

# Socialist Woman

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*unskilled  
untrained*  
**UNWANTED ?**

**HOW  
TECHNICAL  
EDUCATION  
FACILITIES  
DON'T EXTEND  
TO WOMEN**

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**\* SISTER VEAL**

**\* EQUAL PAY**

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## NEXT STEPS FOR EQUAL PAY CAMPAIGN

Antonia Gorton

Barbara Castle's got it - we want it! **EQUAL PAY NOW!** The Equal Pay demonstration in May was the first national women's demonstration in Britain for nearly 30 years. Although the numbers were not great, it was extremely militant and enthusiastic. Among the unions represented were USDAW, SOGAT, AEU, T.G.W.U., Tobacco Workers, various Trades Councils. Socialist Woman bore their tremendous orange and yellow banner through some of the worst weather in weeks. Nearly 2,000 working class women stood for over 2 hours in cold blowing rain to listen to women trade unionists, MP's and a few left wing men speakers. The significant part was the numbers of factory delegations of busloads of women.

The National Joint Action Campaign for Women's Equal Rights, who organised the demonstration are now at an important stage in its development. On one hand there are those members who feel that the campaign should remain largely propagandistic with the occasional demonstration and meeting, but no real involvement in the actual efforts of women workers; on the other are those who feel that the campaign must make itself meaningful in these struggles.

Less than one-third of working women belong to Trade Unions, which is the most elementary level that workers must achieve in pursuance of their aims. Elsewhere, in this journal we give details of a ten-week old strike of women workers for union recognition, this type of struggle is taking place in other areas aside from actual strikes for Equal Pay, such as the Lucas lavatory cleaners. NJACWER can not stand aside from these efforts by women to advance themselves. The local groups must offer their support, from distributing leaflets, to helping man the picket lines, to publicising the cases to the labour movement. Nationally, NJACWER must immediately send representatives to any sections who become active, it must circulate its branches with collecting sheets and general information. Only if it keeps building a truly national movement with constant information about strikes, demo's, agreements of Equal Pay, etc. will a real relationship be built between women workers and the campaign.

NJACWER took a firm step in the direction of involvement in these struggles by voting money and support to the Ramsgate strikers, but its essential problems will not be solved until other organisational/political questions are worked out. Trade Unions and other organisations should be formally affiliated to the campaign; the General Committee should be a delegated body with constant entry for new representatives of organisations; the Executive or Working Committee should be broadly representative of the General Committee. A regular newsletter should be esta-

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blished.

If a conservative and routine approach becomes the main characteristic of NJACWER, it will join many other dead campaigns who approached their job with good will but insufficient political judgement. The aims of the campaign will only be achieved through the action of women workers: it is NJACWER's responsibility to encourage and support them.

SEPTEMBER 12 - EQUAL PAY DAY: plan a meeting, rally or demonstration.

LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE - NJACWER public meeting, Brighton, Oct. 2, 7.45 p.m.  
Lecture Theatre, speakers to be announced.

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### RAMSGATE WOMEN IN TENTH WEEK OF STRIKE

SOCIALIST WOMAN is distributing a collection sheet in aid of a 10 week old strike at Electronics Laboratories, a small factory on the Haine Industrial Estate in Ramsgate, Kent. East Kent has the second highest unemployment rate in the United Kingdom and this fact plus it being an agricultural area makes for very low wages. The workers at this factory organised themselves into the EETU/PTU (formerly ETU) to raise their weekly wage from £8.15s to the minimum of £10.15s for a 40-hour week in the engineering industry. Almost the whole production staff joined the union. On April 16th, the employers demanded that workers resign from the union or face the sack. A few men gave in, but 38 women and one man stuck firm (the majority of the production staff).

The strike has been official from the beginning and pickets have been organised (with some successes: some drivers have refused to cross the line). Demonstrations have been held in Ramsgate (supported by the local trade unions) and twice the strikers have come up to picket the parent company's headquarters; Brocks' Alarms, Holborn.

SOCIALIST WOMAN is pleased to assist these women workers in their fight for Trade Union recognition. We would be pleased to have a copy of resolutions passed by Trade Unions and Trades Councils in their support. Collecting sheets available from us and Mrs. F. Gay (Treasurer) 11 Riversdale Road, Ramsgate, Kent.

### LETTER FROM RAMSGATE WOMEN

Dear Sister, Many thanks for your letter and data received Tuesday of this week. We would like to thank you for distributing our collection sheets for us, as you are aware we can do with all the financial support we can get. We have been out since the 16th April fighting for Union recognition. The outcome at the present moment is we have achieved union recognition, but the terms offered to us by the management for the return to work are unacceptable. This is a rough copy of the proposals sent to us this morning after we met management yesterday.

