forming trade unions in the textile mills of the North-West. In the 1830s and 1840s they were active in the radical Chartist Movement, which was fighting for democratic rights for the working class.

At the turn of the century there was a massive upsurge in activity amongst the working class women of Britain. In 1889 the Bryant and May matchgirls struck for improved pay and better conditions. They won new safety measures designed to lessen the chance of contracting the fatal "phossy jaw" - a bone rotting disease caused by working with the phosphorus in matches. Other women workers inspired by the match-girls' action became organised in the women's Trade Union League. Unionisation spread amongst women workers, and semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Their struggles ensured trade unions weren't just the preserve of the privileged skilled workers.

Women textile workers fought not only for better pay and conditions, but also for political rights and social welfare. In 1903, working class suffragists launched a campaign in the Weavers Union. Most branches decided to back the call for "Votes for Women". Local suffrage committees were formed in Lancashire and Yorkshire. The women travelled to speak in towns and villages, campaigned through public meetings and rallies, often facing the vilest abuse and rough handling.

But the tragedy was that the leadership of the suffrage movement was in the hands of the upper and middle class women. One wing, the "militant" suffragettes led by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, ended up supporting the carnage of the First World War. Emmeline then joined the Conservative Party. Most of the working class suffragists, however, had been part of the "constitutional" wing. The leaders disapproved of the Pankhursts' tactics which involved disruption of public life, breaking windows and courting arrest. The working class women, too, were understandably critical of the Pankhursts. It was all very well for upper middle class women to sacrifice themselves, to be jailed for months in Holloway and go on hunger strike. But for working women with hungry mouths to feed at home it was quite another proposition. They might admire the tremendous courage of the suffragettes - as we can do today - but the tactics excluded the mass participation of working women. They were gestures of protest by the middle class women.

But the "constitutional" wing also limited action to win voting rights. It directed pressure at the Labour Party and Parliament. Parliament did in the end concede votes for women after the First World War, but the major inequalities and the poverty facing working class women remained. Women who had worked in munitions in the war found themselves out of a job when the men came home.

Working class women organised in the Co-operative Women's Guild, the Women's Labour League and the new women's Section of Unions, to improve conditions at home and at work. In 1921 and 1926, miners' wives organised food kitchens, the



defence of households against evictions, and the defence of villages against the police.

The leadership of the TUC and the Labour Party repaid the organising efforts of the women shamefully. The TUC betrayed the General Strike and the miners were eventually forced back to work. When Labour took over Government under Ramsay MacDonald, in its efforts to 'manage' the capitalist system which was wracked by crisis, it tried to cutback on desperately needed welfare benefits for the working class. In the end, Labour split and MacDonald formed a coalition with the Tories. Throughout the 'Hungry Thirties' it was working class women who bore the brunt of the Depression.

What a tragedy that there was no working class womens movement, thoroughly independent of both the middle class 'womens' righters' and of the traitorous Labour leaders.

Unfortunately, much of the earlier experience of struggle has been lost, or rather been deliberately hidden from history by reformist leaders. The labour movement leaders ignored their women members for decades after the Second World War except when it came to fund raising and social events. But by the 1960's working class women were coming to the fore again.

In 1968 the sewing machinists at Fords decided they were fed up with their work being undervalued, fed up at being paid only 80% of the men's rate and at being graded as only semi-skilled. They walked out. Management, unions and the government were forced to take the women strikers seriously. The women won the principal of equal pay, although not the regrading. Final victory on the regrading issue was only won in 1985. "I think the Ford women have definitely shaken the women of this country" said Rose Boland, shop steward at Dagenham. It was true. The Ford's strike was a landmark, one quickly followed by others. In February another militant strike occurred. Women textile workers in Leeds walked out calling for an equal pay rise to the men. Once outside they formed a march going to all the local textile factories calling women out. The march brought 50 factories, employing 20,000 workers to a standstill. A flying picket two years before Arthur Scargill's use of it in the 1972 miners' strike.

It was hardly surprising that women should be angry. In the 1950's and 1960's the economy expanded. More and more women were drawn into paid work. By 1971 they made up nearly 40% of the labour force. But like black workers recruited from overseas, they were kept in less well paid and unskilled jobs. The bosses could take advantage of the fact that the majority of women still saw their main role as housewives or mothers. It is difficult to organise to fight for better pay when you have to skip out to shop in the lunch hour and scurry back to collect the children or cook the tea in the evening. Women's desire for part-time work fitted in nicely with the bosses need for a flexible workforce which it could increase or decrease as demand went up or down.

Despite these difficulties, working women did fight back. They carried on from the strikes at Fords and in Leeds to fight for better pay in innumerable disputes large and small - S.E.I.s, Hoovers, Tricos. They forced the introduction and implementation of equal pay legislation. They fought too for trade union recognition. These battles were particularly bitter for black women. The struggles at Imperial Typewriters, Chix and Grunwicks, in which Asian women played a major role, were all testimony to the extraordinary determination of women workers. Not surprisingly, by 1981 30% of the 12 million affiliated trade unionists were women. Back in 1962 they had made up only 17% of the total membership.

Life in the trade unions was not easy for women workers. All too often, they encountered hostility at branch meetings. Their needs were ignored by stewards at work and if they did fight they found it much more difficult to get support. Of course, this is partly because of sexist attitudes from male workers in the rank and file. Just as miners' wives have had to battle against prejudice amongst the miners, so women workers faced prejudice and opposition.

The major problem in the unions facing the women, however, was the trade union leadership, like the role of the AUEW in the mid-1970's which failed to fight for blacking of wiper blades produced by scab male workers at Trico in 1976, where the women struck for equal pay. The women's determination ensured they won - but only after 21 weeks of a hard fought strike.

Earlier at Imperial Typewriters in 1974 where Asian women workers had begun a strike against racial discrimination in a bonus scheme, the trade union leadership bowed before prejudice and reactionary ideas. It talked of equality and instituted an 'enquiry' - but refused to make the strike official.

Trade Union leaders were strong on rhetoric but short on action when women workers struck for trade union recognition at Grunwicks in 1977. There was widespread support in the movement for the women and many workers - notably Yorkshire miners - sent mass delegations to the picket line. The police broke the mass picket with their new 'flying wedge' tactics. But regroupment and proper defence could have prevented them succeeding again.

More importantly, however, no-one, not even Scargill and the militant Yorkshire miners, fought to win strike action in support of Grunwicks. The right-wing APEX leaders - whose members were on strike - in fact connived with the TUC in blocking supportive strike action taken by the postmen at Cricklewood by isolating them. But their courage and the duration of their struggle served as a marvelous inspiration and encouragement to working class women everywhere.

