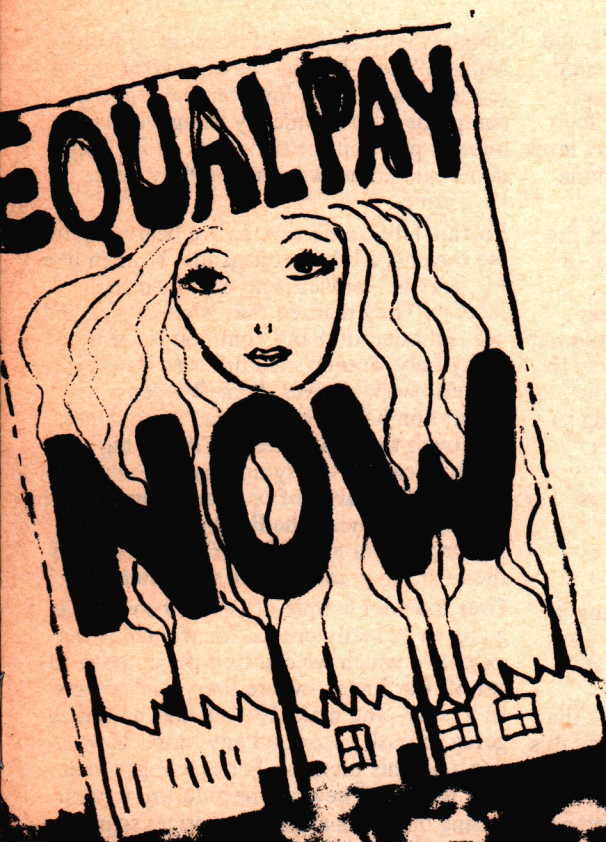


# Womans Voice

number 2 5p



**There will be no such thing as equal pay - this is the truth behind the statements of Maurice Macmillan, the Tory employment minister.**

See page 14



# WOMAN'S VOICE 2

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## Editorial

In both this issue of WOMAN'S VOICE and the last one we have written at some length about Tory policies over rents and prices. The Tories have also made it more difficult for working women to keep their wages level with the cost of living and they have done next to nothing about equal pay.

All this sounds bad enough—but in fact the Tories have gone one step further. Pick up any newspaper from over the past few months and you will find that whenever someone is on strike or there is an economic crisis of some sort the government starts to shed crocodile tears for the plight of the housewife. The Tories are always trying to turn women against workers and to get them to support government policies.

### UNFEMININE

Sally Oppenheim, the Tory MP, writing in The Sun on law and order during the dock strike said: 'As a woman I am not at all surprised that it was the WOMEN of Scunthorpe who demonstrated against the picketing dockers.' When the Tories say this kind of thing they always make out that they are paying women a compliment. We are meant to think that anyone who stands up for their rights is behaving childishly; that women's tendency to go about the business of everyday life without any fuss—even when faced with severe hardship—is the most desirable way for any human being to behave.

Of course they are not paying us a compliment at all. In fact, when you think about it, all this is grossly insulting. From early childhood we are brought up to believe that it is unfeminine for women to stick up for their rights. At the same time we are taught that we should stick with the home and leave men to sort out the rights and wrongs in the world. In reality women being conservative—not sticking up for their rights—is

simply the other side of the coin to women being inferior—leaving the important things to men. The Tories, far from paying us a compliment, are cynically using women's inferior position for their own ends. They don't care about women and they never have done.

Fortunately, some women are beginning to see through all the propaganda. Women like the ones in Norwich who occupied their factory. They realised that what gets passed off as moderation and common sense is really only women's readiness to let everyone else walk all over them. Women's Liberation has, of course, had a big effect. Although the papers treated it as a big laugh, it caught the sympathy and imagination of thousands of ordinary women. The women occupying the Brians print works in London, for example: 'We aren't behind the men', they said, 'we're with them'.

Over the next couple of years or so what is going to be really crucial for women is the extent to which we can find the courage to get off our knees—where everyone expects us to stay—and make it clear that no-one is going to push us around any more. If we don't do this then the Tories will get their way with us. They will be able to carry on raising our rents and letting prices soar. They will continue to use the Industrial Relations Act to make it harder for working women to keep their wages level with the cost of living. They will go on letting the employers ignore the Equal Pay Act.

### LIBERATING

If we don't get off our knees then at the end of the day we will find that, not only have we made no progress towards liberating women, but that our living standards have been whittled away to such an extent that the daily grind of women's lives will become more desperate than anything most of us have ever experienced.

**Editorial Note:** Support for WOMAN'S VOICE has been encouraging, and we have been able to move from a duplicated to a printed magazine. Special thanks to the reader in Ilfracombe and others who sent donations. We want to get a wider circulation, and we hope to improve WOMAN'S VOICE all the time. To do this we need your letters, your ideas, and your contributions. Send to: Valerie Clark, 50 Upper Clough, Linthwaite, Huddersfield, Yorks.