1. Severance pay of £1 per week for every week you have worked there\*. 2. Short time working 16 hours only for union members and not the black legs inside. 3. If we return on short time we sign to say we agree to stay six months, if in that time three or more of us leave, the rest of the Union members will be made redundant. 4. Subject to the staff's approval inside!

As you can fully understand, we could not accept these proposals. Our negotiations are with the management not with the workers. Yours fraternally, Mrs. F. Gay (Treasurer) E.T.U. dispute Electronics Laboratories, Ramsgate, Kent.

\*There are probably implications of this which are not made clear in this letter.



At the General Committee meeting of the National Joint Action Campaign for Women's Equal Rights on July 5, £10 was voted to support these women. Also, F. Blake, Sec-Treas. was appointed to see the strikers and offer to give them NJACWER's assistance in their dispute.

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### WE NEED MONEY! YOUR MONEY!

SOCIALIST WOMAN has proven to be a much-needed journal. It is the only socialist journal which caters specifically for women during this "Year of the Militant Woman". It arms women with the facts and figures; the ideas; the actions which are necessary for our continued development and advancement.

Our circulation has increased so that it is imperative that we consider our cost and production problems with the journal as it stands now. We would like to establish the journal on a more professional and more frequent basis - this is impossible without a substantial subsidy. We hope that our readers, particularly our women readers will feel strongly enough to come through with some much needed financial support. Let us show how much we value the journal of women's liberation. WHAT PRICE FREEDOM? Donate now the cost of a new lipstick or the cost of a year's supply of the Pill or the price of the collected works of Simone de Beauvoir or you lucky girl - Barbara Castle's yearly income! DO IT NOW!

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### NEWS OF THE EQUAL PAY MOVEMENT

Read the 'History of the TUC: 1868-1968' shows pictures and actions of women workers, particularly interesting - match girls strike of 1888, who struck, won their case, organised their own union and during the same year assisted to secure endorsement of Equal Pay resolution in Congress.

Furniture workers at recent conference demanded that rate for journey-women be 85% of the man's pay. Mr. Tomkins, general secretary, said that success in achieving the increase would carry forward the union's struggle for complete equal pay.

The Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions called on its 20 member unions to use their industrial strength to ensure that women get equal pay for work of equal value. A motion was also passed urging unions to back members who act to see that women receive wages in keeping with their work. These unions represent over 3 million workers and are in the forefront of the fight against Government interference in collective bargaining.

The annual conference of NALGO, representing nearly 400,000 local government workers plumped heavily for equal pay. It ordered the executive council to impress the TUC with the need to introduce the equal pay principle in all fields. One speaker said that the days of pious resolutions were over. A growing militancy gripped the country and a vigorous campaign had become necessary.

Australia's highest industrial judges granted women an equal pay award, climaxing one of the most controversial cases in the nation's judicial history. The Federal Arbitration Commission decided that the country's 1,500,000 women workers should gain pay equality over a three-year period. Their wage scale will be increased in stages from 85% of the male rate on October 8 this year to 100% by January 1972. The Australian Council of Trade Unions led the long court battle against the employers.

An Equal Pay resolution was passed unanimously by the General & Municipal Workers.



## SOFTWARE AND SOFT HEADS? OR TAKING THE SEX OUT OF JOBS

by Elizabeth Orna

'I tried having male assistants at first...but it didn't work. They tend to be too independent: men like to have individuality. Women can become an extension of the boss. They don't mind working overtime, they are more loyal and they can take criticism better'. (Interview with Robert Maxwell, MP, The Times, 23 October 1968)

'Men today, as they have historically, provide the hardware for our society - the machines, the banking system, the technology - which makes America strong. Who then takes care of the software of society - the values, the faith, the sense of individual worth?' (Dr. G.E. Myers, President, Monticello College, Illinois)

These two fairly sickening quotations, from moderately eminent citizens on either side of the Atlantic, epitomise the jumble of assumptions about feminine qualities and roles that makes a nasty mess of much discussion about the education, training and employment of women - even among well-disposed persons who are anxious to improve the situation...

