

SOCIALIST WOMAN



The Women's Vigil: Led by the Irish Women's Group



Dolours Price



Marion Price

**HUNGER
STRIKERS
1974**

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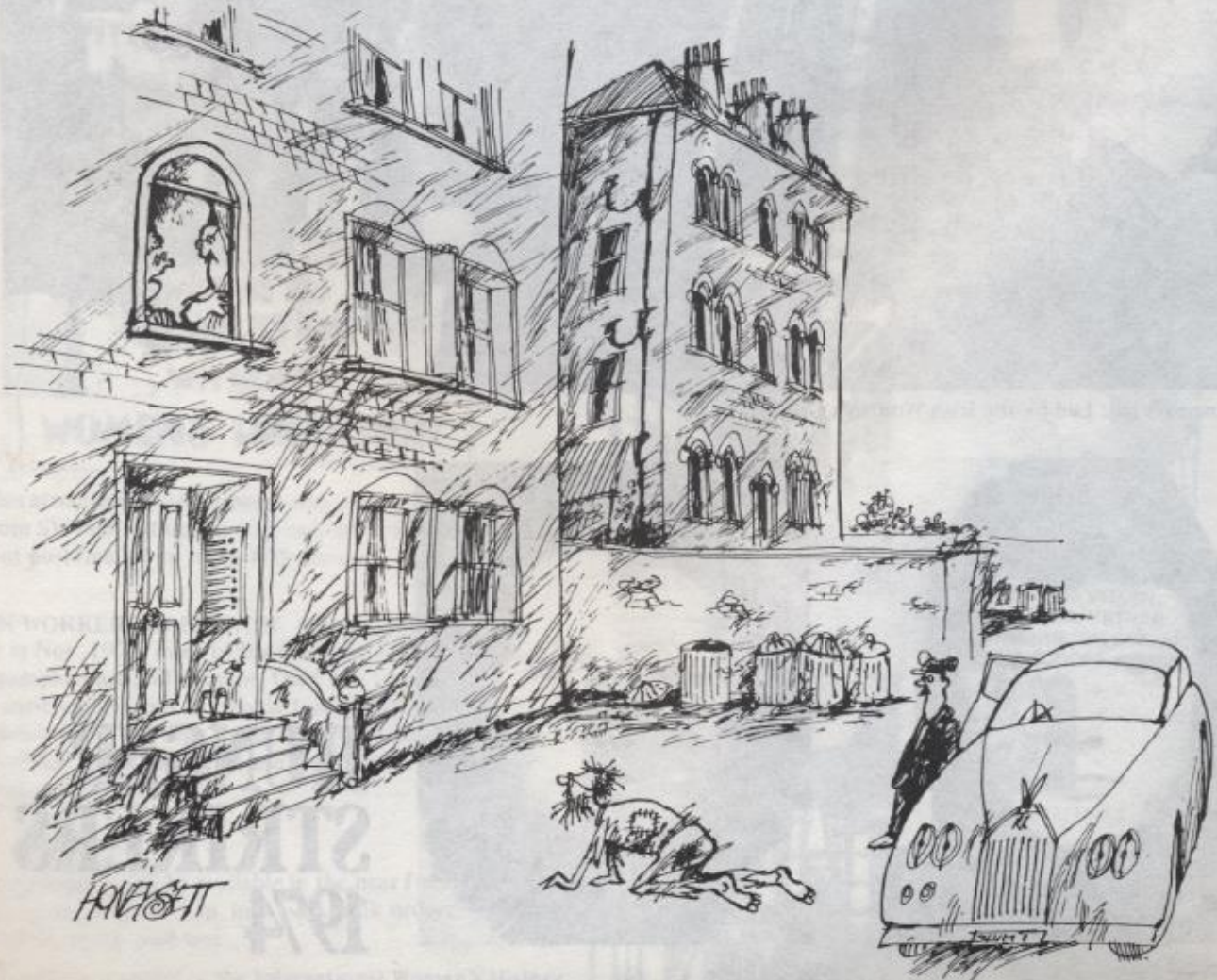


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EDITORIAL BOARD

Leonora Lloyd, Ruth Prentice, Carrie

You've got RATS? But
our rules against
pets are quite clear



"Here he comes, trying to raise the rent again."

EDITORIAL

With the declaration of a 'national emergency' and the introduction of the 3-day week, the Tory government has launched its most serious attack on the working-class, both on its living standards and on its organizations. For when they call for 'national unity', they mean national unity against the miners - to smash their attempt to break out of the straight-jacket of the Pay Laws.

And those Pay Laws are a straight-jacket on every worker. While the employers are allowed to pass on a whole series of 'allowable costs' in the form of higher prices, there are no 'allowable costs' for workers. So wages are strictly controlled while prices continue to rise in leaps and bounds (food prices, for instance, are now expected to go up another 14% in the next few weeks).

More and more people are beginning to see Tory policy for what it really is - a blatant attempt at a redistribution of wealth in favour of the capitalists. Despite the incessant Government propaganda about the 'national interest', threats to 'our democratic way of life' (!), the 'sovereignty of parliament', etc., and the TUC's servile attempts to help the Government out of its difficulties, the majority of the working-class now seems to be decisively swinging over to support the miners.

As it develops, a trial of strength between the classes on this scale inevitably throws more and more of the old assumptions, old ways of carrying on, old ideas and values into the melting pot. The needs of the situation require new forms of struggle and new perspectives on what to aim at. This means that immense opportunities open up for revolutionary marxists and other women's liberationists to fight for our ideas in the working-class and get them put into practice in the struggle.

For we see the struggle against women's oppression as a class question. It is inseparable from the class struggle as a whole. It is not just that unequal pay and discrimination are obviously an aspect of the system of wage labour. The family itself is integral to capitalism. Its structure, division of labour, hierarchy and the various roles it demands its members to act out, not only enshrine and perpetuate that oppression of women to which the WLM is a major response, but are specifically rooted in the needs of capitalist society.

Those who separate women's struggle for liberation

from the class struggle in general, blaming 'ignorance', 'male stupidity', or, worse still, some assumed 'natural human trait', set up a theoretical road-block between their goal and the only social force that can achieve it - the proletariat. And this leads them to lose their bearings completely in a situation of class confrontation such as we see developing now, and such as must inevitably precede any serious struggle for socialism and women's liberation. For the 'normality' against which they were struggling suddenly begins to melt before their eyes under the pressure of the conflict, and assumes new, often surprising forms - like the Tories passing the Equal Pay and Anti-Discrimination legislation, for instance. Political disorientation of this kind may well account for the crisis currently afflicting many WL groups, and the recurring difficulties being experienced in convening national conferences...

The WLM has developed, and helped others to grasp a good theoretical understanding of women's position in capitalist society. What is urgently needed is for that experience and understanding to be brought to bear on the class struggle, both in terms of practical help and by fighting against male chauvinist ideas in the labour movement.

Now is the time to fight for women to be able to play their full role in the trade union movement, and to have the right to organize caucuses if necessary to fight male chauvinism amongst male trade unionists. Now is the time to call on trades councils, shop stewards committees, strike committees, etc., to establish creches, communal child-care facilities, communal restaurants, etc. to free women for the struggles they are engaged in. Now is the time to call on the labour movement to join in combatting the right-wing threat posed by organizations like SPUC and LIFE, whenever they come on to the streets with their viciously reactionary views on the family, sexual morality and abortion.

If the WLM seizes the opportunities and openings created by the crisis in this way, it will begin to lay a real basis, both ideologically and in material terms for the liberation of women from the drudgery of being 'housewives', from the poverty of working for 'pin money', and from the humiliation of being treated as sexual objects. If it does not, it runs the danger of rendering its commitment to women's liberation a totally platonic affair, and disintegrating in confusion.

As this issue of Socialist Woman goes to the press, another phase in the fight against this Tory Government has opened up with the announcement of a strike ballot by the miners' union.

It is an indication of the impact of the miners' struggle, and the extent to which women are being drawn into the struggle, that already groups of miners' wives e.g. in central Scotland have been organizing meetings among themselves to discuss what role they can play in the event of a miners' strike.

Also, groups within the WLM have been discussing their relation to this coming struggle, and some women's centres, e.g. Kingsgate Women's Centre in North London **HAVE ALREADY BEEN TURNED OVER TO THE MINERS AND THEIR WIVES**, as a base for them to operate from if they have towns and cities for meetings, flying pickets etc.

This demonstrates not only the immense support the miners have in their struggle against the Tory Pay Laws, but also the degree to which women are being drawn into the struggles other than their own immediate struggles; and the degree to which they are also beginning to identify with other groups in struggle to the extent of offering their services and facilities for their struggle.

But is this enough? It is possible that the miners, with this kind of support, could display sufficient 'muscle' to force a breach in Phase 3. But what about Phases 4,5,6,7... After all, the miners forced the Government to retreat on Phase 2, only to find that they had to gird their loins for the fight once again, 18th months later. What then is the answer? In the face of galloping inflation, the continued existence of a Government explicitly pledged, not to cut prices at a stroke, but to maintain profits at the expense of the working-class, means that we will all have to fight the same battles over and over again. The fact that the miners are in a stronger position this time than last; the fact that the engineers, miners building workers, and many other sectors have an immediate grievance against the Government; that women are fed up with rising food prices, rising rents, cuts in welfare spending and messing about on the promised equal pay; all of this means that the situation is favourable for a concerted attack on this Government, and not just on one of its many policies.

For we must be clear, that wage restraint is only one of the weapons which this Government can use against us, and is already using. So called 'Criminal law' (i.e. supposedly neutral and not class biased) has been used against pickets, and three building workers are now serving terms of imprisonment for 'conspiring to prevent others going about their lawful work'; Special Police Squads have been used against pickets, as in the Footprints dispute in Sheffield, when the picket line was attacked by one such Squad; press and television have tried to whip up a 'reds under the beds' scare against union militants; and Arab terrorists have been used as the excuse for special exercises around Heathrow to get us all used to the sight of tanks and troops in the streets of Britain.