## RENTS

The Housing Finance Bill has quietly become law. Already a million council tenants have had a 50p rent rise since April. Another 4 million face £1 rises in October. They will be joined in January by 1½ million private controlled tenants who can expect their rents to treble.

If every Labour council had decided not to implement the law, had refused to raise rents, and had refused to co-operate with Tory housing commissioners, the government would have found it impossible to make this Act work. But the Labour leaders exerted all their efforts to weaken the resistance of councils.

Now only 37 Labour councils out of 279 have said they will not implement the rent increases, and many of these are shaky on the issue.

This leaves the battle against the Act in the hands of the 7 million tenants it is supposed to hit. With their families, they make up well over half the population.

Already the tenants' movement nationally is more active than it has ever been. There have been rent strikes in more than 20 towns since April. There are tenants' associations or action committees in virtually every major town or city. Many thousands of tenants are already committed to direct action when the rent rise hits them.

There has to be maximum activity on every estate to involve all the tenants and their families, and to commit them to a rent strike in October. The full co-operation of the trade union movement has to be sought, and pledges obtained to back with strike action any tenants that councils try to intimidate.

Only a militant fight now can resist the rent rises. If enough people become involved, and the rent strikes spread, then the Tories can be forced to retreat on this Act, as they have been forced to retreat on the Industrial Relations Act.

## SQUATTERS

In Islington, North London, a rent strike in October over the government's Rent Act is very much in the offing. This is partly due to many tenants having got together in June to fight the council on the issue of 'squatting' and homelessness. It started when a family of seven were evicted from their flat and offered two rooms in a bed-and-breakfast hotel. The family refused and found an empty house in which to squat. The mother of the family said:

'My first motives were selfish. I only thought of my family. But then I gradually realised that there were others in the area in the same position, so we decided to fight together. We were issued with court orders but we decided to stand and fight it out. Other squatting families in the area had been issued with court orders for the same day, so we formed the Islington Squatters Group.'



The group held demonstrations outside the Town Hall, had meetings with Councillor Hoodless from the Housing Department, but with no success. Eventually they made the street a 'No-go area'. They called all the press and broadcasting networks possible. But the council still got its way and the families were given a 14-day order to get out. The reason given was that the houses were due for 'gutting'—to prevent these homeless families taking them over.

On 28 June the police came in full force to take down the barricades. 60 policemen arrived expecting trouble, but got none. The families said the barricades could go as they had been more a demonstration than anything else.

The two main families concerned were told they would be rehoused in three months. But other families also squatting in the area were given no indication of possible housing in the future. It became clear from this tenants' fight what was meant by the council's policy of 'slum clearance'. They were spending £9000 on 'gutting' more than 100 reasonable empty houses! Islington families are now very aware of the council's disregard for tenants and have a strong base to mobilise a rent strike campaign.

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Mr Toni Scurria, an Italian-American who opened a factory in the village of Ballygar in Galway in the West of Ireland several months ago, is now closing it down. He claims that the girls he took on were lazy and production was slow. Not only that, but the despicable idle creatures insisted on getting 50 per cent more in pay than was suggested by the town's industrial development association. So their wages were at the quite inflationary level of £6 for a 45-hour week!

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## DOCKS

*'Due to industrial stoppage, we regret that certain goods are not in stock at the moment'*

This notice or similar ones have been seen in most shop windows in the last few weeks. The reason—the dock strike. Why are the dockers on strike?

Contrary to the impression you get from the papers, the dockers aren't on strike for the fun of it. They are on strike to defend their jobs—they are fighting for the right to work.

Over the last five years the number of dockers in this country has gone down from 65,000 to 41,000—that's 24,000 dockers out of work. And the situation is going to get worse. One of the local papers in Newham recently had an article in which they explained the plans that were being made for the dock area, when all the dock was closed down! The 24,000 jobs that have already gone have disappeared because dock firms like Union Cold Stores and Hays Wharf have closed down.

When the owner of Union Cold Stores, Lord Vestey (the owner of Dewhursts, the butchers), decided to close it down, he transferred his docking trade inland and opened up the Midland Cold Storage firm in Hackney, East London. The work of the 1250 men who lost their jobs was given to 40. These 'lucky' 40 found they were working much longer hours for much less money than the dockers had been. They were working under conditions no docker would tolerate. When dock workers were taken on at Chobham Farm, the workers there got a nine hours a week reduction and wage increases of between £6 and £10 a week.

Midland Cold Storage and Chobham Farm are just two of the many container depots springing up a couple of miles away from the docks. The men working in the container depots load up the containers, which are very large boxes, with goods. The containers are driven from the depots to the dock and put on a ship. So the container men are doing the same work as dockers. Tony Churchman, shop steward at Chobham Farm said recently, 'Most of us accepted from the start that much of the work in Chobham could be classed as dock work.'