In the 1980's working class women met Thatcher's offensive with continuing determined resistance. Women workers at Lee Jeans occupied their factory and prevented its closure. The Ford machinists struck again for regrading. In 1982 thousands of women in the NHS fought for better pay in the campaign of selective strikes. There are no shortages of examples of women's willingness to fight.

... the real problem is when they go into battle they are betrayed again and again by the union leaders. This happened to the NHS women. If the Broad Left in the AUEW had their way it would have happened to the Ford women. Jimmy Airlie of the AUEW Broad Left and a national committee member denounced the very idea of the Ford women being graded as skilled. He found an echo for his narrow craftist and sexist viewpoint from Terry Duffy.

Why do the trade union leaders behave like this? Experience in the Great Miners' Strike shows us that women workers and black workers are not the only ones to face opposition and betrayal. Union leaders are sometimes forced to call strikes, defend their members and so forth, but they seek to direct, contain or oppose rank and file workers' activity. Their job is to **mediate** between workers and the bosses - that's how they get and maintain their cushy jobs, good pay, and middle-class lifestyles. This fits in too with their **political** ideas which - whether of the left or right variety - are **reformist**.

They think change can come gradually through Parliament and tell us to leave political activity up to the Labour Party. They believe in creating harmony between the classes **not** in overthrowing the bosses. The upshot of all this is that they end up acting as the policemen of the ruling class inside the working class. Their reformism means that they limit every struggle because in every struggle they fear the anti-capitalist ideas that grip the workers and the anti-capitalist logic lodged in every strike. They are terrified of the way that women's struggles can rapidly become very militant when women cast aside their normally 'submissive' role.

How are women workers to organise against this rotten leadership? It is important to get active in the unions, which are still very male dominated. For instance, in the shop workers union USDAW of the over 60% female membership women make up only 20% of the Executive. In some unions campaigning has won improvements. In 1974 only 28% of NUPE shop stewards were women - ten years later, the figure had risen to 42%. This year NUPE even had a woman President - Lil Stevens of the Birmingham Dinner Ladies Branch.

Simply getting more women in the leadership does not guarantee that the unions will fight whole heartedly for women workers. For instance, dinner ladies in Kent have still lost their jobs, despite the elevation of Lil Stevens.

We support positive action in the unions - having special rules and committees to ensure women have a voice. Years of prejudice, and living with the burden of responsibilities at home means it is extra difficult for women to take positions in the union. It is an elementary democratic measure to bring in special rules for women's representation. On its own though, positive action is no solution. Women officials are just as capable of selling out. They are under just the same pressures arising from their role as mediators, as their male counterparts in the bureaucracy. We have to organise at a rank and file level to prevent this. We have to campaign for union meetings at the workplace and in work time so women can attend. We need to fight for rank and file control over all officials so that they can be forced to represent the interests of the workers, including the women workers, or replaced if they will not do this.

Women workers can reach out to women at home, or to those who have become active because they are the wives of strikers. The miners wives were not the first to organise in support of their trade unionist husbands - although they have certainly taken this form of struggle further than ever before. In 1972, Lill Billoca, a Hull trawlerman's wife, organised a campaign for better safety. That was the same year that the first miners' wives lobby took place - of the Coalboard during the strike. "If there is anything more determined than a striking miner" said **The Guardian**, "it must be a striking miner's wife".

In 1974 wives of Cowley car workers on strike defeated a back to work 'petticoat rebellion' led by the strikebreaker Carol Miller. In 1980, steel workers wives came onto picket lines, the demos and, through groups like the one organised in Stocksbridge, near Sheffield, played a vital role in sustaining that strike.

Now that the Great Strike has given us so much experience, we urgently need to connect women trade unionists with the wives' movement. What kind of politics and organisation do we need?

### BUILD A WORKING CLASS WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The miners' wives organisations have now taken their place in a long history of struggle that gives the lie to those who claim that women workers are necessarily passive and a pushover for the bosses.

The problem however is that the lessons each group of women has learnt in struggle have rarely been passed on from one battle to another. Many women are completely unaware of the long tradition of women's militancy and feel as though they are the first and only ones to have encountered these problems.

What is needed is a permanent militant organisation of working class women that could link up the best, most determined women across unions, industries and communities. Such a movement would draw together women's struggles in the unions, at work, in black women's organisations, on the estates and in unemployed groups. It would give confidence and solidarity to all women in struggle and would be the scourge of the bosses who want to use women as a source of cheap and unorganised labour. It would also be the scourge of trade union leaders who want women's membership dues, but won't back their struggles or the attempts of working class women to make the unions speak for them.

The experience and energy of the miners' wives movement could lay the basis for such a movement. In the middle of the strike Carol from Hatfield Main saw this possibility and said to a wives' conference in the Midlands: "I think the miners wives here today can be the basis of a movement that should link up with women at work, a movement that could really change things". For the last five years of Thatcherism we have been on the defensive, people have been frightened to

fight back in case they lose their jobs, and because they have not fought back they have lost them anyway. Women have been hit hard by job losses, low pay and loss of services. The example of ordinary working class women fighting Thatcher's plans can be an inspiration for all women. We can help them overcome the idea that nothing can be done.

If this wish is to become reality and we are to build a working class women's organisation, then we must learn the lessons of the past and prepare to take on the enemies we face today.

The very oppression that women suffer and struggle against has itself served to make it difficult to organise working class women into a permanent fighting movement. It would be wrong to claim that women are **always** militant class fighters.

Being both workers and mothers means that many women are not active in unions and workplaces. Pressures of time and energy are made worse by the constant reinforcement of women's subservient role. It is hardly surprising that many women are susceptible to the anti-working class propaganda that surrounds us. Many are isolated at home with young children with only the media for information. Not talking to others in similar situations cuts women off from the struggles, the arguments and the traditions that make them ready to fight back.

In struggle working class women can often see through the devices that have been used to keep them down. But once the struggles are over - be they lost or won - the old pressures weigh heavily once again.

With the miners' strike over there has been enormous pressure on wives to go back to their old domestic ways. Many have succumbed and stopped attending the groups, struggling again in their isolated homes with the bills, debts and trying to rebuild their lives now the strike is over. This has not happened to all the women, and those who remain active must begin to build lasting links with other women at work and in struggle if they are to continue their fight.

