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A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO WORK: THE CASE FOR POSITIVE ACTION

How we can
fight to end job
segregation and
inequality at
work



This pamphlet has been produced by a Positive Action working committee for the International Marxist Group.

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Do Women have equal rights?

THE STRUGGLES OF WOMEN IN THE SIXTIES, the last ten years of the women's liberation movement, and the passing of the equality legislation have given rise to the idea that women have equal rights.

The facts suggest otherwise

★ More than 2,000,000 women workers are underpaid. They made up two thirds of all workers earning less than £60 a week in 1979.

★ After an initial closing of the gap between men and women's pay after the Equal Pay Act, women's wages are now declining again so that they are less than two thirds of men's wages.

★ Women are 41.4% of the work force, but this has made no difference to their status as low paid workers.

★ 71.4% of women at work are employed by the distributive trades and service industries. This figure rose from 58.1% in 1959.

★ Women are concentrated in 4 main industries: food, drink and tobacco; electrical engineering; clothing; and footwear. All these industries employ under 10% of men.

What Rights do Women have as

50-50 of women are economically active. This figure is
likely to rise as it can be seen in the fact that
the most common reason for not working is that it is
not possible to find a job.

★ In 1979, in industry as a whole, 92.2% of general managers were male . Only 15% of working women had skilled manual, professional or management jobs compared with 65% of men.

★ Over five times more women than men are part-time workers — 40% of all women who work. For women with child-care responsibilities the other options include being unemployed, or a homemaker with a wage approximately 20p an hour.

★ In the six years 1973-78 women's unemployment rose from 16.2% as a percentage of total unemployment to 29.4%.

★ Between January 1976 and January 1980 unemployment among women rose from 254,000 to 412,000, i.e. it has increased by 62%.

★ In 1975 43% of boys but only 6.5% of girls entered sponsorships to skilled occupations, and the majority of these were in traditional areas like hairdressing.

★ Of young women in employment 10.4% received day release compared with 39.7% of young men.

★ In 1977 97% of boys entered maths and science O levels compared with 68% of girls.

★ In 1977 only 2% of women were studying for degrees in engineering and technology with a further 18.8% of women studying science.

The following table shows the percentage of women in the workforce by occupation in 1979. It is a very important document as it shows the position of women's employment.

53.4% of women are economically active. Their paid work is fulltime or part-time. It can be heavy or light, dirty or clean, skilled or unskilled. The most striking fact about it is that it is not equally rewarded.



This pamphlet argues that positive action to end job segregation in the traditionally male dominated sectors of the economy has a special importance in solving the problem of women's unequal rights.

What Rights do Women have at Work?

The Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts.

The Labour Government passed two acts in response to the growing demand among women for equal rights. The first embodied the principle of **equal pay** for women "doing work the same or broadly similar to that of a man". But there were too many loopholes — the major one being that employers had 5 years before it became enforceable!

A number of areas of discrimination remained. The skills ^{involved} in women's jobs continued to be undervalued. Employers valued monotonous jobs in continuous production (mainly women's work) less highly than non continuous production. Employers ensured that each job grade was designated either male or female.

To avoid comparison with men many employers gradually took women only!

At its most absurd, this led to a situation where one woman attempted to claim that she should have the same pay as the man who had the job before her; she was turned down on the grounds that since the man was no longer there she could not be compared to him and was therefore not entitled to equal pay.

The Sex Discrimination Act introduced in 1975 outlines two areas. The first covers direct discrimination. This means that an employer treats you differently just because you are a woman. The second covers indirect discrimination. This is more difficult — an employer must not set criteria for jobs that by their nature exclude women unnecessarily, eg. is a minimum height requirement just an excuse to prevent women applying?

It is lawful for an employer to take steps to encourage women to take advantage of opportunities for doing work done exclusively by men, but it is unlawful to discriminate at the point of selection for such work in order to achieve a balance between the sexes.

The SDA has a section which allows for positive discrimination in training and advertisements. But at the real crux of the matter, selection for jobs, positive action is not allowed.

The act itself is not concerned with pay and conditions but includes terms of employment; the refusal of employment; opportunities for promotion; access to training; and dismissals and redundancy. This is apart from non-employment areas like education.

In other words the areas of pay and conditions inadequately dealt with under the EPA are not protected by the SDA.

The introduction shows these acts have not been successful. We ask why not?

Why Can't These Acts Defend Women?

Simply lifting the most obvious barriers and declaring women equal does not overcome the fact that women have been discriminated against for centuries. This means that when women apply for jobs, their education, training and lack of confidence in male dominated society put them at a disadvantage before they start.

In recognising this — that is that women start at a disadvantage, allowances are necessary to offset this past discrimination. Women will not come forward to take up any opportunities which do exist (sparse though they are) if they are not given some guarantee that special measures can be taken for them to overcome many of these problems.

Since 1965, when the percentage of women working increased dramatically, the female labour force has been more and more concentrated in low paid industries which employ a minute percentage of men.

This has made it easier for employers to avoid the equal pay and sex discrimination acts. Added to this, the past decade has seen an ever deepening economic crisis. Successive British governments have enacted more and more severe austerity measures which in a period of economic recession always means attacks on a woman's right to work. These attacks have included automatic layoff of part time workers*, the reduction of the number of state nurseries, attacks on maternity provision and abortion rights.