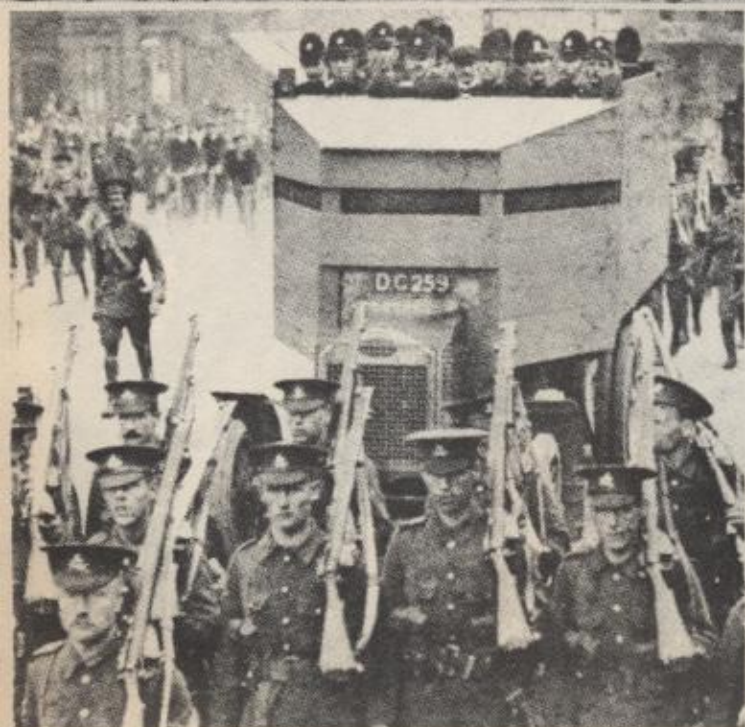
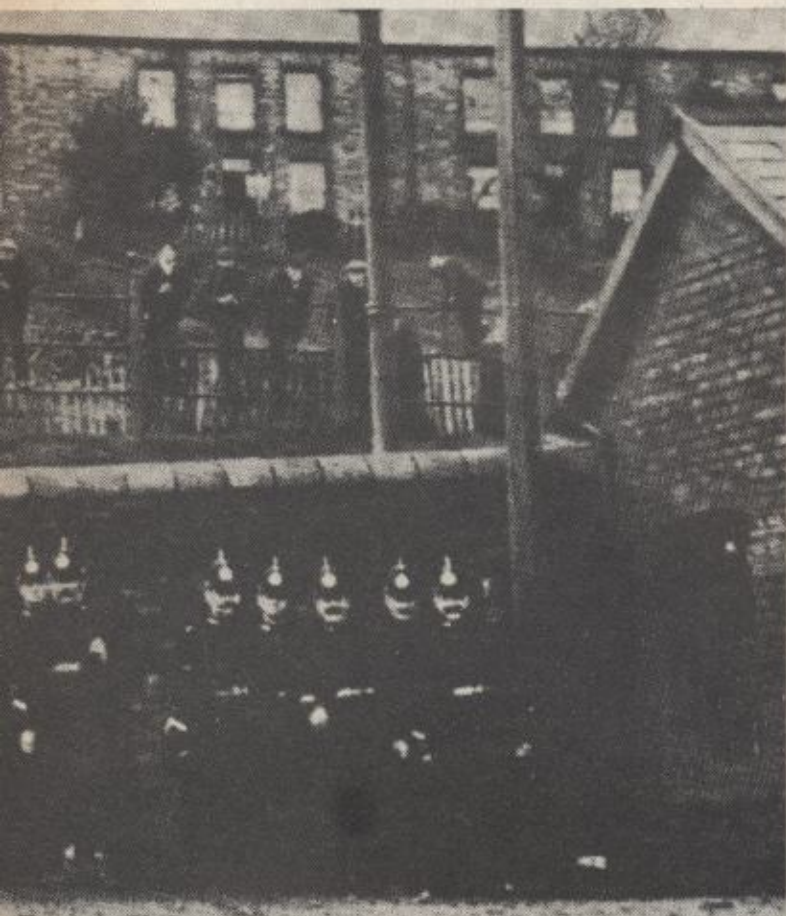
What we should be seeking to do therefore is not just to fend off the present attack contained in Phase 3, but to protect ourselves against future attacks, by removing the Government which is centralising the attacks. But the choice is not entirely ours. If the question is really 'who rules' then this will not be settled by an election. If a General Election is decided, we should use the present disputes (as Mick McGaghie, member of the miners' executive put it) to give the labour movement enough time to campaign against the Tories. We should also be prepared to continue our struggles to defend our standards of living, and the rights of organization, regardless of which Government came out of such an election.

But in the absence of an election, what should we

struggle GENERAL



for the STRIKE



be working for? We have already recognised the need to lend solidarity to the miners. We know from the last miners' strike the strength that results from the combined action of different sections of the labour movement, and groups like housewives and students. We must start to apply this lesson to our present situation. We must prepare not only to act in solidarity with one another; we must prepare to fight not only for our own claims; but we must also prepare a mass, united response to these attacks; we must prepare a general strike.

And this has special relevance for women, and those concerned with fighting questions relating to women. Because in such a situation the struggle is not and cannot be limited to the strong sections of the trade unions, from which in any case women are often excluded. Such a struggle draws all sections of workers into it, and also must encompass housewives, tenants, students etc., who are also under attack from this Government. Not only because they have a vested interest in the success of such a struggle, but because a movement of such proportions necessarily spills over from the place of work into the home, the school, the market. It is therefore essential to decide not just what factory to picket, not just which will be occupied, but to what extent the services necessary for the maintenance of the struggle, for the survival of the working-class during the struggle will be kept going. Who will produce food, how will it be distributed, how will it be allocated, who will have electricity, gas, water supplies, who will remove the garbage, who will staff medical centres etc. And into all of this comes the role of the women; the housewives, the teachers, nurses, shop assistants, provisions workers, etc. Some of us will be organized through our union and place of work; some through tenants' associations; some through local women's groups. But we all have a role to play, in our various capacities. And the first thing we must realise is that we CAN mobilise ourselves and others; that we can contribute to the struggle. But for this we must first organize to free ourselves from our homes, for at least some of the time. The principle of the flying picket is one of collective responsibility. The same should apply in organising and freeing all forces for action including women, and in organising the domestic work which isolates and oppresses women. And on the bodies which organize the struggle, which represent the working-class forces in an area, there should be women, representing the housewives, the tenants, local women workers etc.

We must prepare for this - which means fighting for representation in our unions, and for commitment from our unions for a fight against the Government policies and support for the miners. It means fighting for local action committees to organise the fight in the locality - flying pickets if the miners need support - and to try and win commitment from local groups of workers for a fight against the Government.

All fights taking place in this period against the Government are our fight too. And we must be prepared, not just to support them, but also to fight and to show the way forward, by uniting in action the various sections of the working-class under attack. We have an interest in the fight by the unions on the question of wages, because we have to dole out those wages in the face of inflationary prices. We have an interest in the fight against the attempt to use the courts to smash flying pickets, because women workers often need these pickets more than any other groups of workers. We have an interest in fighting cuts in social services because so many of us depend on them to supplement our family income. We, of all people, have an interest in drawing all these fights into one fight to remove this Government.

Linda Smith

SPUC

The ideology of reaction

At a time when even the bourgeoisie is talking about 'ending discrimination' and 'freeing' women, there is a rapidly growing organisation dedicated to preserving the family and maintaining the subordinate position of women in society.

The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC) is the largest and most important group fighting to restrict the existing abortion law. Its growth is paralleled by a proliferation of smaller groups with similar aims such as Life, Let Live, Birthright. This phenomena is evident throughout Western Europe, particularly France, Austria, and Germany where anti-abortionists rallied in large numbers in the spring of last year.

An understanding of SPUC is urgent in light of recent attempts by right-wing organisations to use issues having a broad popular appeal to extend their influence - notably the anti-Common Market campaign and the agitation around pornography and the obscenity law.

SPUC was formed in 1967 when the more liberal abortion law was enacted. The organisation now claims to have 8000 members in over 80 groups throughout Britain. In Manchester and Liverpool last year, SPUC mobilised 60,000 for its anti-abortion marches. In November 1973, although it failed dismally, SPUC projected it would bring 100,000 to London for a mass lobby of MPs which was to be the 'most important event in SPUC's history'. SPUC undertook to re-imburse the lost earnings of working class participants, and a plane was chartered for Scottish members.

On the SPUC executive sits the Marchioness of Salisbury, wife of Marquis of Salisbury, notorious for his connections with right-wing causes. He owns a 50,000 acre farm in Southern

Rhodesia, is president of the Anglo-Rhodesian Society, ex-director of the British South African Company, and a board member of the National Westminster Bank. Recently he made his home available for a meeting of the British wing of an anti-Communist group having international connections. Prominent representatives from the medical profession - to provide the image of scientific credibility, and Church officials form the bulk of the committee. Joseph Healey is the only Tory MP on the committee, but SPUC's views are represented in Parliament through Norman St. John Stevas.

The presence of such notable reactionaries should be expected, but more surprising is the presence of several Labour MPs. Gordon Oakes, an MP from Lancashire sits on the executive committee and James Dunn, Liverpool Labour MP chaired the November mass lobby.

The Church plays a crucial role in SPUC's activities. When SPUC was first formed, Roman Catholics were not allowed to be members of the executive committee, but the rule was relaxed when Phyllis Bowman, a leading spokeswoman for the group, abandoned her previous atheism and became a convert to Catholicism.