The status of female jobs corresponds to some very general ideas - probably medieval in derivation - about feminine character. Many men, and a good number of women, think of women as patient, loyal, dextrous, unadventurous, conforming, modest, unassertive. By some happy dispensation these are qualities appropriate to the low-level, often repetitive, intellectually undemanding and subordinate jobs in which women mainly work. This can make a very gratifying justification of what exists all about us. Women are in the kind of jobs they are because they have the qualities that fit them for those jobs, and such jobs are about the right limit for female employment. If the situation is seen in those terms, the only problem is to see that deficiencies in training for "women's jobs" are made good, and to give girls more compensatory, home- and family-oriented education, after which no doubt the men can get on with providing the hardware in their own inimitable way.

Viewing it in that light, however, looks remarkably like rationalising backwards from an existing situation until justification is found for leaving it that way - a long-favoured technique among those doing all right out of the status quo. I hope to show in this article that the existing situation is an unbalanced one, dangerous for the national economy and offering a fairly grim prospect for the female part of the population, especially the younger generations, and that it can only be improved by a radical change in attitudes - aided by legal changes and financial incentives and penalties - so that jobs become de-sexed and what counts in education training and employment is the full potential of each person as a human being.

Educational Bottleneck: Over the last few years we have been creating unperceived an educational bottleneck for girls. On one hand more and more of them have been encouraged to take GCE in a full range of subjects, including sciences as Table 1 shows. On the other hand there has been no corresponding effort to encourage them to use the full range of their school interests and success in further education or at work. Women university students make up 27% of the total and are mainly concentrated in arts and social science faculties. In the Further Education system there are (1966 figures) about 77,000 women on full time and sandwich courses to 125,000 men; while only 87,000 girls get day release compared with 537,000 boys. Within these overall figures, there is a heavy weighting of girls in the lower level courses, and they are almost totally absent from engineering and building, and only poorly represented in science and business studies (see Table 2). The jobs that girls and women do for the most part require little in the way of training and education, so there must be an increasing number, especially in the younger age range,



Table 1 (Source: Statistics of Education 1966)

	1956		1966	
	O	A	O	A
Maths				
boys	54,611	13,927	103,799	34,302
girls	22,808	1,846	50,369	6,470
Physics				
boys	20,076	12,677	43,324	24,426
girls	2,792	1,705	8,622	4,130
Chemistry				
boys	17,493	10,136	33,177	17,166
girls	3,910	1,828	10,457	4,416
Economics				
boys	2,398	2,593	13,683	13,930
girls	1,219	351	7,647	3,571
Social Sciences/ vocational subjects				
boys	4,608	9	20,273	4,854
girls	19,438	215	51,577	3,769

who are employed below their educational qualifications as well as below potential ability. The proportion of women in skilled, technician, supervisory and managerial jobs is actually declining... This shift towards less skilled work coincided with a big rise in the number of women at work - from 1950 to 1967 the number of women working rose from 7.3m to 8.9m/ by 1967 40% of women over fifteen were at work as against 36.5% in 1950... The standard official reply to those who draw attention to the bottleneck is to point blandly to the existence of equal opportunities in education and training. So Mr. Hattersley, Under Secretary for the DEP,

Table 2 (Source: Statistics of Education 1966)

Advanced courses	M	W	Non-Advanced courses	
			M	W
University first degrees			OND	
engineering/technology	1,777	10	engineering/technology	4,501 11
science	3,236	780	science	225 45
CMAA first degrees			business/commerce	2,006 3,981
engineering/technology	3,939	9	ONC	
science	1,438	175	engineering/technology	40,663 318
HND			science	6,064 1,784
engineering/technology	7,046	16	business/commerce	11,561 1,603
science	1,063	190	CGLI	
All advanced courses			engineering/technology	405,136 4,448
engineering	4,524	6	science	4,659 1,881
building	11,746	35	social, administration,	5,516 3,428
metal technology	2,097	28	business	
science	17,040	2,682	wholesale & retail	3,054 2,409
social, administration,				
business studies	39,074	4,607		
profession & vocational	8,047	2,144		
HNC				
engineering/technology	37,151	98		
	6,879	1,126		



to a question from Mrs. Joyce Butler on discrimination against women in employment replied that equality of opportunity would be 'better served by continuing the development of education and training facilities on an equal basis' (Hansard, 26 November 1968)\*. As the figures quoted above indicate, the facilities are far from being used on an equal basis, and failing any determined attempt by the government to see that they are more equally used there is the danger that the equal opportunities at present enjoyed by girls in school may become vulnerable to attack - especially in the present economic climate.

The 'two-part career pattern' is an OK phrase too these days in the smooth speech-maker's vocabulary. They didn't invent it, however; for many years now women have worked for a few years between school and marriage, and returned to employment after raising their families, but by no stretch of imagination could it be called a career - they have taken what they could get and what they could get has mostly been dog-sbody jobs. If we actually provided for a two-part career pattern, with the emphasis on 'career' and 'pattern', girls would be more eager to get back to resume interesting and progressive jobs and the turnover of women employees, which results mainly from the sheer deadliness of the jobs they do, would drop.