The restriction of women's work and these attacks are made possible because of the fiction that women's place is in the home. This widely accepted rationalisation is used for perpetuating the employment of women in low paying, unskilled jobs — "They aren't worth training because they'll only get pregnant or married and quit".

It is used to justify unequal pay rates and low pay — "They're only

*The E.O.C. stresses the fact that the automatic layoff of part-timers first in redundancy situations is likely to hit women hardest and could well be unlawful indirect discrimination.

working for pin money". It causes deep divisions within the working class itself — "She's taking a job a man should have."

Finally, it means that women workers are not proportionally integrated in the trade unions and other organisations of the working class — "She shouldn't be running around going to meetings. She should be at home taking care of the kids".

The SDA and EPA have not the teeth to defend women against this offensive let alone remove past discriminatory practices.

The effects of Past Discrimination.

Throughout the history of human civilisation women have been the child bearers. This biological function has not necessarily resulted in them being seen as second class workers and second class citizens. With the advent of class society, the male-dominated ruling class developed the family in all its forms as a result of its need to organise society, to control the distribution and inheritance of wealth as well as developing the most efficient system for the reproduction of workers.

To establish stable family units, it has to be argued that women are physically and mentally inferior to man and therefore unable to occupy an independent place in society. Their role and status in society is determined by the family to which they belong and the man to whom they are married.

Prior to the industrial revolution, women worked in family groups which did not pose a contradiction between home and work. With the advent of the factory, the length of the working day and the arduous nature of the work, the question of a woman's place was posed. The concept of homemaker and housewife was developed and this resulted in women being isolated from the social labour and occupied with domestic chores.

The nuclear family system continues to enforce this social division of labour by defining women by their childbearing role and assigning them tasks immediately associated with their reproductive function. Thus women are still thought of as domestic servants eg wives.

A woman from the time of birth is harrassed by preconceptions about her place in society. Throughout school she is pushed by direct or indirect pressure into what are considered women's jobs and roles. Given that pressure, is it any wonder that results for girls in O level maths are so bad, the number of female apprentices is so low and the number of women in high paying jobs so few.

In Britain today where, on the one hand, women have greater control over their fertility and 54.3% of women are in paid work, on the



*Women are half the
world's population*



*And receive one
tenth of the
world's income*

other hand, there is little change in the type of jobs women do or the differential between men and women's wage rates.

It is the centuries of ideological, social and economic repression that hold women back in this society. These old prejudices will not be overcome simply by society defining women as equal and opening all educational establishments to women. Past discrimination can only be overcome by reverse discrimination until equality is reached.

Job segregation

Job segregation is often identified as the main impediment to equality for women, but rarely described or analysed. It has become an accepted way of organising men and women at work.

Women are victims of deeprooted discrimination which shows itself most obviously in the sexual divisions at work. These divisions have worsened in this century. In the 1880's for example there was a strong and well organised group of women who were surface workers in the mines at Wigan. They fought to retain their jobs until 1901, and from the turn of the century onwards more men got into traditionally women's jobs then vice versa.

Whilst women have been about one third of the total workforce since 1901 (the proportion moving up slowly) the change within industry itself has been towards greater segregation particularly in the skilled manual trades. In 1911 the proportion of women doing clerical work was comparable to the percentage of women in the workforce as



Women do two-thirds of the world's working hours



And own only one hundredth of the world's property

a whole. By 1971, 75% of all clerical workers were women compared to 21% in 1911. Women were also more evenly represented among managers and administrators in 1911 than at any other time since. Women are typists, secretaries, hairdressers and there is no evidence that this is changing.

The exclusion of women from particular occupations and the channelling of them into poorly paid jobs is a clear example of the oppression of women in our society. Even when they are in a mixed work force they do the unskilled jobs; because of their position in the workforce, they are not so likely to be organised into unions, they have minimal job security and during a recession they are the first to be sacked.

Job segregation exists at all levels, but its effects are less obvious in professional work like teaching where women and men have equal job security but unequal promotion prospects. It is most obvious in the key sectors of industry: in mining, where women have not as yet been exempted from the Health and Safety legislation as they have been in for in other industries requiring shift work; in engineering; in steel; and in the car industry.

Who benefits?

When women are in segregated jobs their pay and conditions cannot be compared to a man's and the employer can perpetuate the myth that their work has less value. Capitalism's use of women as a reserve

army of labour is used both to exploit women and to play a role in holding down men's wages.

The failure of the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts is one thing. But women are also facing a frontal assault from this Tory government at the present time. Why is this? Who benefits from women's inequality?



T&GWU Handbook

It's the bosses who benefit — not the workers, women or men.

When Tory minister Patrick Jenkin says that *'if god had meant us to be equal he (sic) would not have created man and woman'* and that therefore women don't have the same right to a job as men do; when Margaret Thatcher declares that she feels sorry for 'latch-key' children and thinks women should go back to the home; when the Tories moralise in this fashion they are acting as spokespeople for the bosses.

In the present economic climate it makes the Tories job of implementing cuts in public spending and holding down living standards a lot easier if women are prepared to stay at home — to look after a frustrated and underpaid workforce, to tend the sick and the old who

can no longer hope to get proper treatment from the welfare state; to manage a tight budget in the context of rising prices; and to keep unemployed youth off the streets. These are the tasks to which women are assigned — doing a patching up job for the wounds inflicted by capitalism.