In recent years SPUC has co-ordinated its activities increasingly with Life, a group having close connections with the Catholic Church. SPUC now counts on the Life connections and the Church to swell demonstrations. Sermons calling on church-goers to attend such events, and the dra-gooning of sixth-formers from Catholic schools all serve the cause.

Lobbies and rallies are not the only activities of these



A welcome for the demonstrators from SPUC supporters.

groups. One pernicious project designed to shock children into becoming anti-abortionists is the organisation of slide shows in schools with horrendous photos - a rubbish bin filled with fetuses or a hand holding two tiny feet supposedly severed from a foetus.

Life has its equivalent: a telephone system called 'Life-line', offering to aid pregnant women who don't want their child. Women who phone, hoping to get advice about abortion are pressured to keep their child. Life-line arranges for families in other parts of the country to accommodate young girls, away from their own family and friends, to avoid the 'shame' of their situation. There is a catch - the girls are expected to act as unpaid domestic servants. This great concern apparently lapses once the girl has her child - then she is turned out of the home.

THE ABORTION LAW

Since 1967 it has been theoretically possible for any woman fulfilling one of two conditions to obtain an abortion on the National Health. That is, if 'the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman, or of injury to the physical or mental health of her or children in her family, greater than if she had an abortion' or if 'there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would be seriously handi-capped'.

In spite of the act's broad terms of reference, it has two serious shortcomings. Firstly, its terms are simply not known to the majority of working class women: no attempt has been made by either the Tory or Labour governments to effectively distribute information on abortion and the provisions of the act. Secondly, the final decision to terminate a pregnancy resides with a woman's doctor. If the doctor disapproves of abortion the conscientious objection clause relieves him of any responsibility towards his patient. Therefore he can quite legitimately refuse to refer the woman to a more sympathetic doctor. In fact many doctors not unsympathetic to abortion are simply unaware of the details of the Act. The only alternative remaining to a woman in this position is a change of doctors - a process taking weeks under the National Health Service.

The defence of the present Abortion Act is not the key

demand. What must be fought for is its extension to include provisions for effective, safe, and free contraception and abortion on demand.

Meanwhile, SPUC is fighting to restrict the act. In an attempt to limit the number of abortions it proposes time-consuming panel systems to review each case and restrictions on the 28-week termination period.

SPUC'S IDEOLOGY

SPUC is dangerous because it represents an ideology which is directed not only against the interests of women, but against the interests of the entire working class. It is uniting large numbers of people around reactionary ideas concerning women - the 'sanctity of the family', the 'cult of motherhood', and the 'higher morality' are all ideas pushed by SPUC.

A central theme in SPUC's manifesto is that abortion is a 'short-cut' solution to problems of social injustice. SPUC's solutions, far from dealing with these problems, would only perpetuate the type of society which ensures their existence. All of its proposals, if implemented, would have the effect of strengthening the family unit at the expense of other forms of social organisation, thus reinforcing the status quo.

Their emphasis on housing, for example, stems not from a concern for the homeless, but from a desire to encourage larger families. Their demands centre around the call for larger council houses and landlord concessions to induce them to take families with children. Demands for increased family allowances and maternity grants are similarly motivated.

Nevertheless, such seemingly radical demands are finding an increasingly receptive audience. A valuable role in countering this development can be played by the women's liberation movement as a force capable of organising collective action around alternative perspectives - perspectives designed to free women from their subordinate position within the family unit, instead of simply reinforcing their dependence as SPUC would have it.

DODIE WEPPLER



.....which is reciprocated

STANDSTILL ON

What are the effects of the present crisis on progress towards equal pay? How is Phase 3 interpreted in this connection? Can women expect to see any further movement towards equal pay and opportunity in 1974?

In a period such as we are in now, it may seem like a luxury to insist that the question of equal pay is important. After all, with large and important sections of the working class, such as the miners, engineers and railmen lined up to do battle with the Government, there are surely more urgent matters to be dealt with than equal pay.

The problem is that such big confrontations must involve the whole working class, or else are doomed to defeat. Whether as workers, or wives of workers, the support of women in the great struggles at present on the agenda is essential. Only one thing stands in the way of such support: not women's supposed backwardness, or unwillingness to struggle and become involved, but the many years of men's backwardness, unwillingness to fight for equality, and their positive *discouragement* to women getting involved.

If women are to be a part of the class struggle, then they must be certain that their interests are not yet again being pushed to the end of the queue, something to be achieved tomorrow, or even after the revolution. Especially at a time when the Government is deliberately pursuing policies designed to divide the class along both race and sex lines, it is more essential than ever that men understand the necessity of fighting for 'women's demands' and that women realise that pursuing those demands will ultimately add to class unity.

More immediately, the struggle for equal pay is important because, unless it is taken up in a determined way, as a part of the overall attack on phase 3, women's earnings will fall even further behind the men's, reversing the slight trend of recent years.

Just how slight a trend this is is clearly shown in recently published figures. They are for April 1973 and show full-time earnings for men at 21 and women at 18.

	MANUAL		NON-MANUAL	
	weekly £	hourly* p	weekly £	hourly* p
MEN	38.1	8 1.7/79.2	48.1	121.6/121.7
WOMEN	19.1	49.6/49.1	24.7	66.2/66.1

*First figure includes overtime DEP Gazette, Oct. 1973

These figures are very revealing. They show that the 'black-mailing' manual workers, men and women, earn a good deal less than their non-manual equivalents. They also show that male manual workers make up quite a bit of their money through overtime. But, above all, they show that women are still taking home only about 50% of male earnings.

In 1950, women's earnings were 55% of men's (hourly earnings 62%); in 1970, the year of the Equal Pay Act, only 50% (hourly earnings 61%) and things have barely improved since then.

In 1972 the Office of Manpower Economics produced its first report on implementation of the Equal Pay Act. This report is expensive, out of the reach of most of those who should read it. What is important to note is that even

in periods when pay laws did not operate (if you can remember that far back) the actual effect on women's earnings of the Act was negligible.

Thus, in low-paid industries, there has been a slow decrease (since 1939!) in the differentials of unskilled men's and women's rates. The report does not analyse the reasons for this, which are reasonably obvious. First, the men in such industries have fallen even further behind men in other, better-organised industries. Second, the influx of immigrant men (and women) into such work, through economic necessity, has been a factor in keeping wages low generally. Thus, it is far more a question of the men's wages not having kept ahead, than that the women's have gone up dramatically to join them!

In the whole of industry, at the time of the report, women's salaries were only 54% of men's; even in the public sector, insurance and banking, where 'equal pay' applies, they were only 77% of the men's. Salaried women are supposedly the most articulate, the most educated, in jobs where 'superior' muscle does not count. What hope, then, for their 'manual' sisters?

Since 1970, the DEP has kept a record of movements on the EP front. By mid-March 1972, 7% of the women covered by the records had had discrimination removed, 28% were covered by 'phased plans', 26% had had larger increases than the men (but with no promise of further improvement) 19% had had equal rises and 21% had actually had lower rises than the men in their industry

APEX workers in a GEC in Rugby picket press conference on equal pay



EQUAL PAY

There are several tactics open to an employer who wishes to avoid paying women wages on the same level as men. An ingenious one noted in the report is to be completely ignorant of the existence of the Act - a quarter of the employers investigated by the OME were in that happy position - or to be ignorant of its terms, as were 9 out of 10. The sample of 193 companies produced 60% who claimed that there were no instances where women were employed on work the same or broadly similar to men. (I cannot explain how such a high figure knew enough about the Act to make such a claim when 90% knew little or nothing about its contents). Only 12% considered it applied to their company, including one in five 'where some women were acknowledged to be on work comparable to men'. Perhaps this was because, in nearly half of those cases where overlap occurred they 'surprisingly.... claimed that equal pay was already in operation.'

THE ROLE OF THE UNIONS

What have the unions done about this state of affairs? Few have done anything except hold conferences. It is worth quoting on what has happened at local level:

'.....the attitudes of union representatives towards equal pay have sometimes tended to be equivocal. We found no clear association between the level of union membership in companies and the extent to which they had progressed towards equal pay. About a quarter of the companies we visitedhad

experienced union pressure for equal pay.....but about one in ten contended that its introduction had been blocked by the attitudes of male members. In some cases.....the men had resisted pay changes which would have narrowed the differentials between themselves and female employees and had successfully demanded the same percentage increases...'

The report found that very few firms were organising their labour force in such a way as to avoid implementation of equal pay. This would be partly a reflection of the already high level of separation of male and female jobs in industry generally (it might also have something to do with the fact that 'ignorant' employers do not know what are 'the same or broadly similar' jobs are); but the favourite method of avoiding the consequences of the Act is simply to have a wage structure which, whilst observing the letter of the law by not differentiating on paper between male and female rates, in fact ensures that those jobs normally done by women come at the lower ends of the scales.

The Report draws some interesting conclusions about the long-term effects of the Act. Thus, male workers 'may have ways of ensuring by the allocation of work and allowances that their earnings kept ahead.' Many firms thought that the Act would 'eventually reduce the employment of women,' because they would employ men in preference to women in the overlap areas. Other firms expected to introduce more machinery. The report is sceptical about the idea that employers might now be prepared to invest more in women in terms of training, etc.

All in all, the report confirms that 'equality' through legislation is an illusion.

THE PAY LAWS: TWO STEPS BACK

Basically, successive pay laws have not even allowed for the modest increases required to achieve equal pay by the end of 1975; this in spite of the much-quoted justification for the pay laws that they will help the lower-paid, *the biggest group of whom are women*. The Secretary of State did not exercise his power to make an order requiring employers to pay women workers 90% of the male rate in cases effected by the EPA by the end of 1973.