Docking is still one of the hardest jobs in the country, it is dangerous and arduous and has a higher accident rate than mining. Bob Light, a docker in the Royal Group of Docks, London, says that containerisation could have been used to improve this. It could have provided longer holidays, a shorter working week, a reduction in the number of shifts, but instead it's being used to bleed the dock labour force to death, and to make a bigger fortune for already rich men.

Two of the myths about dockers are that they are overpaid and they don't give a damn about anyone else. Again, as Bob Light explains, dockers have got good wages compared with some workers, and under the National Dock Labour Scheme they have some protection from redundancy and unemployment, but they have only got these by fighting for them in the past, and they are now having to fight to keep these gains. Just because dockers are fairly well paid doesn't mean that they are keeping other workers' wages down. If they thought that by taking home less pay, pensioners would benefit, they'd do so. But they know damned well that if they took home less pay the person who'd benefit would be the boss! The way they can help other workers is by taking the kind of action they did in 1962, when they came on strike in support of the nurses' demand for better pay and conditions.

It was similar working class solidarity, but on a much larger scale that got the five dockers out of Pentonville. These five were put in jail because under the Industrial Relations Act it is illegal to carry on the fight for job security and better living conditions. The dockers, in taking on the government and its laws, are taking on a legal system which isn't designed to protect the 'innocent' but is designed by those who 'have' to safeguard them and their interests from those of us who 'haven't'.

The dockers are prepared to take on the Tory government and their laws. If women are going to be successful in their fights for union recognition, equal pay and in the fight against the 'Fair Rents Act' we'll have to take them on as well.

Margaret Falshaw

## CLEANERS

In early August the night cleaners who work the Empress State Building (a Ministry of Defence Building in Fulham, London) came out on strike for union recognition and a general improvement in their working conditions. These women are ruthlessly exploited as they all have small children who cannot be left during the day, so they are forced to work at nights in order to live.

At this particular building there were ten cleaners to work 26 floors, without proper equipment, like hoovers and disinfectant—all they have are brooms and dusters. They were earning £12.50 with a £1.50 bonus for working five nights from 9pm to 6am.

Morale was high as the determined cleaners, with the aid of the Cleaners Action Group, picketed from 6 in the morning till 12 at night, every day, for nearly three weeks. They turned away almost all the deliveries to the building, including the navy!

Their strike was made official during the first week and despite attempts to persuade them to return to work by some officials of their union, the Civil Service Union, they refused to move. The contractor, Mr Rhodda of Cleanagents and Co, eventually gave in. They won all their demands, including a wage increase to £17 now, and to £18 when the contract for the company to clean the building is renewed in October. Most important, the Union has been recognised at last. The benefits of the deal will also cover the women on the Admiralty Building in Whitehall, who came out during the second week of the strike.

The women on these buildings have shown all the night cleaners that they can win their two year struggle for union recognition, better pay and better conditions.

## PRICES

Cast your mind back to just over a year ago when there was a general election and the Tories, with the aid of their 'cut prices at a stroke' policy (!) were elected. A couple of months ago Anthony Barber, Chancellor of the Exchequer, appeared on television in order to defend this amidst a flood of rising prices. Hard pushed for examples of their power to 'cut prices at a stroke' he had the luck to be able to point to the first, in what turned out to be a series, of cuts in the price of butter. Good old Tories you say—but before you do cast your mind back again. Two years ago the price of one pound of ordinary, blended butter, was about 15p; by July of last year—during the election—it had escalated to 27p a pound. In the last few months it has fallen to 21p.

All with the aid of the government? On the contrary—there was a drought in New Zealand. Bad grazing reduced the milk producing capacity of the cows, which resulted in less butter, and higher prices. The end of the drought, the cows resumed their task, and the price of butter fell. Since when has Anthony Barber been chief rain maker?

In July of this year the Egg Marketing Board decided to smash 18 million eggs. The reason? Not that there were too many eggs to eat, on the contrary. But because the hens had been producing so well that the large quantities available had pushed the price down (which was good for us when the price of all other protein foods—meat, cheese etc—was going up). So what is wrong with the price going down? The argument put out by the Egg Marketing Board goes as follows: the lower the price of eggs the lower the profit margins of the egg producers. If the profits fall below a certain level, or disappear, then many of the smaller producers would go out of business. When the hens slow down their laying capacity the number of producers will have dropped so there will be fewer eggs and the price will soar. So, therefore, they are smashing 18 million eggs—too bad if you still can't afford them.

## PRINT WORKERS OCCUPATION

Briant Colour Printing, in South London, has now been occupied for over two months. The 150 workers, 30 of them women, took over the building in June in protest at the management's attempts to throw them out of a job. The management had suddenly decided to close the firm because, they claimed, it was unprofitable. What was nearer the truth was that both business and profits had been syphoned off into other companies owned by the same group.