It has often been said - especially in the early days of the Industrial Training Act - that the ITBs would be a particular boon for girls and women whose formal education had gone no further than fifteen or sixteen. Lady Williams has made this point on more than one occasion. Less cheerful views - based on factual data - have been expressed about what the Act is doing for working women. The Women's Advisory Committee of the TUC last year made a survey of the proportion of women employees in manufacturing industry receiving training in the years 1964 and 1967 to see whether the Act has had any effect on the situation. They started with the belief that a gradual improvement was going on, but figures forced them to conclude that such improvements as there had been were insignificant and in 'penny numbers'. Their conclusions were echoed by the Donovan Commission (Report of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations, paras 349-366) which considered the facts so disturbing and the implications - social and economic - so important that they had a research report prepared by Miss Nancy Sear, which confirmed their concern.

The Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions own modest contribution in this field reinforces the impression of inaction - and of non-perception of any problem - on the part of most ITBs. At the beginning of last year, the Association sent an inquiry to all ITBs asking for information on these points: number of women covered by the board's operations; occupations in which they were employed; number of women under training in industries within the board's scope; percentage of women and men employees under training in those industries and any changes since the board's establishment; and any special action by the board to improve training opportunities for women.... In all industries for which figures were available on occupational distribution, women and girls were mainly in the less skilled and responsible jobs and this was as true for industries where women make up the main part of the labour force as for those where the proportion of women employed is small. Women were also in a smaller range of jobs, typically concentrated in certain operative occupations and in clerical and office jobs; very few were in managerial, supervisory, technologist or technician jobs - both by comparison with the percentage of men in such jobs and by comparison with the total of female employees in the industry. Where data are available on the percentage of women under training the proportion in any given occupation in an industry tends to be smaller than the pro-

\* A Bill to make discrimination against women in employment, education and training illegal was presented by Mrs Butler on 18 Feb. and is due for a second reading.



portion of males in that occupation receiving training, and the same is true for day release, with the gap widening towards the upper age range of young workers. Only two boards of the eleven long-established ones were able to provide data on changes in the proportion of women receiving training; only slight if any rises were apparent in these two cases. No board was taking any steps to increase the range of jobs done by women (with the exception of the Cotton ITBs courses for training instructors) or to give special encouragement to firms to train them in jobs not currently done by women.

Recommendations for training and FE so far published by boards make no reference to any discrimination between men and women employees in the matter of grants or the nature of training, and boards tended to refer to this with some satisfaction in such terms as 'schemes are designed to improve quantity and quality of training by types of employment and not by sex' - a fairly clear indication that they did not so far see it as any part of their function to open up wider possibilities of training and promotion for women employees. It will be interesting to see what response the DEP and the boards make to the suggestion - first advanced by the ATTI in a resolution to last year's women's TUC and now taken up by the General Council in its interim comments on the Donovan Report - that the levy/grant scheme should be deliberately used to encourage wider training and job opportunities for women, and to penalise firms which fail to give equal training opportunities to women workers.

The de-sexing of jobs by a deliberate process of positive discrimination in favour of women is essential - women represent the economy's last great untapped reserve, but at the moment the reserve is in danger of becoming a stagnant pond of unemployable unskilled labour. In terms of human development such a change could bring many women greater enjoyment of life and less frustration, and if men learnt to live with the implications of women having the means of financial independence by their own work, that might be no bad thing for family life either.

This article, slightly edited, is from The Technical Journal, publication of the ATTI, April 1969 issue.

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#### WIFE OF PERUVIAN GUERRILLA FIGHTER IN BRITAIN

SOCIALIST WOMAN has been asked to publicise the visit to Britain of Ana Bejar, wife of Hector Bejar who has been held in prison 3 years without trial in Peru. Senora Bejar, a TV actress and revolutionary, hopes by arousing world opinion to gain Hector's freedom.

Hector studied at the oldest university on the American continent, San Marcos, the "dissident" university of Latin America. As a poet, editor of Unidad, anti-Nixon demonstrator and guerrilla leader he practised what he preached.