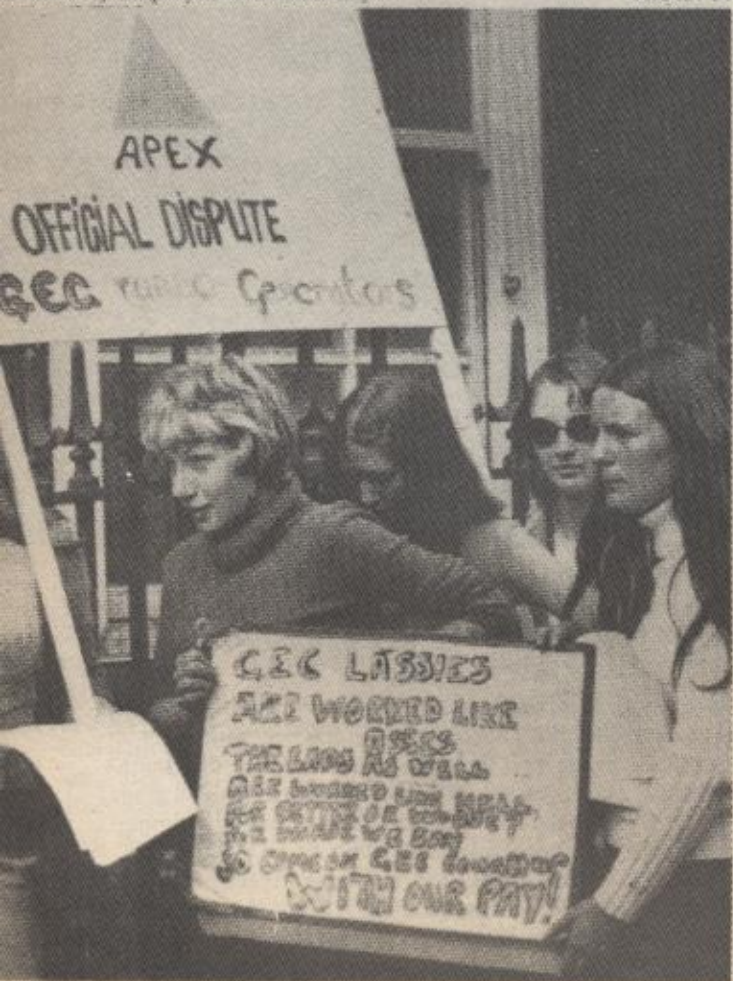
Under Phase 3, 'orderly progress' may be made 'outside the pay limit' towards EP. By the end of 1974 any differential existing between men's and women's rates at 7 November 1973 may be reduced by up to one-half (where the EPA applies). (This is always assuming that a new Phase does not alter things yet again, leaving those patiently waiting till the latter half of 1974 for their rise right back where they started.) To comply with the law, a mutually agreed evaluation scheme must be in existence.

In addition, para 124 of the Price and Pay Code for stage 3 says:

'No increase outside the pay limit is allowable under para 123 if any other increase effecting the group concerned has the effect of widening in percentage terms the differentials to which para 123 applies.' (Emphasis in original)

Department of Employment on Monday.

Photo: Pe



What this means is that when the maximum increase allowable (7%) is negotiated for all workers, the percentage difference remains the same and another small increase can be negotiated for the women, all the other conditions applying, of course. In most cases, the effect on differentials *in cash terms* will be barely noticeable. Of course, if the men were prepared to take less than 7%, whilst still allowing the women to go ahead and claim their bit extra, then the gap would decrease. But not only would such action be highly unlikely, especially as the full 7% is not enough for catching up with increasing costs of living, but as it would not at all challenge the pay laws, it is not the most effective way of getting equal pay!

Only militant action can do that, but most unions have not even tried to get the little allowed under the various stages of the pay laws. One exception, APEX, led a number of strikes during Phase 2 and now says '.....we shall have more strikes on equal pay under Stage 3 than we had under Phase 2.' The AUEW, on the other hand, has seemingly yet again quietly dropped equal pay from the current pay claim: at the very least, it is not putting any emphasis on it. Yet at present in engineering, though the basic female rate is 92% of the male, *women earn only about half the wages of the men.*

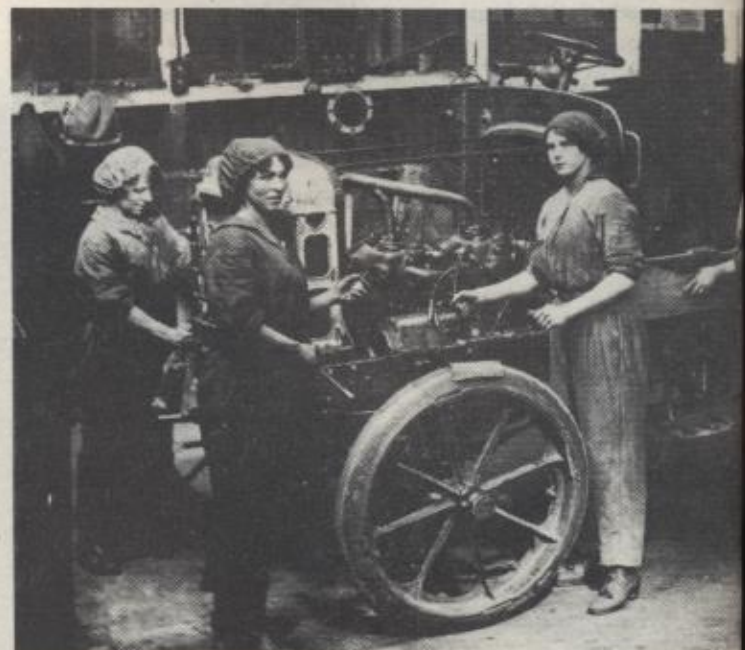
AN ACT OF INEQUALITY

Reasons for this sort of discrepancy are not merely the ones mentioned in the report - bonus, overtime, etc - but are mainly due to the different nature of the jobs done by men and women in industry, and the lack of opportunity generally, so that even where equal pay applies women are found at the lower levels, consequently earning less money - in teaching, the civil service, etc - and this trend seems to be increasing, so that for example, more men are found in the higher nursing grades now than used to be the case only a short time ago. Whilst the Equal Pay Act is sub-headed 'An Act to prevent discrimination, as regards terms of employment, between men and women,' not even Barbara Castle could claim that it had done anything other than actually *increase* discrimination in many cases. In the Potteries, for instance, women have been 'eliminated' from skilled jobs, even some where they are acknowledged to be better than men. In general, it has hardened the demarkation lines between men and women at work.

Ever since the EPA was passed, and its shortcomings realised, attempts have been made by way of various private members' bills, to bring in legislation dealing with Anti-Discrimination, generally on the lines of the Race Relations Act. These moves have been supported by many 'traditional' women's organisations, and by a section of the women's liberation movement, which has been actively collecting signatures to petitions, lobbying, etc.

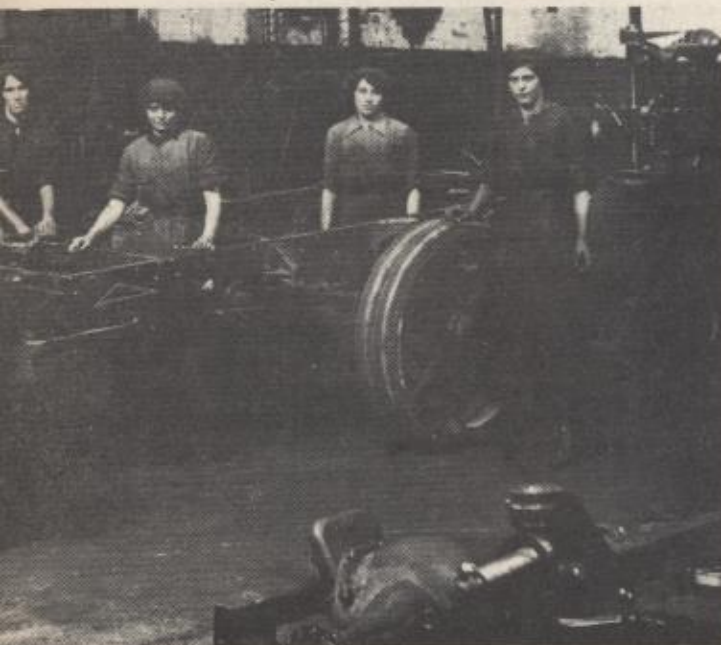
Last year, the Government announced that it would itself be bringing in Anti-Discrimination legislation. Not only has this headed off what could have been a dangerous campaign (just as the Equal Pay Act effectively for the time being nipped an equal pay movement in the bud) but it also replaces weak proposals with others that are either useless, or positively dangerous.

If we understand the motives behind the Government's action in taking over this legislation, then we can see why it takes the particular form it does. Returning to the Manpower report, it says that between 1951 and 1971 'the increase in the number of women employed.....represents almost the total increase in the labour force over this period.' Moreover, 'Recent projections by the DEP suggest that increases in the number of married women seeking work will be the major growth factor in the working population over the



next decade.' (It is true that this contrasts strangely with the later part of the report, quoted above, about the dangers of women becoming unemployed because of the introduction of equal pay, but that is the DEP's problem.)

Recently (and leaving aside for the moment possible effects of the present crisis) unemployment has been dropping; in fact, in many sectors, there has been a shortage of labour, especially skilled labour, rather than in the unskilled grades to which in the recent past more women, as well as immigrant men, have been recruited. However, as both the report and other studies have made clear, sheer prejudice prevents employers taking on qualified and able women, or investing in their training. With increasing world competition, this is clearly not in the long-term interests of British cap-



italism. In addition, middle-class women, including those who affect to despise 'women's lib', have become frustrated at the lack of opportunity for them to use their education and talents. These women are an important part of the Tories traditional electoral base, but even this part is losing faith as prices rise and the Government show itself unable to deal with the problems facing it; By introducing legislation which does away with discriminatory job advertising and other minor reforms, the Government hopes to deal with both these questions: at a stroke heading off disaffection and improving the level of lower management, etc.