And it's the bosses who benefit when women do go out to work since their position in the home is used as an excuse to justify low wages and poor conditions — in other words women act as a pool of cheap labour which capitalism can draw on when necessary and shove back into the home during periods of massive unemployment often without a whimper from the trade union movement. No one but the bosses benefit from these divisive policies.

The way to right the wrong

Throughout the years, many women at factories like Trico¹, Yardleys², Nettles³, SEI⁴, GEC Treforst S. Wales, Metmecs in Norfolk, H.J. Barlow Nuts and Bolts in Staffordshire, not to mention the Fords Dagenham Equal pay strike, forced Labour to introduce this legislation. It was often through bitter and long struggles that their fights were won.

This is the way we can defend women's rights when it comes to the crunch. The legislation is a boost to the struggle. Michael Foot dubbed December 29th 1975 Equal Pay Day. But it was the rash of struggles that broke out following it that made it a reality for some women.

But we have seen how transitory the gains which women have made can be.

It is plain that the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts aren't working. Positive action or positive discrimination, recognises the fact that equal rights are not enough to ensure that women play a real role in society.

The time has come for policies and demands and action that will begin to defend the right of women to any job they choose and to control their own lives. This fight must be taken right into the trade union and women's movement.

That's why we fully support the call of the TUC for Positive Action.

1. Trico Car components factory in Brentford London. These women fought a 21 week battle against the employers and the Labour Government who ruled their equal pay claim outside the pay code they had established with the unions over the Social Contract.

2. Yardleys. These women occupied T&GWU headquarters to get backing for their equal pay strike.

3. Nettles engineering factory in Stockport. In March 1975 180 workers came out on strike in support of equal pay. It lasted 9 days. Several temporary workers came out and joined the AUEW. Equal Pay was won with no strings and on return to work an agreement for a closed shop was reached.

4. SEI. Women at Salford electrical instruments went on strike over bonuses and equal pay demands.

It's all very well passing laws enshrining the principle of *equality* — but how do we challenge the roots of *inequality*. Job segregation is one of those roots. Positive action can help overcome this.

Fighting to get employers to open up jobs to women — to give women special training to enable them to carry out work previously done by men only is a step forward. Reserving special places for women — setting goals and targets to increase women's representation at all levels is essential to breaking down the division between men's (usually higher paid and better conditions) and women's jobs.

It also helps to break down the whole notion that men do the heavy, skilled jobs — while women do the caring, servicing jobs — for we all know that these role definitions serve only to oppress the woman and keep her in servitude.

Women must begin the fight now for positive action programmes. The TUC model agreement* has to be campaigned for at local and National levels.

We have to demand that all employers actively encourage women to take up all opportunities.

Making allowances now to dramatically improve the representation of women means setting aside special places for them. Women will have to be encouraged to take up these places and will have to be given the necessary education and training.

Some examples of Positive Action

Britain

Some employers have already taken some of these steps.

Camden Council (an equal opportunities employer) has produced special publicity entitled 'An Even Chance for All'. It shows a woman with a carpentry skill working on a site.

Adverts aimed at recruiting women bus drivers are now appearing widely.

Camden Council has established a creche for some of its employees and have got one of the best maternity agreements in the country.

We want more of this. But not one of these employers guarantees a certain number of jobs for the few women who do come forward. Rank Xerox in this country has for example a policy of setting *targets* to increase the percentage of women employed in the following categories: sales; services; specialist; professional and management.

*Appendix

Their equal opportunities policy statement says:

"each unit should aim to have a consistently higher proportion compared with most companies of women in what have hitherto been regarded as male jobs. Each unit will therefore be asked to set its own targets and maintain clear records of progress achieved."

Quota systems or targets to get women into new areas is a vital task for trade unionists to set themselves.

Europe

In Italy the unions at Fiat cars won the demand for 50% of all new recruits to be women.

In Norway all political parties have been asked to look at their selection procedures to bring the level of female representation up to 50%.

In Sweden there is a law, that when a company establishes itself especially in a region hit by the crisis, and gets money from the State, at least 40% of the jobs have to be for women. Companies can also get most of the wages paid by the government if they hire women in industries traditionally dominated by men. There is a law for courses paid by government funds that gives preferential treatment to women in courses dominated by men and vice versa.

This is different to our present law which allows special courses for one sex only to be set up. If preferential treatment were given to women applying for TOPS courses in engineering and other skills what a boost that would be.

Many people quite rightly distrust the law because of the way it is often used to shackle the trade union movement. But in Sweden although a great deal was achieved through collective bargaining on positive action, these gains had to be enshrined in the law as well, as one way of ensuring them in the future and registering the gains made.

USA

The best example we have got comes from the experience of the Affirmative Action programmes of the United States.

In the US all government contracted employers are legally bound to set certain goals and to achieve them within a certain period. Failure to achieve these quotas can result in massive fines for the employers. This is a good example of what can be achieved by legal changes. For these laws have meant that employers have had to take active measures to encourage women. This in turn means that women are more inclined to

**The struggle for
positive
discrimination
in hiring and
promotion is part
of the fight for
socialism**

Nancy Rosenstock



fight for what is theirs. In other words changes in the law are not the answer on their own but they can give a stimulus and added confidence to women to apply for jobs.