In 1963 the poor peasants realised that President Belaunde Terry's promises of agrarian reform were empty and they started to take, and to HOLD land by force. In central Peru, pacifists and their families walked on to land and bared their chests to meet the inevitable hail of gunfire which crippled or killed them all. The ELN, the National Liberation Army of Peru, started training Aymara and Quechua peasants for a Fidel Castro type force in the mountains and forest of Maldonado, in the forests which border Bolivia and Brazil, when seasoned troops came up the Madre de Dios river and with superior arms butchered the freedom fighters including the young distinguished poet Javier Heraud. In 1965 Hector Bejar appealed at the cruel oppression which swept his land, raised the standard of the ELN with the slogan 'Land or Death' at Ayacucho. To the east, Hugo Blanco had held the land under the revo-



lutionary banner of the MIR but had been crushed by repressive forces. Three other fronts also took up arms, directed by the MIR, the revolutionary movement of the Left. The young lawyer Luis de la Puente Uceda lead the Mesa Pelada" front near Cuzco. Luis was killed. In central Peru the Junin front was led by William Loboton and Max Velando, they were killed. The northern front collapsed under a hail of napalm, dissention and mistakes. Thousands of starving ill-clad men rallied to Hector Bejar's banner and joined his "Javier Heraud" column of the ELN. Landowners were punished and expelled.

The government forces moved whole communities to isolate the ELN and napalm bombed them from the air. Hector held out for two months, living on little more than grass, until bitten by the huge white flies which carry the Uta germ. This, second cousin to leprosy caused great gangerous festering sores to burn holes in his right leg and he was obliged to seek medical aid. He was captured and his movement collapsed.

Humanitarians everywhere will wish to help Ana Bejar gain her husband's freedom: write to President Juan Valesco, Palacio de Gobierno, Lima, Peru and: Rosa Alarco Committee de Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, Apartado 10149, Lima, Peru. Senora Bejar is available to speak on the revolutionary struggle in Peru, please contact: John Edmunds, Sec., Committee for Solidarity with the Victims of Repression in Peru. 17, Norland Square, London W.11.

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### "WOMEN'S LIBERATION WORKSHOP" HIT THE BIG TIME!

We congratulate our sisters of the WLW on really making the 'top ten' scene. That well-known scribe, Peter Simple of the 'liberal, progressive' newspaper, The Daily Telegraph has given the WLW four para's in his vital, absorbing widely-ignored (pardon us, widely-adored) column.

He gives the WLW some very useful literary and historical precedents to help them in their sticker campaign against sex-exploitation in advertising. Mention is made of the Junior Anti-Sex League in "1984" and the Italian and German fascist women who used the slogans, 'We Prefer Soap and Water' and 'The German woman does not use cosmetics'. Comrade Simple's intimate knowledge of the fascist programme for women is most illuminating. He goes on to say, "To come upon one of these cadres (How many liberated women to a cadre?) at their work on the escalators, charging up and down and rudely intercepting the glassy stares of ascending men as they dab their stickers, would be most unnerving."

Now girls! Whatever you do, don't go onto Fleet Street, you know how nervousness affects a man and whatever we want it isn't hundreds more 'simple'-minded newspaper columnists.

For information about their campaign, and their newsletter, contact: Women's Liberation Workshop, c/o 10, Strathmore Gardens, London W.8.

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### SISTER VEAL IN NOTTINGHAM

by Jo O'Brien and Antonia Gorton

Over 300 people stood in a real cold, blowing downpour in Nottingham's Market Square to hear Sister Patricia Veal speak on behalf of the nurses. The rally was organised by NJACWER as a building action for the following day's national demonstration for Equal Pay, in London. Among the listeners were student nurses in their grey cloaks with scarlet linings, young radicals, the press and middle-aged people of various



backgrounds. Among the other speakers was a representative of the Nottm. Trades Council, of Socialist Woman, and a shop steward of the T&GWU who spontaneously contributed, declaring his support for Equal Pay.

A really flamboyant personality, Sister Veal has a tremendous driving quality. Male and female nurses from major hospitals were obviously hanging onto every word, and took leaflets to distribute to their colleagues. Privately she emphasises the frustrating inefficiency of the Health Service which is really the worst thing that nurses suffer from; the pretence at running a social service while continuing the old attitude that workers should work for nothing, and that nothing should interfere with private companies in their desire to make profits out of State run services.

"The National Health Service is being rooked" she says, by every firm which supplies drugs, instruments and linen. The linen is laundered by private firms; it just doesn't come back." There are patients sitting without night clothes and beds without sheets. The daily newspapers quoted her as saying that nurses will do anything for a decent meal. She refuted this, saying that nurses will put up with almost anything for a decent meal - totally rejecting any implication of prostitution. She hopes that her United Nurses Association will eventually become the bargaining agent for nurses; with it as a trade union run by nurses for nurses.