From the start the women involved themselves totally in the occupation; as they said 'we are not behind the men, we are with them'. When it was suggested that the women should be off the premises by 10 o'clock each night, in order to avoid rumours, they objected and insisted that it was their jobs that were being fought for as well and therefore they were in it as much as the men. As one of the women shop stewards said 'we don't work because we have nothing better to do. We work because we have to. So we're here till the death.'

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During the docks strike tons and tons of tomatoes were dumped in Guernsey and Jersey. These island export mainly to Britain, yet the ships couldn't be unloaded here and so they had to stay where they were grown. Why weren't they given away to the workers on the islands?

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# Equal Pay in Engineering

SARA CARVER

**Earlier this year, Manchester engineers put in for a claim of four points: at least £4 pay rise, more holidays, 35 hour week, and immediate progress towards equal pay.**

Though it is the fourth demand which really concerns us, it should be said that, despite the magnificent struggle of thousands of engineers in the district, despite 30 factory occupations (some lasting as long as 12 weeks), no victory can be chalked up to the workers. The employers, organised in their Federation and backed up financially by other employers throughout the country, were determined to make no concessions on the claim. Unfortunately the trade union leadership of the AUEW—nationally and locally—showed no similar determination, and because of the failure of the officials the settlements fall far short of the claim.

But perhaps the worst casualty of all was the demand for equal pay. *Nowhere* has there been even a move towards equal pay. In one or two cases (usually early settlements, where some employers panicked in the face of the engineers' militancy), women have been given a few extra pence rise more than the men. In other cases, women workers benefited by an 'across the board' rise, where, for instance, *all* grades within the factory got a £2 rise.

## Sop

No real fight was made to support the equal pay demand. Even during the first week of action, the employers, unions and press alike were referring to the *three point claim*. No militant quotes came from the local AUEW offices about equal pay. Settlements that had made no progress at all on equal pay were ratified by the District Committee.

But if they weren't going to fight for it, why bother to include it? The answer is simple. It was included as a sop. It was put in to satisfy the growing awareness and trade union consciousness among women engineers. The demand was often dropped even before negotiations started. Many proposed settlements were rejected at mass meetings because they didn't give enough on this or that demand. But *not one* settlement was rejected because it did not make 'immediate progress towards equal pay'.

## Splitting

However, many of the bad settlements were voted in by the women themselves. At Osrams, the women who make up 80-85 per cent of the workforce, voted in favour of the proposed settlement when the men wanted to stay out and fight for something better. The men have now decided that for future claims they will go it alone. That is, they will only concern themselves with the men's wages and conditions, and let the women get on with it on their own. As one shop steward put it, 'I can't understand. We were proposing a better deal for the women and they voted against it'. But it's easier to understand when you discover that 80 per cent of the women at Osrams are not in the union. Rather than splitting off from the women, the male workers would do better to make sure the women join the union. The men will be foolish if they allowed a situation, in which so many workers at their factory are not unionised, to

continue. And this can go for plenty of other factories, not only in Manchester but all around the country. Not enough effort has been put in either by the union officials or men workers to unionise female labour within engineering. Unionisation drives are what is needed, not recriminations against the women workers.

## Demand

It is about time male trade unionists learnt that equal pay is not a frivolous demand put forward to satisfy a few light-minded women. If we can win equal pay it will represent a major victory for the whole working class. It will mean an immediate rise in the standard of living of many working class families. It would forever eliminate the use of women as cheap or scab labour.

It would bridge the division that exists between men and women workers.

But just as with everything else that benefits working people, it will have to be fought for. The bosses didn't *give* us the 8-hour day, or better wages, or the welfare state. We fought for them and won. And no employer is going to hand us equal pay on a silver plate. There is the idea that with the passing of the Act, equal pay will be automatically granted in 1975. **THIS IS NOT TRUE.** The bosses will find ways to get round the Act. They will attempt to foist productivity deals on women. They will divide up jobs, previously done by both men and women, into 'women only' and 'men only' jobs—after all, if no man is doing the same job as you, how can you demand equal pay? In the last resort, they will make women workers redundant rather than pay up. Only a united working class can prevent them, and win equal pay without any strings.