What was the result of these measures

GENERAL MOTORS have, between 1975-1977, increased their number of women executives from 2.9% to 5.1% of the total and their percentage of blue collar workers from 13.2% to 16.6%. Their training college took in 32% of women engineers in 1977 compared with 0.6% in 1970.

At the BELL TELEPHONE Company, whose Affirmative Action Programme was amended as it was judged by the courts not to be effective enough, the numbers of women in Class I jobs with salaries over \$30,000 rose from 382 in 1972 to 888 in 1978, including 28 black women.

A cross section of women who were interviewed by a local paper believed their promotion was a result of affirmative action. The situation in the countries mentioned above is incomparably better than in Britain.

The TUC and Positive Action

At the 1980 TUC Conference a motion* was passed calling for a vigorous campaign on positive action. In other words as a result of increasing pressure from women workers within the unions the TUC have recognised that special measures are necessary to ensure a woman's place in the workforce.

In November 1980 the TUC held a special conference for delegates from all unions to discuss positive action. Marie Patterson, Chair of the TUC Women's Advisory Committee said in her opening address to the conference:

"Job segregation, which has been the main stumbling block for women in gaining equality with men has hardly been affected since the passing of the legislation..."

"And the challenge to the movement is to produce a positive action policy which is sound and realistic, and at the same time one which will have a definite effect on the employment prospects of working women, by breaking down the barriers which have been erected over so many years."

The November conference on Positive Action discussed a document which put forward two approaches

i) For voluntary agreements on positive action to be drawn up between Trade Union negotiating bodies and employers.

ii) For a legally enforced system of goals and targets to increase the representation of women in male dominated areas. This model is based on the experience of the Affirmative Action programmes of the United States which make it mandatory on employers to set such targets.

On the whole delegates did not see the options as counterposed. When summing up Marie Patterson said that the conference recognised the need for both legislation and collective bargaining.

However she did manage to conclude that *'there was more or less overall rejection of quotas'* despite the lack of discussion that took place on it. Unfortunately there was no discussion of what sort of positive action we should fight for locally and what sort of legislation we want. This confusion was reflected in uncertainty about what we mean when we talk of positive action.

*see Appendix

A lot of debate centred around the need to increase women's participation in the unions as a means to fight for positive action. But campaigns around the demands for the TUC Charter for equality in the unions cannot be the centre point of the fight to end job segregation.

One of the arguments put forward in the TUC document against a system of goals and quotas is that

"such an enforceable programme runs counter to the tradition of voluntarism.."

But we argue that we already have a law which runs counter to the interests of women. It doesn't recognise their past discrimination and forbids an employer to compensate for this.

If you agree that the position of women is unequal then why do you disagree with a law that tries to rectify this?

We're all against laws that shackle the trade union movement and its members so lets do something about this one!

Our Position

We demand the right for women to work at whatever work they choose. We want positive action to break down job segregation.

What we say is that we should focus on Positive Action in LAW through goals and targets mandatory on employers and in ACTION at local and national union levels through a national campaign.

We disagree with the TUC document which advises against amending the SDA to make goals and quotas a legal obligation for employers. Although employers are encouraged to set up special training programmes where women have not been represented in a particular job in the last twelve months such programmes even if established do not mean that women will be taken on at the point of selection. The present law makes it illegal for an employer even if they want to take women on to redress the balance.

So what's the point of the glossy adverts and special courses. The problem is that progress towards breaking down job segregation will be slow unless goals and targets are enforced, unless employers are com-

pelled to review their employment practices.

So What Changes in Law do we Want?

We want to give the greatest backing to the fight for local positive action programmes with an enforcement procedure in Law. This is what can give the fight a national focus and can give a boost for women seeking action.

We recommend that the TUC and local/National unions/Labour Party initiates a campaign to amend the Positive Action sections of the Sex Discrimination Act so that they are extended in two ways:

Firstly the Act must recognise that women suffer from past discrimination and that compensatory measures to reverse this must be made Lawful.

Secondly the section on employers must make it obligatory for them to review their employment practices, and where women are shown to be disproportionately represented to set goals and targets to increase the numbers of women.

Finally we want these positive Action clauses to be mandatory.

Such changes in the law would give a greater lever to Trade Union negotiating committees, and would be a powerful stimulus for women to come forward into new jobs.

Legislation with some teeth will not guarantee womens rights but will make it more of a possibility than is the case with the present legislation.

In 1975 the TUC adopted an equal opportunities policy* which it incorporated into every TU negotiation agreement with management.

Very little has changed despite this clause which serves to emphasise our view that the policy needs positive reinforcement. Without positive *action being written into the law*, without an onus being placed on employers to get goals and targets, negotiating bodies will suffer regional and local disparity, depending on the strength of the employer and the unions. Unions have secured their rights through law in the past, women have to do the same.

A Union Charter for Positive Action

★ Demanding that employers review their employment practices to see where women are disproportionately represented, to set goals and targets to increase their representation.

★ Making sure that women are recruited into traditionally male jobs, with special adverts to encourage them to apply.

★ Employers should publicly state themselves equal opportunities employers.

★ Creating special training schemes for women to learn skills normally confined to men.

★ Setting aside targets to get apprenticeships for young women.

★ Retraining personnel so that interview procedures are not biased against women.