The way in which the proposed legislation will effect working-class women is less than beneficial. Although superficial-

ly it gives women working on the shop-floor, etc, the same opportunities for training, promotion, etc. as men, the way in which women will be required to take up cases of discrimination will be through resort to the National Industrial Relations Court.

This is, as it is intended to be, a highly divisive proposal. It is true that men have blocked, even more violently than they have blocked proposals for equal pay, the idea of women being allowed to do exactly the same jobs as themselves. This male chauvinism within the working-class must be fought. The way to fight it is by women organising themselves to struggle for their demands, and to get the men to take up those demands as part of the fight for class unity. The intention of the proposed Bill is that, on

the one hand, women will fight discrimination as individuals, and on the other, that they will use as a means, the hated class instrument of the NIRC. Both men and women must understand

the nature of this proposal, and realise the importance of struggling in a united, class way against women's oppression at every level. We should, however, be quite clear that, however much we may condemn women who go to the NIRC to combat discrimination, *where that discrimination originates with their male fellow-workers, it is with the latter that the major responsibility lies.* Where the discrimination originates with the employer, then the women must be able to rely on the strength of their unions, otherwise the male-dominated unions will in effect be lining-up with the employers on this question, as they have done too often in the past.

Of course, there is a material, historical basis for male chauvinism. But shutting our eyes to its manifestations, or chanting 'Men and women, unite', when they only too often will not, or saying that the poor dears can't help it and they will get over it after the revolution - all these non-tactics only ensure the continuation of what is a cancer within the working-class.

Of course, the proposals are weak or worse than useless in many other respects, e.g. on education, but it is in proposing legislation such as the above that the real dangers of the bill can be seen.

The way to fight such proposals is for women - together with men - to start a massive struggle for both equal pay and opportunity; to demand training facilities, better pension rights and all the rest. This will also involve a struggle within the union in many cases.

In fighting for their demands, women will not be 'splitting' the class: far from it. By fighting Tory policy, women will be giving a lead. They have just as vital a part to play in defeating the Government as the men and they should realise that, whilst such struggles as those in which the miners and the other big battalions are engaged are obviously key to defeating the Government, they should not allow this to be used as an excuse to put off yet again the fight for those things which women consider important. In 'Salt of the Earth' the women's insistence that their demands for decent homes, with running water etc, were not a diversion, but led to a *strengthening* of the struggle, proved to be correct.

The fight for women's liberation is no luxury - it is an intrinsic part of the class struggle

Leonora Lloyd

1. *Equal Pay*. First Report on the Implementation of the Equal Pay Act, 1970. Office of Manpower Economics, HMSO, 1972. 90p

REVIEWS REVIEWS.....

Sheila Rowbotham's work deserves particular attention in revolutionary circles because her books and pamphlets represent the most serious and sustained attempt by anyone on the British left to place the struggle of women in the context of the working-class struggle. In this book, after a very cursory account of 17th and 18th century ideas on the position of women, she surveys the specifically British historical experience of the entry of women into large-scale production and the effect this had on the early trade unions and the various political organizations of the working-class. Thus her book opens essentially with the early decades of the 19th century and draws to a close towards the end of the 1930's.

Initially, workers' organizations were for the most part divided along sexual lines - a fact due as much to the fragmented structures of the early trade union movement and men's unwillingness to take up women workers' demands, as to the prevailing sexual morality of the times. But the fact that women organized signalled a new era of female independence brought about by the industrial revolution. New ideas on marriage and sexuality started circulating among both the enlightened intelligentsia and the working-class. Political and theoretical discussion that connected female emancipation and socialist aims began to appear in the literature produced by various radical and socialist circles, albeit in a scattered, unsystematic and often contradictory way. But although the economic transformation brought to women the independence of wage labour and the experience of organized revolt, it also brought untold hardship and misery to mothers and young children. Towards the second part of the 19th century, there was increasing intervention by the bourgeois state in regulating industry's demand for female labour, in order to safeguard precisely the general capitalist need for a relatively healthy and stable labour force. But female labour was kept both cheap



and expendable, dependent on the fluctuations of capitalist demand (serving an analogous function, as an industrial army, to that of Irish labour over the past century and immigrant labour in general in the post-war period).

Sheila Rowbotham's evocation of the Suffragette movement helps to counter the the widely-held views, on the revolutionary left, which dismiss the struggle for the vote as a typical reformist experience. It is quite clear that this movement was neither confined to the bourgeoisie, nor to the issue of the vote, and that it provided an opportunity to put forward and organize around a whole series of issues related to women's oppression under capitalism. However, a systematic interrelation between the struggle for women's equality and socialism was not forthcoming, either at a theoretical or organizational level, and the location of this failure is, no doubt, to be found in the absence of revolutionary traditions in the British working-class, and the failure of marxism to gain any mass implantation in this country.

The First World War clearly marked a break in many ways for the Brit-

ish working-class in general, and women in particular. First of all, it drew a clear dividing line between the bourgeois and proletarian feminists, with the former enthusiastically supporting the war effort, and the latter taking an internationalist position and subsequently joining the newly-formed C.P.

Secondly there was the trend to dissolve separate unions for men and women. Thirdly there was a general breakdown in the sexual division of labour, due to the absence of men. This resulted in an unprecedented upsurge of confidence among women. Fourthly, there was a partial - though temporary - attempt to release women from some of their commitments in the home, through the opening of creches and public canteens: i.e. the first appearance in an embryonic form of the future welfare state. Further, the success of the workers' revolution in Russia signalled new possibilities for the working-class and new methods of struggle. It is only against this general background of women's confidence and militancy that one can understand the tenor of reaction after the successful (for the bourgeoisie) conclusion to the war, as well as the specificity of bourgeois tactics vis-a-vis women. After the war, women were pushed out of production en masse, in order to accommodate men returning from the front: this development corresponded both to the bourgeoisie's basic conception of social organization in 'normal times' (women at home, men at work), and to its fear of tens of thousands of unemployed soldiers roaming through London and the provinces. In return women were granted the vote. When mass unemployment really hit the



working-class in the 20's, it was particularly hard on women as it cut down even further the few jobs available to them. And yet there was little unity in action of unemployed men and women. Later, in the 30's, the struggle for women's emancipation was dominated by the questions of birth control and the welfare state, and by the Labour Party's parliamentary strategy.

Those who have read with great interest cde Rowbotham's 'Women, Resistance and Revolution' will find this book rather disappointing. Firstly, because her project of writing the history of women's struggles has no clear and explicit theoretical foundation, so that history appears as a collage of events and impressions. Secondly, because she tries to write about history ignoring political differences and positions, whereas it is essential to spell out the distinctions between struggles organized respectively through T.U.'s and through political parties, struggles led by 2nd and 3rd International forces etc. Without these theoretical and political co-ordinates, her historical approach remains fir-

mly within the non-marxist, popular tradition of British historiography, (whose most eminent exponent is Edward Thompson). However, there is a fundamental difference between Thompson and Rowbotham, in that the latter is a militant and her work is very much bound up with her political activity and experience in the WLM. This makes the reader's expectations much higher in her case, and the deficiencies of the book all the more disappointing.

Today, amidst an unprecedented crisis of world capitalism, as we are witnessing the beginnings of a radical transformation of the traditional landscape of British class politics, with a head-on collision between the two classes inscribed in the dynamic of the present struggles, it is hardly inspiring (to say the least) to be told merely that 'the action of people who are opposed to both patriarchy and wage labour will therefore be crucial.' For what is in fact the crucial is to determine which actions have the potential of bringing down the bourgeois order and to organize for these. This demands far more rigorous political discussion than is deemed necessary by 'Hidden from History.' Michele Lee



A REVIEW OF SHEILA ROWBOTHAM'S 'HIDDEN FROM HISTORY': Pluto press; £3.30/£1.50/paperback.

In a period of extensive social crisis we expect to find not only confusion and conflict over a whole range of social relationships, but also a growing polarisation between traditional and reactionary forces defending the existing society, and those progressive and revolutionary forces struggling, in varying degrees, to challenge that society. The women's liberation and the gay liberation movements have been significant indicators of the crisis in sexual relations, the family, bourgeois morality and authority, arising in the context of late capitalist societies. The reactionary response has emerged more clearly recently; Midge Decter is one of its spokeswomen.

Her arguments against women's liberation are arguments on behalf of that small section of relatively privileged, well-educated and articulate women (of whom she is one) who have found in the conditions of post-war capitalism more room for self-development and achievement than was available to their mothers and grandmothers. Whatever the 'forthright', 'humane' and 'unorth-

MIDGE DECTER'S DEFENCE OF THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN IN CAPITALIST SOCIETIES



odox' gloss (by which the cover of the book characterises Midge Decter's approach) this book argues in favour and in justification of the existing order of society, and of the existing position of women within that order.

Midge Decter agrees that women face a new predicament in society today, but that women's liberation has lied about the nature of that predicament (p.52); Midge Decter will tell us the

truth (see p.52, 80, 124, etc). The truth (according to Midge Decter) is that women now have too vast a range of choices, too few restrictions surrounding them. Thus woman has the freedom (denied to most men) to take paid employment or not to do so; at the same time the status of her work in the home has increased: 'housework has become a profession in disguise' (p.42); she has more freedom to develop her sexuality ('as sexual subject par excellence' - p.83). She chooses to marry because 'marriage is an institution maintained and protected by women, for the sake and at the behest of women, and in accordance with their deepest wishes' (p.124). Advances in contraception have made maternity something which a woman ('in collaboration with her husband') chooses, and has thus acquired 'the qualities of an elected vocation' (p.171). The true situation of women is of an immense range of choices and possibilities which have not yet been fully grasped. Midge Decter accuses women's liberation of 'an angry denial' of this, even a denial of 'womanliness' itself.