Start fighting for equal pay now! All wage claims must include the demand for equal pay and *it must be fought for.*

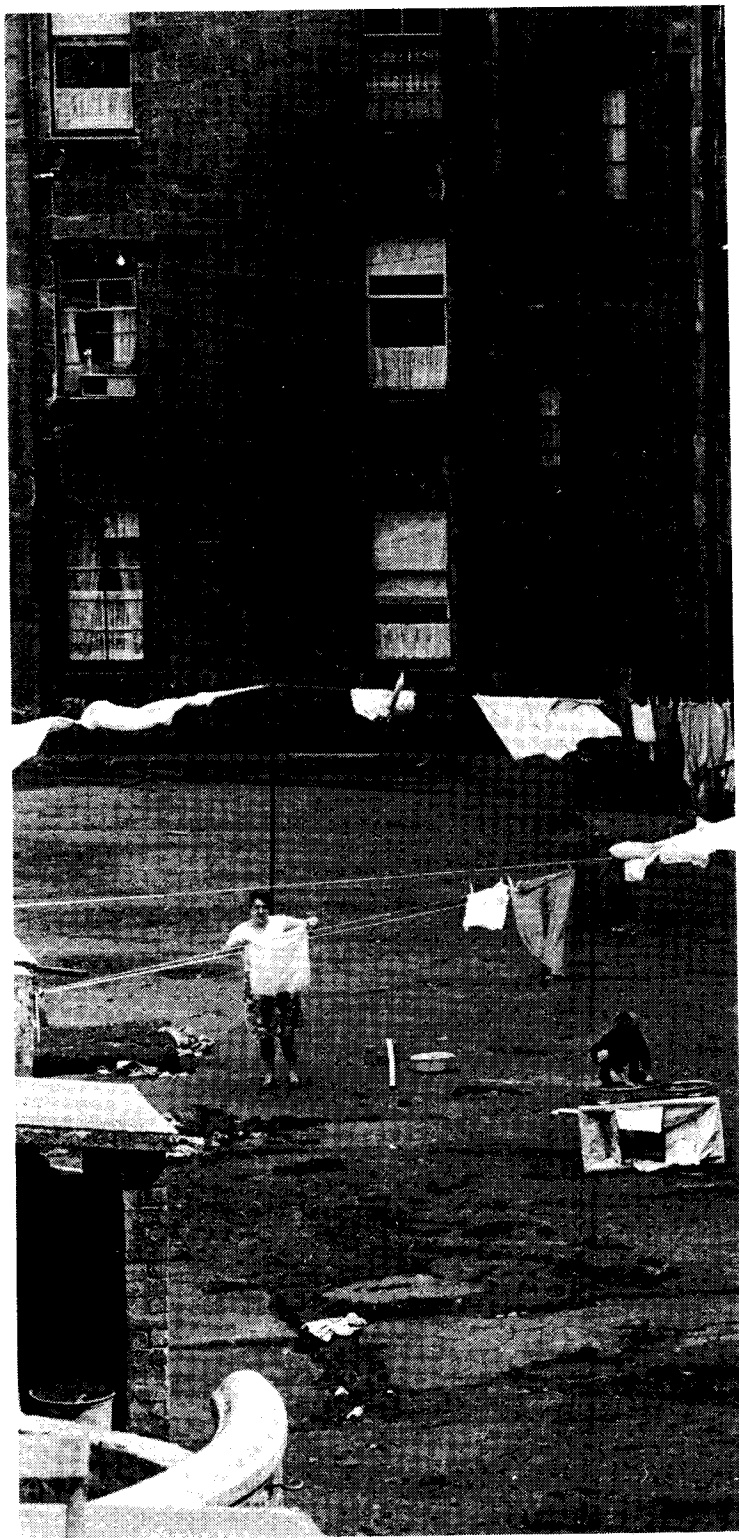
# The Housing Problem

BARBARA KERR

The housing problem in Britain remains through various governments, despite Labour and Tory election promises to solve the housing problem.

It is true that there is a balance between the number of houses and the number of people or families needing houses in Britain. But the problem is that in the north of Scotland, the north of England and Wales houses lie empty, while the south of England and most major cities and towns suffer from a severe shortage. Houses where there are no jobs are useless. It was estimated in 1965 (Labour government White Paper) that three million families were living in 'slums, near-slums and grossly overcrowded conditions'. More recently, *Shelter* has shown that up to 25 per cent may be living in sub-standard accommodation, some of them near homeless. In several of Britain's largest cities—like London, Birmingham and Glasgow—there is a council house waiting list of up to 15 years.

The chances of buying or renting a house you can afford has grown steadily worse over the last 10 years, as more private landlords have sold, making huge profits, so creating severe housing problems for millions of tenants. People with the highest incomes are owner-occupiers, next come council tenants and lastly private tenants. (PIB Report on Council Rents 1968). The worst conditions for tenants are found in privately rented property. The lower your income the worse your housing, and, of course, the more difficult it is for you to find anything better.



had been shooting up in the 1960s, increasing the burden on councils, and their only response was to cut their building programmes. Between 1964-68, 82 per cent of local authorities' increased expenditure on housing went to the money lender in higher interest rates. Also land speculation and builders' profits pushed up the cost of housing, making it even more difficult for councils to build. For example, it now costs the GLC over £2000 for the *land* to build one council house.