★ Evaluating criteria for entry to jobs. e.g. weight, size, etc.

★ Promoting working conditions favourable to both men and women in terms of crèches, flexi time, pressing for local nurseries.

★ Lengthening initial training courses on TOPS.

★ Not such rigid entrance criteria to training courses. Secondment to Skills Centres.

★ Making sure that maternity benefits do not disadvantage women's training or promotion.

Some of the myths about Positive Action

Surely we need a Labour government before we can fight for Positive Action?

NO! women cannot wait until the next labour government. They have to fight to defend their interests now!

In this pamphlet we argue that job segregation can be ended by mass action to force a change in legislation making positive action compulsory, and by trade union action at national and local level to enforce the law. If we consider changing the law as an important component in this strategy, then we must discuss who will change this law.

The Labour Party is the political party of the workers movement. Therefore trade unions and CLP's should campaign in the Labour Party for positive action. These forces aided by the Labour Party Equal Rights Committee should formulate a resolution to the next Labour Party conference which would commit the next Labour government to amend the SDA to make positive action mandatory.

But we cannot assume that a Labour government will enact such legislation. The last Labour government initiated many of the policies which the Tories are now carrying through in terms of public spending cuts etc. and their lack of serious commitment to women is to an extent demonstrated by the inadequacy of the existing legislation. If we are to fight this Tory government we have to know what we are fighting for in the next Labour government. The campaign on positive action must therefore have its reflection in a campaign within the Labour Party itself.

It is by debate and action at the base of the Labour Party that the mass of workers will force their party to implement this legislation. This campaign must be started now, firstly because positive action will have to be fought for before and after the SDA is amended and secondly because the fight for positive action is the best way to defend a woman's right to work NOW.

Does positive action discriminate against men?

Many people say they are against positive action because special measures for women means taking jobs away from men.

This is wrong. Positive action merely recognises that women are not

equal to begin with and seeks to compensate for that. How can it be discriminatory to bring women up to the same level as men? People who say this want things to stay as they are. But unfortunately the status quo is not good for women. It is precisely because the removal of formal barriers did not work that we want to look for special measures. Of course, we are against discrimination between all those who are equal but we are not all equal and we should not be ashamed to say we're fighting for positive action to put an end to that.

Does it mean taking men's jobs?

This question only arises because we are all under the threat of unemployment. The bosses and the Tory government are trying to divide the working class by implying that women having jobs means there will be less jobs for men.

Women's unemployment is already rising at twice the rate of men's. Is this helping men get jobs? Of course not. Unemployment is a deliberate way of weakening the whole workforce and of depressing wages.

What we really want is policies that fight unemployment, not ones that push the problem to others. Women first... who next? What's your answer?

Positive Action is part of the policies of the fight-back. It is a means of protecting the rights of the 40% of women workers in this country. It's not men's jobs against women's jobs, it's a fight for all jobs.

We're not fighting unemployment just so that women can remain in the lowest paid, least organised positions.

If you're against positive action you're really saying that women should stay as they are. So why should women bother to fight to get the Tories out if little will change for them. Positive Action can unite men and women against unemployment and for the right to work at any job.

Any one who says mining, engineering, steel and cars are men's jobs is wrong. These are capitalism's jobs whether men do them or women do them.

Women have not got into these areas because they have been assigned to the home — exactly where the Tories are trying to put us back. This division of labour has been used to oppress women for centuries. IT'S TIME IT STOPPED!

Positive Action will be too expensive

Of course opening jobs to women will not cost more money. It will just

mean employers will have to think before advertising and overcome their deep rooted prejudices.

Nevertheless no one can deny that promoting educational schemes, training opportunities etc. demand resources. These are important if women are to be able to overcome their oppression and become equal in the work force.

We argue that even when there are massive cuts in spending the interests of women should be part of the fight-back — not just something for later when we have won our other demands.

Where the money comes from is not our problem because we at present have no say in government expenditures. The Tories can find £8m to spend on nuclear weapons to annihilate us and yet they ignore and perpetuate the oppression of women. We want the the workers to decide on state financial allocation not the bosses' government.

Do women bring down men's wages?

Many men blame women for the low paid jobs and poor organisation. We don't. The fact is that women are concentrated in industries with relatively little industrial power. A strike of miners has more effect than a strike of hairdressers. So really its up to the stronger sections of the trade unions to make sure that women get the fullest backing in their fight for equality.

If a woman was to enter the Toolroom do you think that's going to lower men's wages? No, it's a question of the strength of workers' bargaining power in the productive process.

Do you believe that women's fight for equal pay has weakened the trade union movement? Has it made men's wages less? No. So then why should Positive Action?

The labour movement has to fight on two fronts — against discrimination and for jobs for all.

The number of women joining unions has gone up rapidly in recent years and the more unions take up and fight for womens issues the more this tendency will increase. Sexist prejudices tend to blame women themselves other than look to what the unions can do to encourage women members to participate — such as fighting for creche facilities, meetings in work-time etc.

How to fight for Positive Action

The discussions being taken by the TUC and Labour Party should be taken to the membership. We will take part in that discussion and will argue that positive action must be mandatory in law through a quota system and that a national campaign should be initiated by the labour movement.