On the one hand she tries to ridicule women's liberation as a childish attempt to cling to a world of no responsibilities, on the other she hints of the disasters with which it threatens the human race.

FREEDOM AND CHOICE - FOR WHOM?

How real, and for how many women, are these choices about which Midge Decter writes? Only a few women are in a position to 'choose' at the lofty level of moral beliefs or personal desires, whether or not to work. Rather it is a question to be determined according to the availability of work, pressures on the family standard of living, the possibilities of making arrangements for children, etc. (Presumably Midge Decter also thinks that women 'choose' to work twilight shifts, 'choose' to get less pay than men, 'choose' to do two jobs - the paid and the unpaid - because they have already made some prior choice to be less committed to paid employment than men?)

Or, to take another of her examples: for most women the availability of contraceptives, contraceptive advice and abortion facilities, on the one hand, and secure and adequate incomes, decent houses, etc. on the other, is by no means assured. So to speak of maternity as a real area of choice is meaningless for most women in spite of the tremendous importance of the technical advances in birth control methods. As the book proceeds - quite inevitably - the realm of choice narrows to the freedom for only one choice - to be housewife, wife, mother, to be dependent within the structure of the family; a 'choice' which is supposed to be made palatable by the new mystique which Midge Decter has tried to weave around it. (This narrowing of choice reveals freedom for what it is in a capitalist society - the 'freedom' of workers to sell their labour power, the 'additional freedom' of women to work in the private sphere of the family.)

NEW CHASTITY OR NEW SEXUALITY?

Midge Decter's reactionary views are at their most explicit when she discusses sexuality: she is unable to recognise women's sexuality as an active capacity; she simply rejects clitoral orgasms and gay relationships as sexual objectification, and confines women's sexual fulfilment to the 'freedom' to submit, to 'choose to be chosen', to be defined by the demands of her partner. According to Midge Decter women who reject or struggle against sexual subordination and women who are proud to be gay are trying to capture some childish state which she calls 'the new chastity'; thus she consistently mis-reads the attempts which we are making to re-



Woman's place is
in the home...
Woman's place is in
the

Posy

HER MASTER'S VOICE

define and assess female sexuality. Perhaps Midge Decter is trying to seek out an achilles heel in the women's movement? (like a psychiatrist writing to the Observer recently who appeared to believe that once he had attached the label 'loud-mouthed lesbians' to women's liberation, all the arguments for women's liberation were totally devalued.) The women's movement is less vulnerable now⁽¹⁾ (than in the period before gay liberation developed) to 'attacks' of this kind. But we are still only just beginning to confront the tasks of developing concepts of sexuality which break with bourgeois morality and with female subordination, and have not always been effective in explaining why this is important.⁽²⁾

REFORM OR REVOLUTION?

Midge Decter's most fundamental objection to women's liberation is that it involves a necessity to challenge the entire structure of capitalist society: 'The new liberators of women (in contrast to the reformers like Betty Frieden) give no evidence of a feeling of obligation to alter themselves. Their view of changing the present conditions of women involves instead an alteration in all the present arrangements of society...They do not desire power for themselves but rather society in which no one has power.' (p.55)

Though Midge Decter's picture of the women's liberation movement as some tightly homogenous organisation represented by such media selected personalities as Germaine Greer is wildly inaccurate, though she doesn't try to fully grasp many of the arguments, she does recognise the crisis in social relationships which is affecting

women today, and the challenge to the existing social order which women's liberation implies. Her response to this is a defence of the oppression of women, and a plea to women to be pleased with their station because in some mysterious way that have 'chosen' it. This is no more than the re-statement of an old idea. The fact that it is being restated at the present time (and not only by Midge Decter) is in part recognition of the impact that the women's liberation movement has made in western societies. But we should not be complacent about this; for these reactionary views are finding new articulators in the context of other reactionary mobilisations in society (the SPUC anti-abortion mobilisations, the festival of light, etc.) and at a time of very generalised social crisis and class confrontation. We have to confront these ideas and use our arguments against them to strengthen our own positions in the struggle for women's liberation.

MARGARET COULSON

Notes:

(1) For a discussion of the impact of gay liberation on the American women's movement see: Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love, *SAPPHO WAS A RIGHT WOMAN*, Stein and Day, 1973.

(2) Kollontai begins to consider the importance of this in *SEXUAL RELATIONS AND CLASS STRUGGLE*.

A Review of 'The New Chastity and Other Arguments Against Women's Liberation', by Midge Decter. Published by Wildwood House, 1973

Sheila Rowbotham has been publishing at a prolific rate over the last year. She has produced 'Hidden from History', 'Women, Resistance and Revolution', as well as this one, the only one so far published at a price most people can afford.

This is fortunate, because it is a valuable contribution to the current debate in the women's movement and one of the few comprehensive attempts at a Marxist analysis of the position of women in capitalist society today. Thus, it is a book that should be read.

Her central aim is to understand the formation of women's consciousness in a world which is dominated by men, in language, culture, social organisation and production. Despite this overall aim, the division of the book into two separate parts is a product of two different approaches to the problem. In the first part she attempts to understand the formation of women's consciousness primarily in relation to her own experiences during the 1960's, whereas in the second part she takes a much broader perspective and looks at the nature of 'female production' within capitalism and the part which the sexual division of labour and the family plays in maintaining commodity production.

This division tends to blur the important and correct point which she makes as a Marxist, in the introduction - that the formation of women's consciousness cannot be seen or understood as a simple inversion of the masculine world, nor as an entity in itself, but only as a response to the contradictions which capitalism has developed between 'family and industry, private and public, personal and impersonal.' As I will attempt to show, her method of approach in the first section does not correspond to this position and has important consequences in relation to the pressing problems of organisation which the essentially correct second section poses.

In attempting to adopt a framework which examines 'the way society communicates to the individual' with her own experiences as the subject matter, it is impossible to encompass the wider context of capitalist social relations of which they are a part. While trying to describe the main factors which blocked the emergence of a revolutionary feminism she adopts the concept of 'male cultural hegemony'. This is seen as one of the major brakes on the political development of women; their ability to perceive their own oppression and to actually manage to translate this into speech, since



even language and its meaning has been created by men. Neither is the revolutionary left immune to this hegemony. It has practised a stilted marxism which saw the women's question as diversionary; and this overt sexism drove many women away from the Left and into the women's liberation movement. The main problem is not that her observations are untrue but that 'male cultural hegemony' assumes an importance almost in itself without enough examination of its connection to capitalist social relations. This raises the dangerous possibility of the essential division emerging on the basis of sex rather than class.

The second section, however, firmly situates the analysis of women's position in society within capitalist social relations, and it is precisely the contradictory nature of this which she sees as having created the possibility of women's consciousness breaking through.

To put it briefly she argues that the sexual division of labour in capitalism is based for a woman on 'female production', in the home, of immediate use values and, for the man commodity production. AS a result the relationship of men and women to production is different. Production in the family is subordinate to the production of commodities, and as such the family cannot initiate change but is dependent on changes in the social relations of society as a whole. However, this balance in the division of labour is undermined, both by the needs of capitalism to involve women in commodity

production (women's cheap labour is an alternative to investment in machinery), and the increasing penetration of commodities into the home. This means that on the one hand capitalism needs the labour of women in industry, and on the other it requires them to carry out the traditional role of housewife. Meanwhile this increasing penetration of commodities into the home undermines her role as the producer of use value.

These contradictory developments have resulted in women moving towards a new female consciousness, and more importantly in terms of strategy, working-class women are at the apex of all these contradictions and their movement into action is seen as key to the emergence of socialist feminism. Their position compels them 'to develop both sisterhood and solidarity or be crushed. They need each other, they need the support of male workers, and their fight at work connects immediately to their situation at home. Their organization and militancy is vital not only for women's liberation but for the whole socialist and working-class movement. (p.124).

The question of organization is therefore posed very sharply. What orientation should be taken towards working-class women? How is the support of male workers to be gained and what is the relationship to the revolutionary left? Unfortunately the book ends on the horns of a dilemma: the necessary movement towards the working-class and the revolutionary left is combined with a reaction to their male domination. This is a hangover from the first part of the book which tends to see the over-riding divisions in society in terms of sex rather than class. This is not to say that there is no problem of male chauvinism in revolutionary organizations. As she has pointed out, it is partly their failure to recognise the connection between women's oppression and the class nature of society, which has held back the development of a marxist analysis. However to expect the left to be free of male

chauvinism is to disregard its material roots in capitalist society. If capitalism is to be overthrown in its entirety, not just at the economic level, it is essential that we wage a continuous struggle within the left to recognise the importance of the women's struggle to carry out this task. We will never achieve this if we insist on the autonomy of the women's movement from the class struggle.

The importance of 'Woman's Consciousness, Man's World' is precisely that it has raised the level of debate to that of organization. LIZ HARDY

'This album is dedicated to the sisters who died in pain and sorrow, and those who are now in prisons and in mental hospitals for being unable to survive in the male society.'

In the cover-notes, she interprets and echoes the title: the space between people, the space all around her, which keeps her apart from others. We live in a society, a whole culture, where others are automatically strangers, different from and alien to ourselves. But despite this, Yoko Ono can still see the world in terms of there being some overall pattern to life and to human interaction, and she therefore retains an immense faith in human beings, and in their power to change the world. This also explains her reference, at the end of the cover-notes, to a belief in some kind of immortality.