At the same time women in the unions and in the Labour Party must redouble their efforts to maintain links with the miners' wives. These links should not only be social. They should not only be based on the past struggle of the miners. They need to be turned into links for the future. Together with the miners' wives groups women in the unions and in the Labour Party must strive now to build a working class women's movement. In the months and years ahead that movement will have definite tasks, dictated to it by the depth of the capitalist crisis and the extent of the Tories attacks. To fulfil this task the working class women's movement needs to organise around definite demands, goals and forms of action. In short it will need an action programme that includes as its key elements:

- \* Open the unions to women workers with all meetings in worktime on full pay, democratic women's sections, positive action and the right to caucus in the unions.
- \* Fight the attacks on jobs by opposing all 'women first out' solutions, demanding instead workers' control over the sharing out of available work, hiring and firing, and the hours worked. Use strike action and occupations against firms threatening redundancies or closure. Demand the nationalisation under workers' control and without compensation of all firms threatening closure. Fight for full nursery facilities, maternity and paternity leave guaranteed by law, and creches at workplaces.
- \* Fight the cuts and privatisation drive. These not only drive women back into the home by taking away women's jobs. They also force women to fulfil the services at home that should be provided for by the state through hospitals, nurseries, old people's homes, etc.
- \* Fight for equal pay for equal work. Defend pay against inflation by raising wages to keep pace with the cost of living - as determined by committees of workers and housewives.

- \* No redundancies but retraining for all workers whose jobs are lost to new technology, with payment at the higher grade.
- \* Fight the anti-union laws, which will be used against trade unionists every time our action looks like becoming effective. Campaign for a general strike to smash these laws inside the working class.
- \* Fight for free abortion on demand, for free and easily available contraception, free sanitary protection; and a massively expanded programme of hospital, clinic and medical centre building to provide the health service women need. Abolish the repressive age of consent. Campaign to defeat the Powell Bill. Oppose the legal and social discrimination suffered by gay people, such as the numerous refusals by courts to grant child custody to lesbian mothers.
- \* Support the struggles of the working class both in Britain and abroad - including the struggles of those people, like the anti-unionist Irish in Northern Ireland, the PLO in the Middle East and the black masses in South Africa who take up the armed struggle against their imperialist overlords like Britain, or their agents, like Israel. Fight racism and fascism which divides us and weakens us, just as much as sexism does, in the fight against the common enemy - capitalism.
- \* Women must not wait for a future Labour Government to grant all these demands and solve all their problems. It won't. Labour Governments have never gone near granting women real equality. Callaghan's government began a horrible propaganda campaign aimed at glorifying motherhood and driving women back into the home. He presided gloatingly over the defeat of women at Grunwick's. Kinnock will be no different. The patronising and cynical way he uses his wife, carrying her round like a pretty public relations doll, is a small, personalised, but extremely instructive insight into Kinnock's attitude to women. They play second fiddle to men. And his attitude is dominant, as on other questions, inside the Labour Party.

So women must not wait for Labour. They must fight back now. But if a Labour Government is brought back to office women must direct their demands at it. The extent to which such a government is prepared to meet these demands, base itself directly on the working class up to the point of arming it and disarming the bosses, will enable us to measure how far such a government can truly be described as a workers' government. We do not believe for one minute that a Labour Government will go anywhere near meeting these demands. But a working class women's movement, by fighting for such demands, can put Labour to the test **and** prepare the way for a revolutionary alternative to Labour.

### 'WRONG PATHS'

#### **Feminism**

"Let's bring together the miners' wives and the forces of the women's movement". This idea has become very popular with women who worked in support of the miners' wives, and amongst some of the women from the pit communities themselves. But what exactly is the "women's movement". Would it be a step forward for miners' wives to join it? WORKERS POWER's argument which runs throughout this pamphlet is that women are divided by class: women from the upper class have different aims and interests from those of the working class. We think that the problem with the Women's Movement is that it deliberately ignores this fact and tries to unite **all** women in fighting **all** men who it sees as responsible for the oppression of women. These are the basic ideas of **feminism** - although there are different strands of feminism which have emerged out of the women's movement.

The modern Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) grew up in Britain during the early 1970's. While jobs increased for all women during the long boom, this was particularly true in white collar jobs. There was also an improved chance of getting to college for many young women from both working class and middle class backgrounds. They therefore found themselves able to have a bit of independence. But that independence was still very limited. Women still couldn't get into higher paid jobs; their skills as office workers, nurses, teachers, industrial machinists, draughtswomen and so on were not highly paid. Lack of child care facilities meant they had to abandon careers half-way through if they decided to have children. On top of all this, they faced male prejudice and sexist attitudes at home and at work.

Of course these problems faced women in both blue and white collar jobs, but it was those in the latter, the more middle class women, who looked forward to a real career and who had time to organise while they were still students, and indeed afterwards. They formed most of the WLM.

There were many positive points about the WLM. It challenged the idea that women are second class citizens. It challenged the 'double standard' attitudes towards sexuality - better contraception had already partly removed the fear of unwanted pregnancy, but women still suffered from the rotten old ideas that they had a 'reputation' to keep. Women's Liberation spread the idea that women should be able to **enjoy** their own sexuality in the way it pleased them. Thus the Women's Movement also took up the cause of lesbians challenging the silence and persecution that they had suffered for centuries.

The Movement challenged the idea that housework and childcare were primarily a women's responsibility. It challenged the idea that only certain jobs were 'women's jobs'. It asserted women's rights to be treated as people, not sex objects - which was what the protests about 'Miss World' were all about.

The Women's Movement had a profound effect in the ranks of socialists. Socialists had struggled for women's emancipation in the past, but these ideas had nearly been forgotten. The Labour Party Women's Sections had decayed. They concentrated on bazaars rather than on politics. Active trade unionists often relied on the wife at home to make the tea and look after the children, but never for a moment thought she would want to or even should be involved in a union struggle or go to a political meeting.

The Women's Movement forced socialists to take the Women's Question seriously. Women refused to just make the tea and do the typing. The trade unions were forced, as we have seen, to take up women's issues, to train women unionists and to allow them into the ranks of the shop stewards and even the full-time officials. The unions were even forced to campaign for free contraception and defend women's right to abortion.

But the Women's Movement also had very negative features for working class women and the socialist movement, as was to become more and more apparent. The Movement concentrated on 'consciousness raising' rather than action. There was no democratic structure. Like all 'libertarian structures' with no elections, accountability or organisation, meetings were dominated by articulate middle class women. Increasingly, women in the Movement concentrated on opposing men and 'patriarchy' - by which it meant men's domination. Radical feminists argued that patriarchy and men were the major enemy. For them, men in the trade unions were just as bad as men in the ruling class.

Women's groups and consciousness raising circles soon proved their inadequacy to the task of liberating women. Only a tiny minority of women could be reached or 'liberated' by these methods. It was like trying to drain the ocean with a soup ladle. What was thwarting and defeating the feminist gospel? Feminists searched for the cause of most women's unresponsiveness to their propaganda in terms of their intimidation by men. Feminists turned to the issues of wife battering, rape

and pornography (which they saw as inciting men to the violent physical suppression of women). Their campaigns - such as the 'Reclaim the Night' movement - generated momentary enthusiasm but soon ended in espousing reactionary calls for curfews on men, for censorship, for stiffer sentences from the bosses' courts. In fact it was heading as a movement, in the direction of the Tory Law and Order campaign.