Below we make our own contribution to how such a campaign could be structured at a local and national level. We are not aiming to impose a rigid outline on this discussion, because we believe that the best way to organise and build such a campaign is to involve as many people as possible — trade unionists, feminists, Labour Party activists, and students — in the initial debate.

The labour movement's responsibility to women

The Equal Pay Act was introduced by a Labour government after the struggles of women in Britain for equal pay. Those struggles were focused through a national campaign for women's equal rights — NJACWER*.

This campaign was set up in October 1968 after a year of female militancy which included the strike by Ford women for re-grading. NJACWER was based on trade unions women's groups and political groups. Its main focus was equal pay which it fought for by an extra-parliamentary campaign.

Despite the inadequacy of the legislation that was finally passed, the actions of women nationally and locally are a model for us today in the fight for positive action.

Two things are vital if women are to win the fight for positive action:

★ To organise in their unions, Labour parties and women's groups. The growing weight and role of women in the labour movement has an important impact on all workers. They begin to see women as equal partners with the same rights as the male workers, and the same ability to fight the bosses in everyone's interests.

And as Marie Patterson said at the TUC Positive Action conference
"Trade Unions must take active steps to implement such policies for it is only if we are seen to be putting our own house in order that our positive action proposals will be taken seriously..."

In other words we have to promote the self organisation of women in the unions.

* National Joint Advisory Council for Women's Equal Rights

★ A mass national campaign will be needed to coordinate activity and focus attention on amending the SDA to include mandatory positive action. We can see the power of such a campaign if we look at something like the National Abortion Campaign.



TUC Congress

Morale, strength, achievement come with unity in action and power with numbers.

Nationally organised activity around job discrimination has not existed since the Equal Pay struggles of 1968. We cannot change laws without national co-ordination nor can we build the mass movement which would change the position of women at work.

Such a campaign must draw in all sections of the labour movement in order to fight to establish in law and in practice womens equality at work.

Committing the Labour Movement to a mass campaign on Positive Action

a) The official bodies of the labour movement will need to organise the fight to win the unions and the Labour Party to actively campaign for positive action.

b) Within each union and Labour Party the basis for propaganda and agitation will be made by the collection of information.

c) A working party should be set up which is open to national unions and organisations who are committed to positive action. This working party could prepare for a trade union activist conference as soon as possible.

This conference should set up a co-ordinating committee to formulate clear aims for the campaign.

Organising a Positive Action Campaign.

There are important aspects to the campaign for positive action on jobs; collecting information; winning our women's group, trade union branch, labour party, and political group to actively support positive action in law and in practice; and committing the labour movement and the women's movement to organising a mass campaign for positive action.

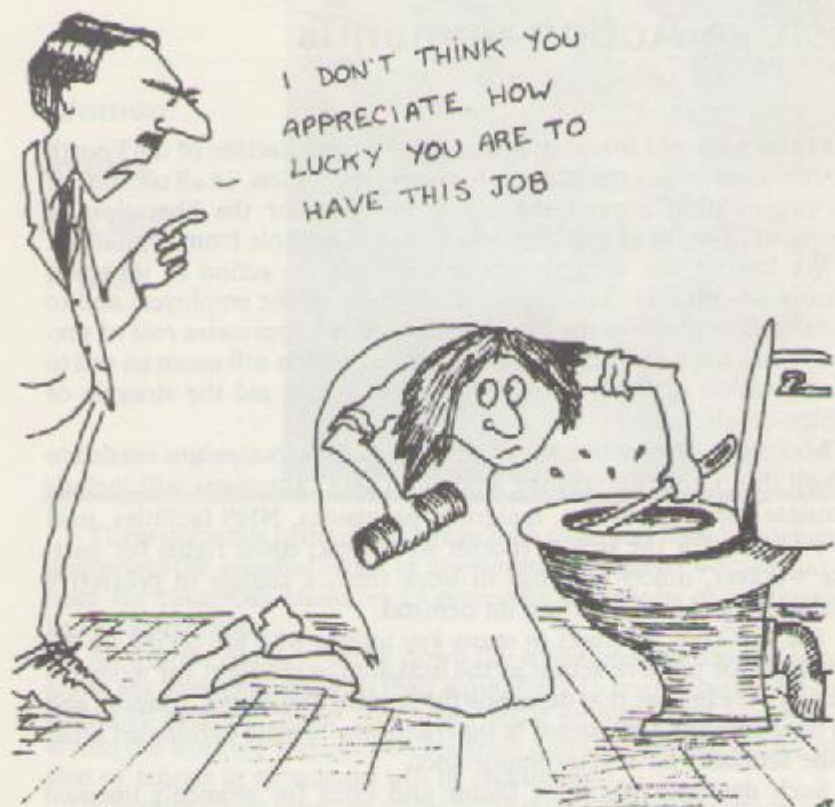
Collecting information

a) Find out what collective bargaining agreements exist within your unions around the EPA, SDA and Protective Legislation.

b) Investigate the major industrial employers covered by your union and in your local area. Find the number of women who apply for 'male' jobs; the number accepted; the last time a woman held a job that is now done by men e.g. during the war. Establish whether your company has called itself an "equal opportunity employer" and what its practices are i.e. do they have targets for the integration of women into traditionally male jobs? Do they positively advertise to encourage women to apply for these jobs? do they discriminate in favour of women?