There are twelve songs on the album, all written produced and sung by Yoko. Her voice is very westernised now, and 'in tune' by our standards, and she has written some very lyrical songs, as well as more obvious rock and roll numbers.

Broadly speaking, the songs fall into three main spheres of reference, and then end up with a 'joke' song - a parody. Since I have not the space to talk about all the songs, I will look at those which I feel are the most significant.

The first group are those songs which seem the most 'personal', dealing with her own pain, and intensity of experience, trying to survive in society.

The second group deal with the experiences of other women, of women in general. There is a simplicity and 'innocence' in the way Yoko talks about

the way Yoko writes about more general ideas, which can sometimes verge on the naive, though I don't use this word as any kind of insult. The simplicity of her ideas is consistent with her belief in pacifism, in humanity, in love, 'as forces in the world.

'Yellow girl' is about a girl who bastains from life, and lets external pressures control her destiny. 'Angry young woman', though it doesn't sound very angry, is the story of a woman who has left her husband and children. Yoko seems to feel that she will now find fulfillment, but for me the image of this woman is a lot more desolate. I do not share Yoko's faith in the 'new world' to which this woman is walking.

The third group of songs is more overtly political/cultural, though the ideas presented are more impressionistic than theorised. 'Growing pain', the first track on the album, is lovely to listen to, and its accent is on immortality and the continuous nature of life. This includes a lot of pain, but that too is part of the whole. 'Straight talk' is about how people say one thing and mean another. However, I see this problem as being a lot more complex, than it is posed in the song. It is true that honesty with yourself is a progressive move, but because

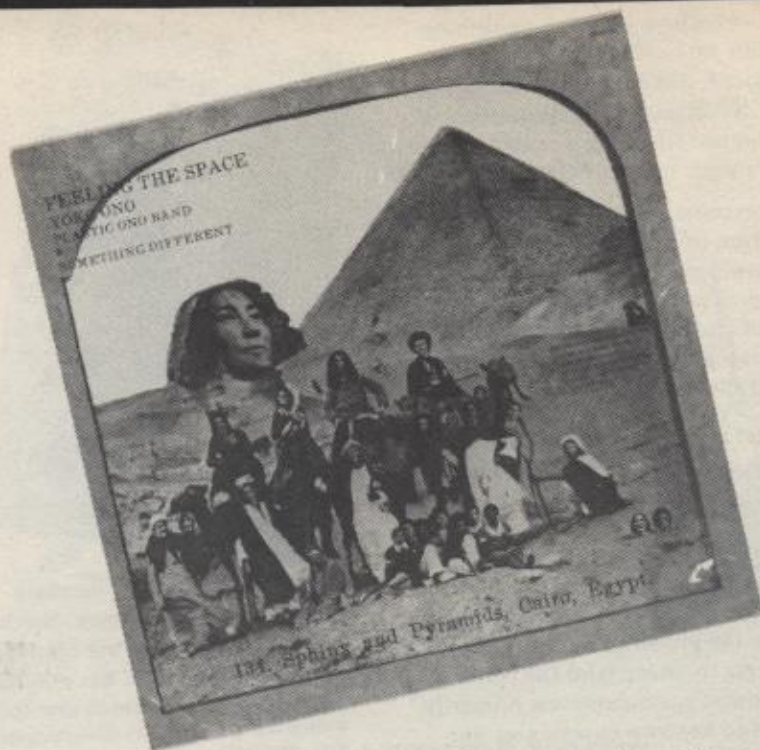
emotional reaction is so riddled with contradictions in our society it is not enough just to tell people to say what they think or feel. Often they don't know.

'Woman power' is the most overtly political song on the album. It should be seen in the context of Yoko's belief that 'only people can change the world.' She sees women in the vanguard of people, and of the new humanity. 'What we need is the power of trust,' she says she says, and this will come about through women and men who want to join them. The kind of revolution she anticipates is a non-violent one of the mind. This implies a certain political naivety, though consistent with her general political beliefs. However, she does recognise the profound need to change society very radically, and she also has a very acute understanding of women's oppression.

On the whole, I liked the album. Its overall flavour is that of women coming into their own now, and not being passive, or accepting male domination or male values. It asks questions, poses problems and gets people thinking. Let's hope they'll be more albums like this, and not just from Yoko Ono.

CARRIE SALZEDO

N.B. Cdes should also look at Yoko Ono's 'Approximately infinite universe,' a double L.P. I am not sure which of the two comes first chronologically, but both are available on Apple.



'Down among the women. What a place to be!' So starts this novel, and in it we explore the 'down' aspect of women's condition: The places to which their lives are relegated - the kitchen, the bedroom, the nursery, the park - and the level of experience at which they are supposed to exist - the home, the children, their relationship with men.

For, in the contest of our society, women have to see themselves, and their fulfillment as human beings, in terms of men. Their identity is in how they relate to a man. And yet they are separate, autonomous people, even if they do not acknowledge this. Thus there is a cleft, in the internal emotional life, between external pressures and 'personal' feelings, which creates a whole atmosphere of contradictions. This atmosphere permeates things 'down among the women'.

Down here they are struggling, though not always consciously, and never collectively. They have to struggle against various economic and social pressures - they have to survive. And yet, any changes that occur are uneven. One individual changes when another seems to be standing still, and so no real understanding is achieved between them. And in the end, they all aim to make it with men, so how could they turn to each other for any understanding? Their lives take place in the same areas as other women's lives, they spend most of their lives with other women, and yet they remain isolated from each other; men's presence, as symbol and instrument of their oppression, is always felt, coming between them, keeping them apart. We are definitely 'down among the women'.

It is 1950. Scarlet lives with her mother Wanda, an ex-Communist Party member, who long ago gave up trying to be what society expected of a woman, but never had a chance to carry it through. She will always remain 'down', though her spirit is not broken. What difference do your ideas make when faced with the reality of poverty? Wanda had to bring up her daughter, without depending on a man. The sacrifice entailed in making that choice has shaped her life.

Now her daughter, Scarlet, is 20, unmarried, pregnant. 'Scarlet... has a blank where a future ought to be. The birth of her baby is a wall she hesitates to look over. She does not believe that because she is having a baby, she is going to go on having a baby. That it will presently get up and walk away, and look back and jeer, having turned into another person, has not occurred to her.'

But life goes on: she has the baby;



she calls her Byzantia; she lives in poverty and constant worry. 'Wanda had the same concerns years and years ago. They bore her now. She looks at her spotty and apathetic daughter, and laments the waste of her own youth, spent nurturing a child who has grown up no better than she'.

The story also follows the lives of Scarlet's friends from University: Sylvia, Jocelyn, Helen and Audrey. They are more or less friendly throughout the novel. They all go through ups and downs and, except for Helen, they rise again. And yet, in eventually settling 'happily' with a man, there is a hint of acknowledged frustration and emptiness in their lives.

Jocelyn, who turns out to be the 'narrator', sees some giggling young girls in the park. One is going to be married soon. Jocelyn remarks to herself: 'The tower block where I live is full of women who were once girls like this, now off to Bingo, desperate, with their children left locked up; pale, worried and aging badly.'

The 'happiness' and 'fulfillment' which they sought was an illusion. They have achieved a kind of security; they are dependent economically on their men; they are 'looked after'. The effect of this on any possible spirit of independence is obvious. But their choice in life is made and they live through it. They keep the same values, even when partially recognising the limitations these values impose on every one concerned. For Scarlet's generation, you've done all right with men, or you haven't done all right.

Helen was destroyed by these values. She had been involved in a triangle with a married couple. It had dragged on a long time. Then the wife killed herself and her baby. Now she sometimes haunts her old friends, in their moments

of weakness, when the contradictions seem to have the upper hand.

Only Byzantia has the chance of breaking out of the old attitudes, of seeing herself differently. And yet the hope for her is abstract. Each generation hopes that the next one will make up for its failures. How much freedom of choice does Byzantia have? More than her mother, but still she too is constrained. No one can be liberated in an unfree world. She says to Scarlet at the end of the book, when she is now 20, 'You amaze me... Fancy seeing success in terms of men. How trivial with the world in the state it's in'. She is determined not to catch this 'disease'.

And so we are left to make up our own story for Byzantia, and for ourselves. Finally the novel steps outside of the limits of 'women's place' into more unknown territory. Up until the end, it has been narrated by Jocelyn, sitting on a park bench, in the afternoon, watching her children play. When she moves beyond the confines of the park, and speaks more generally, a whole new attitude towards women and their 'place' is suggested. The potentiality for no where and everywhere to be a 'woman's place' is released, and at this point the novel becomes not just a story of women, but of humanity in an area of human experience often neglected, ignored, dismissed. Herein lies its strength as a work of literature - its portrayal of the warmth of human feeling, even in degradation, poverty and oppression. And its portrayal of these with a spontaneous humour, which enhances the sense of reality of the people it describes. There are no illusions about the characters - they don't represent 'womanhood', or symbolise anything. They're people, with strengths and weaknesses like everyone else.

And though Fay Weldon is not trying to convey any overt 'message' - political, cultural, social, or whatever - nor trying to justify, explain or excuse, her novel is an affirmation both of life, and of the need to change, to question, to struggle, on an individual level, and, from there, on a general level.

The end of the novel is open; each reader could see it in terms of their own vision of liberation, and of the best way of achieving this. I think this was the author's intention. It is enough that she has posed some of the important questions, concerning women's oppression, and how people survive in spite of, and in terms of it. It is a very human work.

CARRIE SALZEDO

VIVE LA LIBERATION DES FEMMES!

Extract from the Manifesto of the Ligue Communiste;

translated by G. Harney.
For the liberation of women'

Women were traditionally under-rated and reduced to slavery in the old 'civilisation' of the West. Far from breaking with this tradition, capitalism gave it new strength with economic and ideological justifications, such that the emancipation of women is not conceivable without the destruction of the capitalist social order.