Coming up against these dangers in practice in fact demobilised and broke up these campaigns as feminists proved unwilling in practice to make common cause with the Tories and the Church.

Socialist feminists argued that both patriarchy and capitalism were bad for women. But the problem with their ideas is shown in this description of Socialist Feminism given by its supporters in a Communist Party of Great Britain pamphlet: "The priority of socialists is the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a society which meets the needs of the working class. Whilst most feminists in the Womens Liberation Movement would regard a socialist society as preferable to capitalism and as affording the best conditions for the achievement of the liberation of women, our priority is not the overthrow of capitalism but the overthrow of male domination of women, the system of patriarchy."

So for socialist feminists the class struggle increasingly took a back seat. In the early 1980's key struggles involving women workers - the Health Strike, Lee Jeans - passed the feminists by.

Socialist feminist action in the labour movement concentrated on winning better positions for women - getting more women onto leading committees of the unions and Labour Party - which would be little use to most women workers without a fight at a rank and file level for their interests.

But the main focus of activity for feminists was the Greenham Common Peace Camp. The courage and determination of the Greenham women impressed thousands, including many women workers. However, the feminist politics at Greenham have proved completely incapable of generating a movement which could successfully halt the war drive.

The feminism and the pacifism of Greenham women offer a false analysis of the war threat and from that draw disastrous and self-defeating tactical conclusions. War they say is the result of male violence. It is the sharpest expression of men's violent subjugation of women. The answer is for women to campaign against war with non-violent methods. To involve men - except in a peripheral role - would bring in violence. And anyway they would then oppress the women in the movement. Men equals violence equals the oppression of women; this is the Greenham message. It is a wrong one.

To lump all violence together is itself a fatal concession to the ideas and values of the ruling class. Despite the enormous organised violence of the State, Thatcher always depicts her enemies as 'violent' whether they be the IRA, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua or the miners. How does she get away with it? It is not enough to say she is hypocritical. The truth is that it is very easy to present any resistance to oppression or exploitation as an 'outbreak of violence'. Why? Because the oppression and exploitation are systematic - it is going on all the time. It is part of the established order. To fight back leads to a clash with the forces of the state. 'Violence' by the state is not some kind of pathological killer instinct. It is functional. So long as the oppressed put up with their oppression, perfect peace reigns. That is what the bosses mean by 'law and order'.

Socialists have always argued that we must make a sharp distinction between the violence of the oppressor and the violence of the oppressed fighting back. We are not pacifists. We do believe, and history decisively shows, that only resistance that mobilises a greater force than that of the oppressors, will result in liberation.

There is nothing specifically male about ruling class violence either. If all the members of the ruling class could be turned into Margaret Thatchers overnight, they would still defend their system - guns in hand.

Socialists say - the threat of war comes from capitalism and imperialism. It is exploitation that they defend - including that of women and their oppression too. As long as exploiting classes exist they will threaten humanity with destruction. To remove this terrible threat we must destroy the capitalist economic system and the state that protects it.

Thus the struggle against war cannot for a minute be separated from the struggle against capitalism. To relegate anti-capitalist struggle to the distant future in favour of a 'united' peace campaign in order to preserve unity with upper class pacifists, the Church and so on, is to engage in a powerless charade that hides the real enemy. It is to turn one's back on the only class which can end the war threat - the working class - men as well as women.

To write off half of humanity - men - as inevitably violent and natural allies of the ruling class is to concede the battle from the outset. For it will prove impossible to win all women for the cause of 'peace' and thus the feminist pacifists are always condemned to being forever a minority. Since they themselves renounce any 'violent methods', i.e. they announce that they will offer only passive resistance or obstruction - their strategy is doomed to failure.

At root their problem is that they are totally wrong about the cause of the war threat, seeing it either in nuclear weapons themselves or in the 'male's' violent nature. They are wrong about its purpose - to simply defend the oppression of women. Consequently they are wrong about the tactics to counter the war threat.

They praise their own tactics as imaginative, new, different. Certainly they draw attention to the issue. But they only work as publicity stunts. They grabbed the headlines while the government was in political difficulties over the siting of Cruise missiles. Human chains, sitting on the road, tying yourself up in balls of wool may work OK for this. They helped attract tens of thousands to one-off demonstrations. But these tactics have not and cannot prevent the government using the bases. In time of war or even in a time of war preparations the women protesters would be brutally swept aside, arrested, imprisoned.

No, the answer to the threat of war is a working class answer. In the here and now the fight against Cruise missiles should have been based on mobilising the unions in demonstrations, protest strikes, blacking. But to be successful, it would have to be integrated into the general offensive to overthrow the ruling class. Women do have a central part to play in the struggle against war - but it is a part alongside of and indeed often leading, men into that struggle.

During the miners' strike, many socialist feminists and many young women new to activity, have been involved in the class struggle, while miners' wives have been introduced to feminism. Which way now? The feminists call on the wives to join them. We say - beware. Miners' wives certainly must go forward and fight for working class women's interests and develop their own skills and talents. But we shouldn't harness the vitality of this new working class women's movement to the decaying and fragmented middle class women's movement.

Rather, the socialist feminists should throw off the old feminist nonsense about fighting patriarchy as something separate from capitalism. They should commit themselves whole heartedly to the class struggle and to the long and essential battle to fight women's oppression through that struggle. This in no way demotes in importance the struggle against women's oppression. On the contrary it takes it from being an issue amongst professional workers and the intelligentsia (teachers, journalists, students, etc) to the cause of millions of working class women. Without winning them to struggle, women's liberation and socialism are both impossible.

### The Labour Party

The Labour Party leadership scabbed on the miners' strike. Neil Kinnock spent more time denouncing 'picket line violence' than attacking Thatcher. Miners and



miners' wives know this - yet in many parts of the country, they are joining the Labour Party. Why is this? Can anything be hoped from or achieved in the Labour Party?

Of course, in many pit villages, the only 'political' organisation is the Labour Party. For miners' wives who have become politically active and politically conscious, joining the Labour Party seems the logical thing to do. It is after all, the major party of the working class.

Some miners' wives and miners, recognising the strike was defeated, now look to the next Labour Government to turn back the tide of the Thatcher onslaught. But Labour's record in office shows that this is a false hope. We need only remember what happened last time, after the 1974 miners' strike brought down Heath and ushered in a Labour Government.