How to win your organisations to Positive Action

a) Publish the information you have collected in union journals,



Positive Action is a special measure to right the wrong which has been done to women over the centuries

Labour Weekly, Tribune, Trades Council Broadsheets, Women's Sub-Committee newsletters, Women's TUC and women's movement publications. Use the local media and press to open the debate.

- b) Commit your union branch to set up a positive action committee.
- c) Formulate and submit resolutions committing your local and national organisations, the TUC and Labour Party to fighting for positive action in law and in practice.

Why the IMG is fighting for Positive Action demands

The International Marxist Group is the British Section of the Fourth International — an organisation for world revolution. In all sections of our organisation around the world we fight for the liberation of women and for the liberation of humanity as a whole from capitalism.

We believe that a campaign around positive action in jobs and training is central to countering the offensive of the employers and to educating the whole of the working class on the oppressive role of sexism. We do not believe that winning positive action will mean an end to discrimination at work but we do believe it will aid the struggle of women on all fronts.

Making positive action mandatory will aid the campaigns needed to end all discrimination against women. These campaigns will include adequate nursery facilities, maternity provisions, NHS facilities, paid leave to care for the sick, a shorter workweek, equal rights for part-time workers, union meetings in work time, a change in protective legislation, and free abortion on demand.

The IMG has members in many key unions who are taking up the campaign for positive action as the next step in the fight for women's equality. We believe that demands for preferential hiring, training and job opportunities for women in the traditionally male dominated areas of the economy have great importance.

Such demands place the blame and onus for women's unequal status in this society fairly and squarely on the capitalist system and the bosses.

Demands around positive action begin to establish in practice the right of women to a job, if necessary at the expense of the capitalist system — not of fellow male workers.

Moreover, demands for positive discrimination at the point of selection to fill quotas of women even challenges the right of the capitalists and the bosses to control hiring and firing.

In fact, positive action for women challenges head on the divisions within the working class along sex lines, divisions that are fostered and maintained by the bosses in order to weaken the working class and hold down the wages and working conditions of everyone not just women. If women are pushed out of the labour force at the will of the capitalist system then everyone's right to a job is threatened. Positive Action seeks to ensure women's rightful place in the workforce.

**Women
miners
can dig
it too.**



These demands help to encourage both male and female workers to appreciate the material effect of discrimination against women and the need for conscious measures to overcome the effects of centuries of forced subjugation.

As women begin to break down the traditional division of labour along sex lines and establish their equal right to employment and their ability to perform 'male' jobs, then sexist attitudes and assumptions within the working class will be undercut and the whole SOCIAL division of labour in all spheres will be challenged.

Struggles which open the doors for women to enter the educational, occupational and leadership realms previously dominated by men pose in the clearest possible manner the eradication of womens inferior social status.

The TUC had equal pay on their books for a hundred years before women themselves actually won it through struggles like those at Fords. These women did not leave it to the mis-leaders of the working class. The leaders of the labour movement have been bureaucratic and conservative and do not always fight for the needs of the working class as a whole — let alone for their women members. Demands around positive action raise fundamental issues in relation to workers control of hiring and firing, the right to work etc. around which the rank and file of the working class as a whole can unite to fight this conservatism and replace this leadership.

The IMG fights for militants within the labour movement to organise around a programme of demands to challenge the misleaders.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES: TUC SUGGESTIONS FOR POSITIVE ACTION

- (a) Publicly a union should press an employer to commit himself to being an Equal Opportunities employer. This could involve insisting on the TUC Equal Opportunities clause in all agreements, and the employer informing the local job centre of his policy, giving the local press the information in the form of an article or letter, and most important of all, including an appropriate statement on all job adverts both internal and external.
- (b) Evaluation schemes that decide the grading of the job should be based on the level of skill, training and responsibility needed and not on differences between male and female 'skills', eg is it more skilful to be able to solder intricately or to lift heavy boxes?
- (c) Ensuring that the job description is an exact description of the duties of the job and does not imply sex stereotyping, eg does a receptionist have to be 'attractive' or a sales representative 'active executive type'? The job description should be drawn up after research into what the jobs require, not based on assumptions such as all fork-lift drivers carry heavy weights.
- (d) As with job evaluation schemes and job description, criteria for promotion should be laid down enumerating the skills that need to be developed, such things as formal qualifications should be looked at carefully, in terms of their necessity, their desirability or whether they could be gained after promotion.
- (e) Actions in the recruitment stage should include making adverts attractive and available to women, by the use of the EOC; including a picture of a woman as well as a man in the advert; making sure the wording does not put off women (a reintroduction of the use of male or female wanted might be a positive encouragement); advertising in women's magazines (though to do so exclusively is discriminatory); contacting local women's groups, school teachers and careers officers dealing with girls to inform them of the vacancy; ensuring all vacancies are advertised internally and to all people, and the use of an employment noticeboard to display vacancies.
- (f) Personnel staff, including receptionists, should be made aware of the implications of an equal opportunities (EO) policy, and have available a full job description, so that women seeking jobs are not put off when making their initial approach.
- (g) At the interviewing stage, the application form should declare the employer has an EO policy and state any relevant grievance procedure. It should also only ask questions relevant to the job applied for and not ask unnecessary personal details.
 - in a large concern more than one interviewer should be used, preferably with a mix of sexes.
 - interviewers should be trained in interview and assessment techniques to eliminate unconscious bias.