At the economic level, capitalist society is incapable of providing the social services necessary to sustain the labour force, and therefore uses women as unpaid domestic servants who donate between 30 and 70 hours of free labour every week looking after their husbands and children.

It is easy to understand why the bourgeoisie is so full of praises for traditional family life! The existence and strength of the family unit allows them to continuously make savings as far as the value represented by the domestic labour of women is concerned.

At the social level, women find themselves essentially assigned the role of reproducing the species. By virtue of this, they are confined to the role of social preservation, both in the family and in society as a whole.

At the ideological level, the 'second' sex is presented as a luxury object in the shop windows of the consumer society; a commodity bought and sold like everything else.

Thus in their everyday life, women endure double oppression: what capitalism as a whole imposes on them as workers, as well as what they have to put up with from the so-called stronger sex. This double oppression manifests itself in a persistent and scandalous way in the distinction made between 'women's work' and work done by men: where everything else is equal, the vast majority of women receive a wage 30% less than that of men; and in addition, the conditions for training, employment, dismissal, in fact the conditions of work in general, are tougher for women. The pretexts given for this discrimination against women - absenteeism, the necessity for maternity leave, - are a crude revelation of the role of women as supplementary labour power: a reserve army of labour. The bosses see them fitting very nicely into this role. To the extent that the exploitation of women in the work-place and their exploitation in the home are complementary, it is obvious that the emancipation of women requires the abolition of this double exploitation. That is to say that it requires the total destruction of the social system which gives rise to it - not a mere rearrangement of the system.

This is what those hardened reformists of the French Communist Party simply refuse to recognise when they speak of 'harmoniously' reconciling the functions of being a mother and being a worker, and expect as a result of this happy reconciliation a revival of the traditional family which even the bourgeoisie doesn't dare

to hope for.

We think that in a society which has abolished the class domination of the bourgeoisie, the economic functions of the family will wither away as the domestic services, the provision of food, and the bringing up of children, are taken in hand by the community. In this way, women will be able to play the full role which is theirs by right in social and political life. The family as a group of individuals will also lose its authoritarian and repressive function of adapting children to fit in with the society, and will become a simple emotional community whose evolution it is impossible for us to predict. Whilst we are aware that the above represents the only real solutions for the emancipation of women, nevertheless here and now we must take up the struggle for the following:

- For the recognition of the social function of motherhood, and for its burdens to be borne collectively through the socialisation of domestic work: public services (restaurants, laundries, etc.), which are both free and of high quality.

for the abolition of all the penalties which a working mother has to endure: we need creches open 24 hours a day, including for children with mild illnesses.

- for women to have access to work in conditions of real equality: abolition of all discrimination in relation to access to, or subject matter of, professional training! Equal training for all! Equal pay for equal work!

for women to be able to live out their sexuality, not just in its reproductive function, but in the pursuit and practice of pleasure. The necessary (though in themselves insufficient) preconditions for this are: centres of information and for distribution of contraceptives in work-places, schools, colleges and universities, which should be open to minors as well! Free abortion on demand, including for minors!

because the marriage set-up sanctified by the bourgeoisie constitutes a means of judicial and moral constraint on one's way of life, as well as a means of general social discrimination (social advantages reserved for legally married couples), we demand that divorce by mutual consent be reduced to a free administrative formality.

The emancipation of women is not just a concern of half of humanity but of all of it. Thus children must be able to live for themselves, and not as objects of vocation, consolation or compensation for their parents; their mothers, frustrated and excluded from social life, reproduce in their children the same loss of dignity which society inflicts on them. In no circumstances is it possible to limit the question of women's liberation to a democratic demand compatible with the continued existence of capitalism. It is indissolubly bound up with the destruction of class society. The role played by women in the great revolutionary movements of the past, shows how the shaking of the status quo serves to raise their hopes. They were on the streets in 1793, on the barricades of the Commune, and they were in on the beginning of the Russian revolution of 1917, which started with a demonstration by women, and today they are in the trenches of Indochina; tomorrow women will prove the most resolute of the gravediggers of a system which reduces them to the slaves of the slaves of the masters of capital.



IRELAND & WHAT'S ON

The Women's Vigil: Led by the Irish Women's Group, several vigils have been held outside Brixton Prison by supporters of the Irish Political Hostages Campaign; in particular, they are protesting against the forcible feeding of the Price sisters,

Echoes of the suffragettes..... Claire Price visited her sisters Dolours and Marion last Saturday 19 January. She told the *Irish Times* that Dolours 'seemed to be dragging her feet.... and like Marion, her skin was like wax. The girls' eyes were black looking and there were sores around their mouths because of the force-feeding.' They are still suffering severe chest and stomach pains.

The struggle to end the torture of force-feeding and get the prisoners returned to the North of Ireland, is gaining momentum..... On the 19th, the IPHC had staged a dramatic demonstration outside Wormwood Scrubs, challenging the Governor to show his faith in Home Office pronouncements about the beneficial effects of force-feeding by submitting to it himself.

Naturally there was no response, so three volunteers were force-fed under medical supervision. All three vomited before the force-feeding tube had even got to the back of their throats, and one of them, an elderly man, had to be taken to hospital where he was kept overnight suffering from shock.

From Bob Purdie's Report in Red Weekly, 25 Jan.



Dolours and Marion.

Women on Ireland Collective. Kingsgate
Womens centre NW6 435 2057

Friday 8th Feb.-Sunday 10th Feb. 8pm
Womens hunger strike outside Brixton Prison
Sunday 24th Feb. 5pm

Women and the Irish struggle
speaker Mairin Deburca

Republican from Dublin. Member of Irish
Womens Liberation.

Coop Hall Sevensisters Road N7

I.P.H.C. Maureen Mcquire, 88 Roslyn Rd ,N8.
800 9392

WOMEN & SOCIALISM: NEXT CONFERENCE

This will be on The Campaigns of the Women's Movement.

Place: South Oxford Primary School, St. Aldates, Oxford

Time: March 23/24, 10.00 am each day, ends 4.00pm Sun

Agenda: Sat. Workshops on 4 campaigns, plenary report

back. Sun. theoretical basis, future campaigns

Details from Alison, Helen or Lucy at 2B Kingston Road,

Oxford, or phone Jane or Jill at Oxford (0865) 46314.

Creche & floor to sleep on. £1 registration. Papers

welcome.

COVENTRY CONFERENCE

Subject: Structure & Organisation in the Womens Movement

Date: Saturday April 20

Place: University of Warwick, Coventry

Agenda: Includes discussion of 'The Tyranny of Structureless-
ness' - further papers & notes from groups welcome.

Registration: 25p. (payable to Coventry Women's Group)

Details: write to 28 Keswick Walk, Wyken, Coventry.

Phone Walsgrave 7365

Accommodation: very limited.

There will be a creche.

LONDON SOCIALIST WOMAN FORUMS

These are held monthly. Next one: showing of
Salt of the Earth, a film made in 1953 by the American
Mineworkers Union, telling the story of the part played
by the women in a strike. The 'actors' are the actual
participants. Feb. 13, ULU, Malet Stree, 7.30 pm
For details of future forums, write to us at 97 Caledonian
Road, N.1

Feb. 8, 8.00pm General Picton, Caledonian Road (nr.
Kings X). Planning meeting for Conference on Women
Against the Tories. This conference was scheduled for
Feb. 17 at ULU, but as we cannot now have ULU either
the date, place or both will have to be changed; come to
planning meeting and/or write for details.

BOOKS ON THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

HIDDEN FROM HISTORY: 300 Year of Women's Oppression & the Fight Against it.
SHEILA ROWBOTHAM
£1.50 plus 15p post & packing

THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN: The Rise & Decline of the Women's Movement in German Social Democracy 1863-1933
By Werner Thonnessen. £1.50 plus 15p post & packing

SPECIAL OFFER: The two books together: post free

Pamphlets on the Women's & Gay Movement

GLF Manifesto: 10p + 5p p&p; Psychiatry & the Homosexual: 15p + 5p p&p; The Politics of Homosexuality (Milligan): 20p + 5p p&p; A Woman's Work is Never Done: 5p + 3p p&p

Pamphlets by Alexandra Kollantai
Communism & the Family: 15p + 5p p&p
Sexual Relations & the Class Struggle/Love & the New Morality: 15p + 5p p&p
Women Workers Struggle for Their Rights: 16p + 5p p&p
All three titles by Kollantai: 50p including postage

All from RED BOOKS, 24 Boundary Road, NW8.
Tel: 01-624 4504

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WOMEN WORKERS IN BRITAIN: A HANDBOOK
Printed in Nov. 1972, most of the facts and figures in this useful pamphlet are still relevant. Used as a textbook in several sociology courses. Available from Red Books or 21 Highview Court, College Road, Harrow Weald, Middlesex. Now available at the special price of 15p. 10% reduction on bulk orders.

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Our new pamphlet will be available in the near future. Order your copies now. 13p, incl. p&p. Bulk orders (10 or more) at 8p post-free

This publication is on file at the International Women's History Archive, 2325 Oak Street, Berkeley, Calif. 94708, and is

available on microfilm through Bell & Howard Warriner

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This applies to all our publications, posters, etc.

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

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Socialist Woman is now planned to appear four times a year. Subscriptions will still be for six issues.

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Please note: 'International Woman's Day' by Alexandra Kollantai is temporarily out of print and will be available again shortly. All orders will be filled as soon as possible.

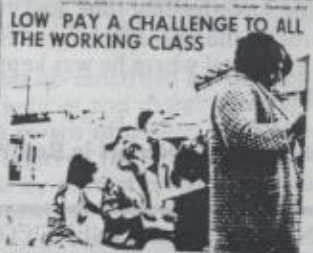
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