That Government made a deal with the union leaders - the Social Contract. Labour promised to hold down prices and maintain public services in exchange for the union leaders holding back trade union struggles for higher pay. This proved fatal for the working class. True, in the first two years, things seemed better for women workers - by 1976, women's hourly wages had reached their highest ever as a percentage of men's (75%). But the economy was in a bad way, and, as usual, the bosses expected the working class to make the sacrifices.

Labour announced cutbacks in the public spending programme. Prime Minister Callaghan started to talk about 'the importance of the family' and 'community care'. For him, just as for the Tories that followed in his footsteps, these were code words for - cut the public services and let housewives do the caring at home - unpaid.

In the last phase of the Labour Government, Callaghan and Healey led an onslaught on public service workers' living standards. With inflation high, they tried to limit wage increases to 5%. They attacked the very members of society that a working class government ought to help. With so many women workers in low paid and public sector jobs, women were bound to be particularly hard hit. So much for all Labour's rhetoric about equality and justice.

Labour in office paved the way for the Tories. In the mines, they introduced the divisive bonus scheme, and closed pits. They sat back while the police perfected their picket busting techniques - by attacking the pickets at Grunwicks.

In all its actions, the Labour Government was acting not as a government of the working class, but as a government of the bosses. It used the faith of the working class, and then the support of the traitorous union leaders, to keep the working class in check.

Out of government, Labour acts as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Anxious above all to occupy those ministers offices in Whitehall, Labour tries not to frighten the bosses, tries to prove itself a 'responsible' alternative to the Tories.

When Thatcher went to war with Argentina, Labour gave its loyal support. She sent hundreds to their death, so that Britain could keep a strategic base in the South Atlantic, and to warn off semi-colonial countries from daring to challenge imperialism. Labour collaborated with the warmongering 'patriots'. The only national body in the Labour Party to protest was the Women's Conference. The 'left' leader Michael Foot gave the most patriotic speech in the House of Commons during its special sitting on the war.

Labour's politics are nationalist and reformist. Labour argues that the capitalist system can be improved gradually so that workers benefit. The existing state machine - police, civil service, army, courts - can be directed by a Labour Government because, they claim, that the state is neutral, 'the meat in the sandwich', as Kinnock called the picket busting police during the strike. The British working class, they say, can work together with management for 'our country'. Life can be improved through reforms.

Of course, it is true that many reforms, like the National Health Service, for example, do make life better for workers and their families. But the bosses agreed to a free health service in the 1940's because they needed healthy workers to produce higher profits. They feared that unless they introduced such reforms workers would ask why on earth they had risked their lives in the war and begin to turn to revolution.

However, when the capitalist system is in trouble and profits are being squeezed much of the NHS becomes a 'luxury'. Prescriptions go up, queues grow, our service deteriorates while the rich go off to private hospitals - using doctors and nurses trained in the service we paid for. The elderly suffer in particular - they are no longer productive. When the bosses talk about 'our country', it's just themselves who make up the 'us'. They call on workers to make sacrifices while they invest their money wherever profit can be made.

A government which really fought for the interests of the working class would have to take that wealth, those industries, out of the hands of the bosses, taxing the rich and nationalising industry. But the bosses would not give up their wealth and power peacefully. And at their disposal they would have their police and courts - we have seen in the Miners' Strike that these bodies are not neutral at all in a class battle. Then there would be the armed forces under the control of upper class generals and Chiefs of Staff. When a reformist 'Socialist Government' in Chile took limited measures against the rich in 1973 the bosses backed a military coup which left over 30,000 dead and plunged Chile into a period of cruel military dictatorship that has not yet ended.

The whole problem with reformism is that it does not want to see class struggle, resulting in the overthrow of the bosses. It wants class harmony between bosses and workers. It believes in benevolent capitalism, not socialism. Even benevolence gets ditched in times of capitalist crisis as Callaghan's health service cuts in the 1970's showed. It nationalised the mines - but compensated the former owners with millions of pounds. It gave the workers no control over the industry. It ran the mines in the interests of the bosses' profits. The drive against uneconomic pits was carried out by Labour governments, as well as the Tories. The last Labour government closed more pits than the Tories have managed to do so far.

In other words, reformism serves the capitalists. This is why in every partial struggle - like the miners' strike, or the ratecapping fight - reformism limits the fight-back. If the fightback develops into a real challenge to capitalism, then Kinnock, Hattersley and co., will use every public platform they can find to preach the virtues of democracy and obedience to the law. They did this in the miners' strike. They will do it again and again. And even a 'left' like Ken Livingstone will give in to the capitalists - as he has done over rate-capping - rather than mobilise the working class for a fight to the finish,

When it comes to a struggle to get rid of the capitalists, their state and their whole system only one power can deliver the killer blow and organise resistance to any counter-attacks by the dispossessed bosses. That power is the working class organised through factory based committees, city-wide workers' councils, and workers with arms - a workers' militia. This is the power that will make the revolution provided it is led by those willing and able to make a revolution - a revolutionary party.

This whole prospect terrifies the Labour leaders. Every time the rank and file take the initiative the reformists see the spectre of revolution. And they seek to exorcise that spectre pretty quickly. They try to exorcise it with the holy water of 'democracy'. They call on workers to leave politics to the professionals in Parliament and Whitehall, to wait patiently until the next election, to obey the law, while the Tories and bosses sack us, cut our wages, attack our unions, and batter us with the police when we go on strike.

Can the Labour Party be changed, and taken out of the hands of the anti-working class leaders? Left wingers in the Labour Party urge miners' wives to join to change it. But even the left leaders like Tony Benn are committed to reform through Parliament. Getting in at the next election is the most important question

for them - and that means **unity**, even with a scab like Kinnock. This is a recipe for working class defeat. Even if Labour is returned, it would mean a government like the last one.

Hattersley has already told the AUEW that there will be a new, wage cutting social contract. Kinnock has said it is unrealistic to give a figure for how much Labour can reduce unemployment by. Significantly, Kinnock never once promised to keep open so called 'uneconomic' pits.

It is vital that women activists inside the Labour Party and inside the women's section of the party, organise against the leaders, and to win a real voice for a democratic women's section in the party. This fight will keep these leaders under pressure and open the eyes of those women to the reality of reformism.

To this end supporters of WORKERS POWER will work with anyone in the Labour Party who wants to oust the scab leaders and force the Party to support workers in struggle. But that party remains committed to maintaining the capitalist system and we warn you that it will betray the working class again and again. The working class needs a different party altogether.

### **the Communist Party of Great Britain**

If the thought of having Neil Kinnock as a leader is too much to swallow, then joining a party calling itself Communist may seem like a much better deal. The name makes it sound as if it is fighting to get rid of capitalism altogether and establish a society based on communist principles. It sounds like a party with thoroughly working class politics.