— it should be agreed previously what skills the interviewers are looking for, there should be an interview report form to ensure a common standard, and discussion afterwards between interviewers.

— any testing process should be job-related, and have a direct correlation between test and job performance; for instance, is the mechanical comprehension test used truly indicative of future performance?

— questions should be aimed at assessing the person's skills and abilities, and not include questions which are only put to women on home circumstances, future plans, etc.

— it is good employment practice to explain why a person did not get the job, and what improvements would make them acceptable. This enables the person to understand and assess their performance at interviews, and ensures the interviewers are fair.

(h) In promotion, the advertised commitment to an EO policy is most important, and should be made by the chief executive.

— all promotions should be circulated internally; the use of an employment noticeboard as a focal point would be an advantage.

— these vacancy notices should include job description and candidate requirements, not just job titles, and should be checked for indirect discriminations such as a requirement to continuous service.

— the possibility of part-time promotions should be investigated.

— an annual review system should be used to discuss with staff their progress and future plans in employment terms, and any training or job opportunities that might benefit them.

— seminars should be held for supervisory staff on how to evaluate personnel performance free of discrimination.

— staff suitably qualified for promotion should be personally alerted to the vacancy.

— all staff should be encouraged to take training courses that will help in their promotion prospects.

— in service seminars, courses and discussions on issues relevant to management development should be held. These should be non-residential, wherever possible, and in working hours.

— the same criteria used for a recruitment interview should be used for a promotion interview.

— the creation of recognised grievance procedures should be established preferably in the form of a committee with management and workers represented.

(j) The working conditions should be examined to see if they could be made more attractive to women. For instance, the provision of creches or paying for places in a local nursery where local authority provisions do not meet the needs.

— extensive use of flexible working time, flexible holiday times and the right to carry over leave from one year to the next.

— the improvement of maternity provisions to allow more flexibility than the statutory requirements."

A TUC CHARTER

EQUALITY FOR WOMEN WITHIN TRADE UNIONS

- 1** The National Executive Committee of the union should publicly declare to all its members the commitment of the union to involving women members in the activities of the union at all levels.
- 2** The structure of the union should be examined to see whether it prevents women from reaching the decision-making bodies.
- 3** Where there are large women's memberships but no women on the decision-making bodies special provision should be made to ensure that women's views are represented, either through the creation of additional seats or by co-option.
- 4** The National Executive Committee of each union should consider the desirability of setting up advisory committees within its constitutional machinery to ensure that the special interests of its women members are protected.
- 5** Similar committees at regional, divisional, and district level could also assist by encouraging the active involvement of women in the general activities of the union.
- 6** Efforts should be made to include in collective agreements provision for time off without loss of pay to attend branch meetings during working hours where that is practicable.
- 7** Where it is not practicable to hold meetings during working hours every effort should be made to provide child-care facilities for use by either parent.
- 8** Child-care facilities, for use by either parent, should be provided at all district, divisional and regional meetings and particularly at the union's annual conference, and for training courses organised by the union.
- 9** Although it may be open to any members of either sex to go to union training courses, special encouragement should be given to women to attend.
- 10** The content of journals and other union publications should be presented in non-sexist terms.

WOMEN'S EQUALITY

(Motions 22 and 23)

Congress notes with concern the deterioration of women's earnings and their reduced employment opportunities and that, although the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts have been in force for five years, very little progress has been made towards equality for women at work; on the contrary, the gap between women's pay and men's is widening and the vast majority of higher-paid jobs are still dominated by men.

Congress therefore resolves to pursue vigorously a campaign for real equality for women and recognises that new strategies are needed to establish genuine equality of opportunity. These must be seen as an integral part of the trade unions' fight against the industrial and economic policies of the Tory Government – in order to prevent women taking the brunt of the current recession.

Congress therefore welcomes the initiatives taken by the TUC Women's Advisory Committee (in line with a resolution passed by the 1979 TUC Women's Conference) to investigate forms of positive action in women's education, training and employment as a means of shifting entrenched patterns of discrimination. It calls upon the General Council to draw up, in consultation with individual unions, detailed proposals for positive action which can then form the basis of future negotiations between unions and management, and to present these proposals to Congress in 1981.

USEFUL ADDRESSES:

Equal Opportunities Commission
Overseas House,
Quay Street,
Manchester M3 3HN.

Trades Union Congress (T.U.C.)
Congress House,
Great Russell Street,
London WC1B 3LS.

Low Pay Unit.
9 Poland Street,
London W1V 3DG.

National Council for Civil Liberties
Rights for Women,
186 Kings Cross Road,
London WC1.

Rights of Women (R.O.W.)
374 Grays Inn Road,
London WC1.

Spare Rib.
27 Clerkenwell Close,
London EC1R 0AT.

Women and Manual Trades Group,
40 Dale Street,
London W4.

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The IMG

This pamphlet is produced by the International Marxist Group (British Section of the Fourth International). The IMG believes that fight for women's liberation is an essential part of the struggle for socialism. We believe the action around the demands of women to end job segregation and open all jobs to women workers is a vital part of this struggle. The IMG will be arguing for the demands in this pamphlet in the Labour movement.

If you are interested in knowing more about the IMG tear off the form below and post to IMG, PO Box 50, London N1.

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