She herself appears to be a-political: her phone is bugged, but the only comment she makes about this is that it's a nuisance because of the interference on the line. But the complaints and ultimately the remedies suggested by the UNA must be political. Most crucial of all perhaps is the rejection of the nursing hierarchy. This hierarchy like all others, masks inefficiency, a dislike of change, and a hostility to that free exchange of ideas and opinions which is necessary to learning.

Sister Veal is very much a leader of the type that is thrown up at this stage of the movement. Dynamic, genuine, politically unsophisticated (which drops her in it, sometimes) capable of inspiring great devotion. We salute Sister Veal - one of the few angry women!

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#### RECOMMENDED READING

The Women Incendiaries - the story of Women in Paris during the siege of 1870 and the Communes of 1871 - Edith Thomas. 50/-

Nature of the Second Sex - 5/- and The Second Sex 8/6 by Simone de Beauvoir.

The Status of Women in Canada - A Brief presented to the Canadian government's Royal Commission on the Status of Women 1/-

Origin of the Family, Private Property & the State, Engels -5/6

Can the Workers Run Industry? Ken Coates (ed) 8/6

Too Many Babies? Joseph Hanson 2/-

Order from: Pioneer Book Service, 8 Toynbee St., London E.1. Pioneer can also supply books not listed here. Add 10% for postage. Ask for their catalogue.

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Italy's leading Jesuit publication said recently that adultery by women was worse than men and should be punished by jail sentences.



Bertrand Russell has said that he learnt more about China from reading the first volume, "The Crippled Tree", than from living there a year. How do we learn a national history, especially one as intricate as that of China, without years of study? One of the ways is to find a Han Suyin - someone with a thorough knowledge of her own country, who can so sensitively explain how this history moulded her personal life.

She was born in 1916, the child of a marriage between a woman of the Belgian middle class, and a Chinese who, by tradition, should have been destined for a classical education, but because of the decision of the Chinese government of the time to train more scientists, was sent to Belgium to become a railway engineer. The marriage was scorned by both families and races. It did not have its own strengths or serenities to compensate for this social ostracism. Marguerite Denis was taken back to China by Cou Yentung. Much of Han Suyin's material for the first two volumes comes from the records made by her father of his life. Excerpts from his diary are included in the first book, and Chou Yentung tells us what kind of a China he took his European wife to: "Because of childhood happiness I wronged my wife, for when I met her and told her of China, it was of this China, the China seen on Delft porcelain, a China of palaces and bridges, of satins and gardens, of mountains and rivers wildly beautiful, of obedient servants and benevolent kinsmen, which I described to her. I was only describing my prosperous, secure family. I thought it China. "But the China that Marguerite had to try to live in was "Misery, desolation everywhere. The streets of Chungking were noisome with people in rags. Everywhere we went, like flies the beggars followed, running under our feet, exhibiting their sores. Marguerite screamed as a woman thrust a fetid, stinking bag of pus under her eyes; it was a child, faceless, the nose and eyes gone into one running, putrid sore. The houses crumbled, children ran after rats to eat them." As a child of the civil servant class, Chou Yentung had been taught the Chinese classics; he had not been taught to notice, let alone consider, the mass of his own people. Just as they rode on the shoulders of the coolies in their sedan chairs, so as a class they rode above the peasants, the dignified, unseeing ones, bringing death wherever they went. "When our chair bearers lifted us on to their shoulders and trotted to the hills in the summer, they had to stop and smoke every four hours, otherwise they could not carry us. All around us we spread a lavish death; too much work, too little to eat, and opium." Spring in the hills would be recorded by the young scholar Chou in poetry "a twinkle of butterflies, in sudden gale, pelted above the young bean fields, and we went home to find silken words about this spring episode." Delicate words. Sensitive memory. As Han Suyin says, her father's writing is like a "landscape painted by a Taoist artist on a temple wall."

Her own words are Eurasian; sometimes delicate, always vigorous. Her childhood was tumultuous - a raging mother, trapped in poverty and loneliness, and a silent father, the victim of being Chinese in China at a time when the only thing that counted was to be European, a member of the supreme "white" class, gun runners, opium vendors, missionary clique. Thoroughly she explains the cataclysmic history of China, for years dominated by British, German, French, Belgian and American interests. And the private family life she links so cleverly and rightly to the public life - the state of China which dictated the difficulties under which she was to grow up, a Eurasian, part of neither race, living in poverty, surrounded by squalor we can not even comprehend (in Peking 10,000 people would die of exposure in one winter week) and always Mama shouting at Papa "I will go back. I don't want anything to do with this vermin, these yellow vermin of yours." In the young child Han Suyin "a fragmentation of the total self occurred...others born like her in two worlds, who chose not to accept this splitting, fragmentation of monolithic



identity into several selves, found themselves later unable to face the contradictions latent in their own beings. Consistency left them crippled for the world's incoherence." Because of this fragmentation of self she is now able to relate East and West, their present and their future. Belonging to both and neither she understands how they have been linked in the past through exploitation of East by West, and can wonder whether they will ever be reconcilable.