This is just not true, and the experience of the miners' strike gave the lie to it. While many Communist Party women and men played their part in raising support for the miners, the politics they were advocating were disastrous. Their politics also had a bad effect in Women Against Pit Closures and women's support work.

The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) is split at the moment. On the one side are the 'Euro-Communists'. This section's politics are often to the right of the Labour Party. The Labour Party makes a big show of its independence as a party. Even Kinnock dare not openly talk of a coalition with the Liberals - yet. The Communist Party has at the centre of its programme a strategy of class collaboration, rather than of class struggle. It adopted these politics in the mid-1930's when they were called the 'peoples front'. The excuse for them then was the need to unite all democratic forces against fascism. One of these forces was the 'democratic' section of the capitalist class.

The policies of the peoples front could not therefore be anti-capitalist. At best they could hit the supposedly undemocratic or fascist sections of the ruling class. Socialist demands and objectives that required the overthrow of the bosses' state power were ruled out till a distant stage. Since then - despite the defeat of fascism - the CPGB always had a version of this class collaboration on offer.

First of all it was the anti-monopoly alliance. Aimed largely at preventing Britain from entering the Common Market, it dictated the alliance with representatives of reactionary small and middle sized businesses. The owners of small sweat shops might well be anti-monopoly, but they are even more fiercely anti-union since their survival hangs on viciously exploiting their workers - often women. This alliance reached the depths of shame when the CP were prepared to share Union Jack draped platforms with the likes of Enoch Powell in the Anti-EEC campaign.

In recent years a new version of this alliance has been formed: the 'Broad Democratic Alliance'. Its aim is to isolate something called 'Thatcherism' by means of an alliance which starts off with the Labour and Communist Parties getting together with the Welsh and Scottish Nationalists, and then drawing in the Liberals

and the SDP. Hopefully it can spread to even include the Tory 'wets'. The policies for such an alliance can't of course be 'socialist'. They cannot even go as far as the totally reformist 'Alternative Economic Strategy'. After all this included some nationalisations and that would frighten off Steel, Owen and Heath.

This policy advocated loudly by the CPGB would tie the Labour movement to a bosses' government on a bosses' programme. Its overall policy could go no further than what its most conservative components would stand for. To leave 'four million' unemployed to the tender mercies of David Owen or Edward Heath, whilst Neil Kinnock and Norman Willis ride shotgun over the Labour Movement to stop it fighting these gentlemen, would be a total disaster for the working class.

In fact this strategy has already been played out in miniature during the miners' strike in South Wales with the so-called Welsh Assembly. The South Wales NUM, heavily influenced by advocates of the 'broad alliances' strategy, refused to put the squeeze on Llanwern steelworks, tried to avoid mass picketing and kept most miners in their area in a state of passivity. All this was done in the name of winning over 'public opinion' by creating an assembly of small businessmen, chapel preachers and Welsh Nationalist politicians. This assembly would support the miners only as long as there was no violence, i.e. no effective picketing.

This kind of class collaboration - subordinating workers' vital interests to those of the desired middle-class partners is very congenial to the feminists. After all the feminists want to unite **all women**, i.e. in fact **all classes** of women in a broad movement. Eurocommunism and Feminism are thus natural allies. Both are increasingly dismissive of the working class (who they insist are 'white, skilled, male' by the neat trick of deducting women workers, black workers and presumably unskilled ones as well from the ranks of the working class). Trade unionism is 'narrow' (read, limited to workers), 'economistic' (read, concerned about wages and conditions) or 'syndicalist' (read, not sufficiently subordinated to electoralism and courting 'public opinion').

The best know 'Euro' feminist is the journalist Bea Campbell. She spent the strike writing articles attacking the 'macho' violence of the 'Men's movement' (she means the labour movement). Instead of using her journalistic skills to explain how the state attacked the miners, how the police were used by the Tories and how the miners had to hold and defend the picket lines, Bea Campbell accused the miners of 'falling for the law and order campaign'. Apparently they should have realised that non-violent direct action Greenham style could work: sitting down in front of the scab convoys perhaps?

Bea Campbell is co-author, with Anna Coote, of an influential feminist book called 'Sweet Freedom'. In this, they argue for a series of reforms in the economy and social structure, and a 'major redistribution of resources'. What on earth do they mean by this? If they mean a redistribution from the capitalist class to the working class then it is utopian to put it in this way. Capitalism is in a prolonged crisis caused by fallen profit rates - i.e. an inability to exploit labour sufficiently. To 'redistribute' from the bosses in this situation would require a struggle of revolutionary proportions.

More than this, to be able to 'redistribute' it would be necessary to seize control of production itself. Attempts to even start to do this with the timid methods of reformist parliamentary government would simply produce a massive economic, social and political crisis. The working class cannot afford to blunder into this situation unprepared for it, disarmed in advance by notions of limiting themselves to **peaceful** change.

But it is far from clear that Bea Campbell really does mean a redistribution from the rich to the workers. On the contrary, what she is really after is a redistribution **between the sexes** as the answer. She even wants a 'redistribution of services amongst working people'.

The political method of achieving this for Campbell, is a struggle not against the bosses but against men. 'Men will have to relinquish the privilege of supreme power'. Miners, dockers and hospital porters will be interested to know that they

have to give up their 'supreme power'. Fortunately the more enlightened men of the ruling class have already obliged Bea Campbell by giving supreme power to Margaret Thatcher.

In fact it turns out that Coote and Campbell really mean that more women must 'engage with power'. This means women becoming M.P.s, councillors, trade union officials and top civil and public servants. These individuals of course should be 'accountable to the women's liberation movement'. Hence the interests and aspirations of middle class women show through the **classless disguise** of feminism. There is nothing in this careerism for working class women. It merely shows contempt for them. Working class women must wait while their sisters in top jobs fight out the battle - not with capitalism but with men - including with working class men who apparently have more than their fair share of resources.

The other wing of the CPGB, centered at present around the 'Morning Star', seems to put more stress on the working class. Women associated with this grouping were influential in the national 'Women Against Pit Closures' during the strike. But this half of the Communist Party also supports the idea of a cross-class 'anti-monopoly' alliance. They too lay stress on capturing positions within the trade unions. Two features of National Women Against Pit Closures showed the dangers of this approach. One was the nonsensical petition to the Queen in the summer of 1984 asking for her intervention in the dispute - as if the country's biggest landowner and leading member of the upper class would do anything to support workers in struggle. Another and possibly more lasting feature was the bureaucratic way that the national organisation was constructed and run, with ex-officio members of the committee and a restricted number of delegates. This was of a piece with the CP's strategy of capturing official leadership positions and then holding on to them at all costs. Like the Labour leaders, they are frightened of rank and file working class action and above all they are terrified of workers' democracy.