### The Only Solution

The only possible way of solving the housing problem in terms of numbers, cost, standard of building and planning and location is the abolition of the control of profit over housing. This would require:—

- the nationalisation of all land
- the nationalisation of all building societies, insurance companies and finance companies
- the nationalisation of the building industry
- the abolition of all private landlords

We could then build sufficient houses in places that benefit the community as a whole and at a price that working people could afford. Unfortunately this will never happen in our present system—it will only be seen in a socialist society. Such reforms cannot be brought about by any government, for it is the money lenders and the land-owners who have the real power in this society—economic power—and they will never sit back and allow a government to ruin them. What is more, we have seen in the past that Labour governments have no intention of trying.

Nevertheless we must continue to demand that any government claiming to represent working people does attack the housing problem. More important, every tenant should refuse to further line the pockets of the money lenders and land-owners, and should fight in local tenants' associations to stop massive rent increases by refusing to pay them. Nation-wide action of this sort can stop rents escalating, although it will never actually solve the housing shortage.

Housing is a prime example of why revolution can be the only 'reform' guaranteed to succeed. When we have a society that believes in housing for people and not for profit, there will be no problem.

## Slums and red tape

*Alison Langan lives with her husband and three children in Islington, North London. During the last few years, the middle classes have bought up all the 'desirable' properties and tarterd them up into elegant, trendy homes. They forced property values up at the same time, making it impossible for working class communities to stay in the borough.*

*Alison lives in a slum. Her children have to play on the main City Road, with traffic thundering past all day. At the end of the day they have a wash-down in the kitchen sink. She talked to WOMAN'S VOICE about housing conditions and the Council's attitude.*

We were rehoused here after a miserable three months of being homeless. The rooms are difficult in the extreme to live in. Only with a great deal of hard effort can I cope with conditions here. We had water put into the kitchen and have just managed to have a decent-sized sink fitted. Before this, I washed three children in a sink so small that our baby was not able to sit down in it. We continually asked the Council to do these basic things, but finally in desperation got sick of asking them and had to do them ourselves. Everything of course has been paid for by my husband and me.

### How Can the Problem be Solved?

The example of the first Labour government shows how difficult it is to improve the housing shortage without directly challenging the private profit system. Labour came to power pledged to do many things on housing, but they failed on most of them. They failed because housing is directly connected to and controlled by the capitalist system.

The Labour government was going to build half a million houses a year, but only succeeded in building just over 400,000 in 1967, declining to 370,000 in 1969. The principal reason for the failure was the burden of interest rates on local councils. They have to borrow money on the open market, and pay market interest costs. A £5000 house paid for over 60 years costs the council (and ultimately the tenant in the rent he pays) £25,000. Interest charges

We share a lavatory with another family with four children—so altogether eleven people use the same lav. My baby has been ill with tummy upsets. The local clinic welfare worker agrees with me that it's caused by the unsanitary conditions in this house. No amount of disinfectant, scrubbing, or sweet-smelling deodorisers will change the facts that too many people are forced to share the same toilet, and that the house just needs re-building. But when we complain to the Council, they just say this isn't true.

### Shiftwork

We seem to present the Housing Department with an impossible problem—we actually expect to have somewhere decent to live! My husband is a shift worker, and we say that he must be able to sleep undisturbed by the children during the day. So we have made a very 'unreasonable' request (according to the Council). We have asked to be rehoused in a maisonette or a flat in which he can get some sleep during the day. We maintain that for the well-being of our family, we must insist on this.

Does anyone on the Council know how unbearable it is to control housebound children on a rainy day, with Dad trying to sleep? I know, and I don't see why I should have to be tense and nervous every time they laugh or bang their toys. Working class children lose out on enough things. How many of them are fortunate enough to have a room of their own where they can read or follow their hobbies? I don't want my children to be stifled. We have a right to a decent home with recognition of our special needs. I think that shift workers and their families (and other categories of workers too) warrant special consideration when being rehoused.

### Homeless

We are still classed as 'homeless', after five years in this 'temporary' home! And we have discovered that, as such, we cannot be offered new or modern accommodation because we are in a 'special category'. When I asked the Council about this, the only reply I got was, 'Come now, you must understand that there *has* to be special categories'. No reason why!

So we have been rehoused in dreadful rooms, repaired them, tried to be patient, hoping that if we proved ourselves 'good' tenants, we might just be lucky and get decently rehoused. But at the end of it, all we are eligible for is two old flats, both completely unsuitable.

Alternatively our 'final offer' (in the words of yet another official) was a place on the Thamesmead Estate, outside London, at an approximate rent of £52.90 a month, with the prospect of ever-rising rents. We refused this. Imagine my dismay when I was told that I was to be given another offer on the Thamesmead Estate and if I turned that down I 'couldn't ever expect to be offered anything like this again'.