Throughout her teens she rejected her Chineseness, tried to become totally European. By 20 this position was reversed. She had begun studying in Belgium, and China was at war, this time with the threat coming from Japan. She now had an overwhelming need to be Chinese. She travelled back to China in 1938 for no other reason than to be with her country in its desperation. On board ship she met Tang Paochang, her future husband, and so began the "Birdless Summer". "The fundamental ambivalence of our relationship, its extremes of vehemence and hatred, passion and love and cruelty, its obsessional force, hobbled me for a long time." For nine years she bowed to Pao's concept of what is woman in an effort to be reborn "Chinese". Of the aristocratic, military class, educated at Sandhurst, Pao was also returning to China in her time of need, to serve with Chiang Kai Shek's elite corps. As a class they had been "negated" for years - their role as overlords, masters of the Chinese people had been taken over by the whites. They retaliated with extreme "Chineseness" - the Confucian Ancestral Virtues, reverence for elders, Chastity and Obedience of Women, and the notion of woman as property. Pao lectured Han Suyin - to help China her role must be that of becoming the virtuous Chinese woman; so he beat her, tore up her books, and, most crippling of all negated her capacity for useful work with the Ancient Virtue "A woman of talent is not a virtuous woman." All the time that she longed to do something to help China her husband refused her permission to work. Instead she must spend her youthful energy in helping him to climb the hierarchy of Chiang's farcical army - an army which almost never fought, was officered by profiteers, and in which "Mein Kampf" was prescribed reading. Chiang's policy was "prevarication, compromise and concession towards Japan; hope of aid from the Western powers; maintenance of the ruling groups in their immediate moneyed interests and civil war to "eradicate Communism". Meanwhile the Communists were resisting the Japanese invasion, by December 1938 having six anti-Japanese bases. A guerilla band called the Pearl River detachment was formed from the Red Army. They started off with only eight guns which worked, were joined by students, labourers, and overseas Chinese from Hongkong, and by the end of 1939 had liberated an area of 200,000 people. "From 1939-45 the conclusive test of strength between the two ideas, the two perspectives, (Chiang's and the Communists) was played out. And the great power of a people's war was proved, where the people, mobilised, educated, become politically conscious, accomplish miracles of fighting by their own volition, where they are "water for the guerrilla fish", where every man woman and child is a combatant."

But humiliated, beaten, bound up by the whirlwind of Pao's xenophobia, the bride Han Suyin could only half sense the reality of the political situation. At times Pao and his fellow officers bemoaned the chaos in which they were involved but "their sudden flashes of consciousness were quickly extinguished in the egotistical pursuit of their careers...One could occasionally detect in their talk a sneaking respect, an envious fear of the "red Bandits" who encouraged slave girls to rebel against their masters, did not insist on chastity, and incited the peasant women to stand up and denounce their husband's misdeeds. "Little girls of eight were sold into brothels and that was as it should be, and Pao would talk of virtue, integrity, the duty of obedience, discipline saving the country, while the conscripts walked by us on the roads, a stinking swaying mob of men, gaunt with hunger, roped like beasts, while three out of four of the Chinese soldiers that died, died of hunger and disease because the officers pocketed the money for their food."



Desperately trying to find the reality of the situation, ignorant of, and half fearing Communism; intuitively revolted by the motives and actions of the Chiang army; unbalanced by relentless criticism from the husband for her "unchineseness"; torn by alternate searching for, and rejection of the Confucian concept of womanhood, what reality did Han Suyin find to keep her sane through this "birdless summer"? It was the reality of the coolie, the sureness that the future of China did not rest on her shoulders, on Pao's or on anyone else's, but on that of "the coolies, man labour, carrying, pulling, tugging, carrying the war and the festering corruption of their masters on their backs, their flesh wasted, their muscles and eyes bulging with life-devouring animal labour...And yet in spite of this, what vastness, what sense of power from the grey and teeming life which laboured, laboured."