This has been true of the Communist Party ever since Stalin came to power in the Soviet Union in the mid-1920's. Stalin gave up the original idea of the Bolsheviks who had led the workers revolution in 1917. They wanted the working class to have power not just in Russia, but internationally. Men and women in the working class world wide flocked to the banner of the Communist International. But Stalin crushed the workers' organisations in Russia, imprisoned and murdered his opponents, and wanted peace with Western Imperialism so he could build 'socialism in one country'. This meant that all the Communist Parties had to give up the idea of making a workers' revolution and win influential allies for Russia instead.

It also meant abandoning the goal of liberating women from household slavery within the framework of the family. In Russia today women still do the housework. The family is glorified as a socialist institution. Just as the road to a truly classless society is blocked by a parasitic bureaucracy living it up at the expense of the workers, so the road to women's liberation has been blocked. The Stalinist Communist Parties in the 'East' as well as the West are no more parties of Women's Liberation than they are parties of Socialist Revolution.

### WOMEN, COMMUNISM AND THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

As we have seen there are many fronts in the struggle of women under capitalism against their oppression and exploitation. All of these struggles - for equal political rights with men, for equal access to welfare and medical pensions, for equal pay, for the right to choose in the matters of contraception and abortion - all of these are progressive and vitally necessary struggles. But not one of these struggles taken on its own or even all of them rolled together will ever liberate women.

Like the working class trade union struggle it will be a labour of Sisyphus (Sisyphus in the Greek myth had the task of rolling a huge boulder up a steep hillside only to see it roll down again when he got it to the top). Why is this? Because each of these struggles produces a response by the capitalist system which

eventually undermines any gains won.

Thus the entry of skilled white collar women into the ranks of the professionals, an indisputable right, does not liberate women. When these women hire au pairs, nannies or childminders, they simply pass on a portion of their domestic oppression to working class women. These women, because they are isolated and unorganised, are chronically underpaid. The entry of large numbers of women into the labour force has a tendency to depress wage rates. The old family wage of the man, which was supposed to support a wife as full-time house worker is increasingly inadequate and has to be 'supplemented' by at least part-time work by the woman. In the United States and Britain - despite equal rights and equal pay legislation and court decisions, women's pay as a percentage of men's either fails to rise or actually falls.

Legislation may prevent an individual employer from paying two workers performing identical jobs different wages on the basis of their sex - and of course it should do so. But 'equal pay for equal work' will never in fact equalise men's and women's incomes. The capitalists will either move the woman to another lower paid job or replace the male workers and keep the low rate for the existing job. Of course this does not mean that equal rights are not worth fighting for. The employer can be forced to make partial, temporary but nonetheless real concessions by this means. In addition by gaining legal equality women can see for themselves that it is not just - indeed not primarily - their legal or political inequality that causes their oppression and exploitation. It helps reveal that the cause of this is **social inequality** and that this is rooted in the very nature of **capitalist society**.

Without uprooting Capital's exploitation of Labour and without removing the condemnation of women to domestic toil and privatised child-rearing, then women will always be socially unequal. This social inequality will in its turn restrict and deny fulfillment to women at the level of education. It will thwart the full development of the personality. It blocks psychological and sexual happiness, and the full enjoyment of social and political life.

Partial and piecemeal struggle for concessions from the bosses or reform of their system can never liberate women. In periods of serious expansion of the capitalist economy, such as the long boom of the 1950's and 1960's women, along with the working class as a whole, may make substantial improvements in a whole number of areas of their life. Also when factors like war or changes in the organisation of production produce a call for women's labour then capitalism itself may take certain measures to lighten domestic slavery - canteens, creches and nurseries may be introduced on a wide scale by the state. But these concessions are never permanent. When crisis follows boom, when the rate of profit sinks and the capitalists seek to cut 'unproductive expenditure' (unproductive of profits that is) then all these gains come under the axe.

So the strategy of reformism simply cannot free women. Nor can it bring a secure or constant improvement in their conditions. The fight to improve our lot or hang on to past gains poses sharply the question, how to win decisively, how to put an end for good and all to oppression and exploitation?

There is only one answer and that is socialist revolution, the total and complete expropriation of the capitalist class. Socialist revolution will smash and destroy the bosses' state with its unelected judges, its bureaucracy and its police force and army. Only thus can real power pass into the hands of the working class as a whole. To win this struggle, workers will have to create action councils composed of delegates elected in the workplaces and on the housing estates. They will have to win the rank and file soldiers to do likewise in the army, creating soldiers' councils and removing the unelected upper class officers, replacing them with elected working class ones.

These sort of democratically elected councils or the beginnings of them have come into being in nearly every serious revolutionary situation in the twentieth century.

The reason is that they are vital to fight against capitalism when all the various facets of the class struggle come together into a general battle. Thus in the general strike in Britain in 1926 Councils of Action sprang up and began to take on more and more functions. They began to challenge the official state power of the bosses.

In one country, Russia, these councils of action succeeded in destroying the bosses' state and replacing it with their own power. This power was based on the councils (soviets in Russian) of workers, peasants and soldiers' deputies. To these bodies the workers militia and eventually the 'Red Army' owed allegiance. This new state was based on a democracy - workers' democracy - more responsive and answerable than any parliamentary system.

In alliance with committees in the factories, which exercised complete control over all of management's actions, the process of nationalising the factories, banks and big retail and wholesale businesses went ahead rapidly. In the 1920's the creation of a centralised plan for the whole economy was begun. This demonstrated that the Marxist programme for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the installation of planned production for human need was not a utopian dream but a real possibility.

The Russian workers got this far on the basis of a country whose economy was extremely backward. The industrial working class made up only some 10 - 15% of the population. Moreover Russia was devastated by the First World War, by a civil war set off by the intervention of British, American, Japanese and French armies. These factors and the isolation of the revolution for 30 years led to the growth of a powerful bureaucracy which seized political power from the Soviets.

Under the rule of these bureaucrats, with Stalin at the helm, the planned economy came to be systematically plundered. The bureaucrats enjoy enormous privileges on the basis of their plunder. The use of this economy to mitigate the inequalities between skilled and unskilled, between man and women and above all between the state and party functionaries and the great mass of workers, stopped. Inequality became extended with the destruction of workers' democracy. Now it will take a new political revolution to remove the obstacles that this bureaucracy presents to progress towards communism.

This degeneration of the Russian Revolution was not inevitable and is not inevitable in all revolutions. It is not a product of human nature any more than women's oppression is. It is a product of the insufficiently developed forces of production (technology, factories, communications and above all the working class itself) and isolation. In the old, highly developed capitalist countries we will start off with enormous advantages, though expansion of the revolution internationally will still hold the key to rapid development of the planned economy. But why is this so central to the liberation of women?