### Unreasonable

My last encounter with the bureaucracy was most interesting. It was basically the 'hard sell' to get us out of London—something happening to more and more working class families. Every other sentence uttered by the official tried to persuade me how lucky I was to be offered a home on Thamesmead, and then came a long lecture on why we should 'co-operate'. I asked, quite logically, why, if they were prepared to offer us (even in our special category) new property on Thamesmead, we couldn't be allowed something similar in this area. I was told in no uncertain terms, 'That's different. We need people to move out to Thamesmead'.

My husband received a phone call from the Housing Department one day and was more or less told that his wife should try to be reasonable. When I rang back in answer to this I was told that if I continued in my attitude, we could be evicted!

With this sort of response from the Councils and the Tories' terrible rent proposals, council tenants simply cannot allow themselves to be pushed around by arrogant officials. Tenants are now seeing, through bitter personal experience, that there is only one way to defeat this unfair treatment—we have to unite and fight within Tenants Organisations.

### Profitable

We must not allow Tory big business to represent us. In London decent homes at fair rents are not available for working class families for one very simple reason. It is more profitable to build office blocks and high-rent housing for the rich.

A united strong organisation of tenants will be able to fight for a fair system of housing. We have a very straightforward demand—decent homes that we can afford. Is that really too much to ask?



# Facts of Life

Are women inferior to men? It is obvious that society thinks so. All the rules about equal pay, all the laws against discrimination won't make much difference until there is a revolution in the attitudes of men and women towards the opposite sex and until the facilities for welfare and child-care are provided which will free women to take advantage of their opportunities.

There are a lot of myths about women. 'Women can't make intelligent conversation', 'women love an excuse to dress up'. There is some truth in these sayings. But it isn't because women have to be like this. They are made like it by their upbringing. The emphasis for little girls is to be pretty, not too bright ('too full of herself') and to learn all the tricks that please Daddy and Uncle Fred and Grandad (and which will later help her to get a husband without too much difficulty.)

## Duty

For all the talk of a permissive society, many women are still subservient to their husbands. The man may be kind, the woman may feel reasonably happy, but nevertheless her life is not her own. The dinner must be on the table when he comes home from work. There must always be clean shirts and socks.

Fair enough, some say, if the wife is at home 'doing nothing' all day while the husband is working. But it is not done this way because that is the fairest way to organise things—it is done because *it is a woman's duty to do it*. This is proved by the fact that millions of women who themselves go out to work all day are still expected to have a dinner ready in the evening, and the housework done. There is nothing fair about that.

A woman receives housekeeping money from her husband. But this is not a *wage* for her work in the home. It is to pay for

food, children's clothes, gas, rent. Anything she needs for herself has to be squeezed out of the little that might be left over. Most husbands, if they can afford it, are generous. If the wife wants a new dress all she's got to do is ask. But how would men feel if all they had to do was ask every time they wanted something for themselves?

Then there's the matter of women going out in the evenings without their husbands.

Round to her mother's or her sister's, yes, that's OK. But how many men would be willing to look after the children while the wife went to a political meeting or her trade union?

It isn't necessary to do a full-scale survey. Just looking around friends and relatives shows that women certainly live in a men's world—and they have a very inferior place in it.

## Sacrifice

The housewife cannot see a way out of this. To save her marriage and her sanity, she glorifies her prison. She devotes herself to the home. She sacrifices herself for her children.

**And she makes herself happy in this way.** Everyone knows of the woman who 'only lives for her family'.

But what happens when the family is grown up, when the house has everything it needs—no more cushions to make or appliances to save up for? Middle-aged women often wonder where their lives have gone to. They have given everything for their family, and in the process have had no life themselves.

**It cannot be right that some people exist just to be servants to others. Everyone is entitled to a real life of their own.** That is not to say that women can't enjoy cooking or sewing, of course they can. But this should not be seen as their only reason for being alive.

Some women say they are contented with things as they are. They are not willing to give up the few courtesies they get from men, being paid for when they're taken out, having heavy parcels carried for them and so on. But to put up with being a second-rate person, just to get a few perks, is like staying in a rotten job just because there's a good bonus at Christmas. In the long run, it just is not worth it.

It suits the ruling class very well for men and women to blame each other for the miseries of life, which in fact stem from the inhumanity of the capitalist system.

## Better

Men are treated badly by society too. Self-respect and dignity are stripped away from them at work. It is no wonder that they like to feel they have some authority over their wives and children. But this attitude must be fought. Men should not carry on the same system in their own families. They must try to break it.

And at the same time, women must understand *why* men treat women as inferiors. **Women too should see that the enemy is capitalism, not men.**

Women are fighting for the few rights they do have, and to extend them: the right to work, the right to a good education, the right to free contraception and abortion, if necessary, to enable them to decide when they will have children.

But to fight for 'equality with men' means nothing, unless we also mean that men should have a better life. Women do not want equality with men whose lives are distorted and ruined by tedious jobs and daily aggravations.

We don't only want equality. We want things to be better—for everyone.