When at last she was allowed by Pao to train as a midwife, she was to recognise another reality. A girl child would be born and be rejected by the mother: she dare not show it her husband, he would be angry; it must be suffocated, strangled, pushed into a water bottle, or just abandoned, it was a girl, worthless. The collective wrong born by woman under Confucianism made them a subjected mass like the coolies - but in their collective strength lay their future. "The very ideogram for "woman" denoted subjection, the bar across, horizontal burden of her heavy breasts, the protruberant hips and the crossed bow legs, not quite quadripedal, but almost. Since then I have often thought that in today's China, with the Cultural Revolution which compels all to weigh in the light of reason our secret clingings to primeval devices of subjection, the first thing that should be done is to eradicate totally, to change totally, some of those odious ideograms which are exact pictures of two millenia of feudal oligarchy, four millenia of woman's inferiority."

Han Suyin triumphs in her sense of history. The Chinese have always had this historical sense - that is, an understanding that what happens on a large scale influences private life: "passive or active, all participated in the history of their country. Hence the Revolution has made no break in the loom of chronicle, there is no chasm between past and present as some Europeans imagine. The Communist Party claims itself heir and descendant of the Taiping; the Taiping themselves were an immense peasant uprising successive to so many others which occurred sporadically through the centuries. Always there is a progenitor, and the shuttle goes back and forth weaving the centuries into a wholeness. The pattern changes but it is one loom, one fabric, one uninterrupted thread: the history of a people. Like the Great River, it moves on though the landscape changes." (The Crippled Tree)

The history of China is her history, so its complexities, its contradictions, are an integral part of her thought and words. In the first two volumes her language is so vital - it has absorbed everything from the rhythms of the labour of the poor, to the delicateness of genteel family life. In "Birdless Summer" it is flatter, less rhythmic and colourful. As a "Confucian" woman she had had her receptiveness to atmospheres dulled. She was enacting out the history of so many women; trying to understand her world by "looking" through another person, trying to relate herself to the historical process through a man. It was like putting on someone else's spectacles and wondering why their "vision" did not accord with yours. But truly in "Birdless Summer" has explored the fundamental problem already recognised by the Chinese, that of why we (both men and women) cling to subjection. She is not uncritical of the Cultural Revolution. In its extremes she recognises a self-righteousness which is so reminiscent of the old Confucian moralising. She shrinks from it. But she also knows that it is considering a most fundamental relationship between ourselves and our history - why we accept situations which are not beneficial to us. "The Cultural Revolution compels all to weigh in the light of reason our secret clingings to primeval devices of subjection." That is a thing for all of us to ponder.





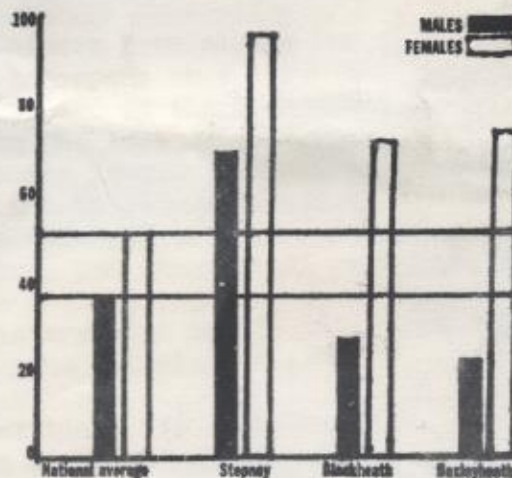
# NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of Socialist Woman will feature the stirring words of James Connolly, the great Irish revolutionary on the women of Ireland. "None so fitted to break the chains as they who wear them, none so well equipped to decide what is a fetter. In its march towards freedom, the working class of Ireland must cheer on the efforts of those women who, feeling on their souls and bodies the fetters of the ages, have arisen to strike them off, and cheer all the louder if in its hatred of thralldom and passion for freedom the women's army forges ahead of the militant army of Labour." Don't miss this important issue.

## WE'RE NOT SURPRISED

Figures recently released, showing the incidence, broken down by sex and class of mental illness are illuminating. They show that the working class area of Stepney suffers more than twice the national average and that women, overall, suffer more than men. In the poorer area, the constant struggle for survival combines with social conditioning to produce the highest rate of almost 100 cases per 10,000 for women. In the wealthy areas, loneliness and boredom make these women almost as ill. What a waste!

Graph shows cases of mental illness per 10,000 adult population. Women in affluent suburbs like Bexleyheath and Blackheath are almost as prone to mental illness as those in low-income Stepney. For women, the rate in all three areas is far above the national average.



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