Because only on the basis of democratically planned production will it be possible to make child rearing, cooking and cleaning, and recreation, socially performed tasks. Only thus will it be possible to socialise child rearing and housework. What does this mean?

To frighten people away from socialism, capitalist propagandists have always conjured up visions of huge barrack-like dwellings where everyone is forced to eat in canteens and sleep in dormitories. They have spread scare stories about the 'socialisation of women'. They suggest that communists wish to make all women into prostitutes at the disposal of all men. They claim that children will be wrenched from their mother's arms and 'socialised', by uncaring communist monsters. These evil fantasies have nothing to do with socialism and communism though they have all been done by capitalist societies, democratic as well as fascist in war-time.

Since women will, in a workers' state, have full political rights and since that state will have set as its object our social emancipation no measures would or

could be imposed on women. What then does socialising childrearing and domestic labour mean?

It does not mean 'abolishing the individual home' or 'abolishing the family'. It means speedily and progressively introducing well-equipped nurseries for children from the earliest age. These will be centres for play, health-care and education. No-one will be compelled to deposit their children there, but as their resources will far outstrip those of a private home, it will become desirable to do so. Especially since women will be drawn into all sorts of jobs from which they are now largely excluded. It will be normal for people - men quite as much as women - to look after their children and other people's (their childrens friends and companions) in this environment. The same applies to cooking. No-one is suggesting forbidding people cooking their own meals when they want to. But a high quality provision of food in socially owned restaraunts and take-away kitchens which could easily expand and improve today's private enterprise institutions would remove from women the **necessity** of cooking each and every day. Women could no longer be chained to the kitchen.

Who **would** do the now socialised housework? Probably a combination of everyone taking their turn and specialisation and training for those who enjoyed this sort of work. Marx and Engels were always wary of providing 'recipes for the cookshops of the future'. So should we be. But this much is clear. Whether in the individual home or in the community the enslavement of women to washing, cooking, cleaning and nursing can be abolished on the basis of advanced technology and an advanced social sharing of domestic work along with work in the office or factory. Indeed these very distinctions will themselves become obsolete.

As women become more and more integrated into social life the vestiges of inequality between men and women will wither away. Men will lose their old arrogance, brutality and condescension. Women will lose their lack of confidence, their willingness to endure oppression. The life denying morality inherited from religion, the selfishness and egotism inherited from capitalism will also wither away. What this will mean for the relationships between the sexes and between adults and children we can only guess at. In fact it is better to observe Engel's warning about laying down laws of the socialist future: 'When these people are in the world, they will care precious little what anybody today thinks they ought to do; they will make their own practice and their corresponding public opinion about the practice of each individual - and that will be the end of it'.

Feminists often attack Marxists for holding the view that socialism will automatically 'solve' women's oppression. Some elements who waver between Marxism and Feminism or who wish to combine the two in a mish-mash concede to the feminists that women's oppression **could** carry on. They argue that women - all women - would need to organise separately in a women's movement to struggle against men to make sure women's liberation was carried out.

This is a thoroughly false perspective. Of course **after** the socialist revolution there will still be a battle between the forces of emancipation and oppression. But the lines of this struggle will not coincide with the sexes. The vanguard communist women and men - will be fighting to win over and transform the more backward members of both sexes. Special work by women amongst women will of course be necessary, to educate, mobilise, rouse up to consiousness those women who have not been fully mobilised by the struggle for socialism itself. Women communists, women trade unionists, members of the working class organisations will doubtless have to fight male indifference or obstruction. But in this struggle they will find male communists alongside them and 'backward' women opposed to them.

Throughout all of these struggles from today's battles against the everyday oppression and exploitation of women under capitalism, through the socialist revolution to the systematic emancipation of women in the building of a classless society, one indispensable instrument is necessary. Without it no long lasting or effective working class women's movement can be built. Without it the working class cannot seize power from the capitalist class. Without it a planned economy and the socia-



lisation of domestic toil cannot be carried through. This instrument is a revolutionary party of the advanced workers, women and men.

Such a party must be a vanguard party. That is, it must group together the disciplined fighters, the militants of each and every working class struggle. It must be based on a programme, a coherent strategy for working class power and what to do with that power. This strategy must include tactics and demands which fit and give militant expression to today's struggles but which point the way to the need to seize power from the bosses as a class. It must also deal with the repression needed against the old ruling class and the democracy the working class needs to exercise its own rule (what Marxists call the dictatorship of the proletariat). This programme therefore must show how women's struggles, demands and needs as well as their final and total liberation fit in at every stage.

Around that programme a fighting organisation has to be built. Revolutionary communists call the political and organisational basis for this organisation - democratic centralism. Feminists often attack this idea. They proclaim it an inherently 'male structure'. In so doing they only warm up the old anarchist objections to any kind of centralism. In fact no serious struggle against the capitalist state - a highly centralised formation - is possible without centralisation, without a central leadership with the power to direct the membership like the commanders of any army.

Is this authoritarian? In one sense yes. In the sense that class war is a struggle where one class must impose its will on another. This requires discipline. Discipline means a willingness to carry out orders.

Does this mean blind obedience? No, and here the revolutionary combat party is the opposite of a capitalist army. It is truly democratic at the level of the formulation of strategy and major tactical decisions. Freedom of discussion, criticism, elections of leaders, the freedom of groupings and factions to organise, allows the party through a conference or congress to decide these questions. But when decisions are taken and action is called for then all act as one including the dissenters. Practice, the practice of the class struggle decides who is or who was not correct. The party can then decide whether to change course or continue along a chosen path.

Women need this party just as much as men. They can participate in it just as fully. Indeed revolutionary Bolshevism involved more women militants, including leaders like Alexandra Kollontai, than any reformist party. The revolutionary party is not only the party of the 'naturally advanced', of skilled trade unionised, white male workers. True these do dominate the existing reformist labour movement. A revolutionary party however turns especially to the oppressed sectors of the working class seeking to draw them into the class movement as a whole. The party helps, encourages and trains them to overcome the backwardness capitalism has imposed on them. So it is with women. Training, education and the opportunity to lead, rather than passive consciousness raising by merely contemplating our oppression, all draw more and more women into the revolutionary organisation.

WORKERS POWER makes no claim to be the vanguard party the working class needs. The task of creating it lies in the years ahead of us. But we have, we believe, begun the task of developing, or re-developing the strategy (programme) on which that party can be built. We are small in numbers and thus obliged to present our ideas to the militant minority of working class women and men whilst fighting alongside them in the general class struggle.

If you want to see a revolutionary party built, then join us in this struggle. The vast majority of women have, as Marx said of the working class, nothing to lose but their chains. THEY HAVE A WORLD TO WIN.