**Valerie Clark**

## Women in the street

Don't talk to me about politics  
And all that.

I'm just not interested.

I mean, it's nothing to do with me, is it?

Don't talk to me about Vietnam  
or Ireland.

I don't understand it.

Although I'm sorry for the children, aren't you?

Don't talk to me about Wilson  
or Heath.

They're all the same to me.

You've just got to put up with it, haven't you?

I tell you what, though.

If housewives went on strike tomorrow  
That'd bring the country to a standstill.

Something would be done about prices then!



# WHY UNIONS

KATHY TAIT

A smaller proportion of working women than men are in unions. Did you know that, although women are one-third of the labour force in Britain, they are only one-fifth of all trade unionists? There are a multitude of reasons for this (such as the number of women who rapidly change one boring, low-paid job for another to relieve the boredom), but they all boil down to the same thing—women's jobs are seen as less important to the family income than men's. This is often accepted by both men and women and the bosses reap the benefits from it.

Single women suffer from low wages too, but many of them kid themselves that once they are married they can forget about worrying over their own wage-packet. People who want to organise and change things, get all sorts of excuses. 'Only filling in time until we start a family', 'Only working for the holiday', 'Don't want to take home more than my husband', say the women. And the men will say, 'What chance have we got while there's so many women here?' and get away with doing nothing.

## Robbed

All these arguments can—and must—be countered individually, and the advantages of organisation pointed out. The basic argument of women's wages being less important than men's must be beaten. Most women of working age work. Women are one-third of the workforce, and two-thirds of these are married; most of them with children. *Most working class women NEED to work whether they want to or not—they need the money.* On top of this, the majority of workable years are spent actually out at work.

Women make profits for firms just as much as men do but we have been robbed of millions of pounds ever since the days we first got low wages, fewer opportunities and unequal pay for the same work. Cussons, of cosmetic and soap fame, estimate that it will cost them £200,000 a year to implement equal pay. All these thousands of pounds that it will cost employers, only goes to show how much they have been robbing us of in the past.

Arguments about men's and women's jobs are important. But the only answer to low pay and bad conditions for men or women, is *organisation* or, in other words, combining to gain greater control over your own situation. Listen to this extract from 'Woman Worker', a bulletin distributed regularly at the Goodmans factory (see the story 'Equal Pay Victory at Havant').

## Why Everyone Should Be In A Union

Women in jobs where there is no union get lower pay and worse conditions than those in which there is a union. For example, women workers in laundering and catering get an average basic wage of only £8 to £9 for a 40 hour week. Women in Goodmans and other engineering firms can get a basic wage of £13 or more

because unions in the engineering industry are strong. High-paid groups of workers such as dockers and car workers didn't get their wages by luck—they are an organised, militant part of their union and fought to win every penny.

Workers, women or men, can only win their rights by acting together. If one worker goes to the supervisor or manager to demand a rise or complain about unsafe conditions, she is fobbed off or given her cards. Nothing is done by the boss. Workers can win by joint action. Nothing shifts a boss faster than a threat of the factory stopping work, cutting his output and profits. One worker can't stop a factory, but many workers can. If one worker sticks up for her rights, the boss can simply sack her. But if everybody does it, he can't sack the whole factory.

If all the women in Goodmans who are not in the union were to join, it would make it much easier for *everybody* to get better wages and conditions. No-one is going to hand anything to women workers on a plate. *We will only get what we fight for.*

That is the case in a nutshell. However, it has to be admitted that many unions do not always act quickly in the interests of their members. In that case, ordinary trade unionists have to make sure the union is democratically controlled so that it does really represent them. On this point, I want to mention the ideas put forward by one section of the Women's Liberation Movement (see the article on the pamphlet 'Women, the Unions and Work' in WOMAN'S VOICE No. 1). The pamphlet says we should not think that unionisation among women will change anything at all, and that to encourage unionisation is to lead women up the garden path yet again, where control over their situation will be removed from their hands. This kind of attitude is not good enough. Any alternatives to unions are so isolated from the rest of the working class that they have always been smashed. Trade unions are the industrial organisations of the working class. *Not* to unionise means not to organise.

## Recognition

Just before writing this article, I went to a picket line where night cleaners working for Cleanagents Ltd were intent on preventing scab labour entering an enormous government building. They had an important list of demands, yet the one that matters most to them for the future is the demand that *their union is recognised* and has negotiating rights. The employer knows this too. 'Yes, you can have new hoovers and all sorts of things, but no union' was the kind of response he gave. He knows, and they know, that unity is strength, and that is the real issue involved.

*The November issue of WOMAN'S VOICE will have a further article by Kathy Tait on 'Democracy in the Unions'.*



# CONSUMER POWER

Most of us experience that feeling of wretched helplessness as we gape at the ever-rising prices in the shops, and wonder what to cut down on next. Newspapers are always discussing the scandal. Politicians make promises. But the situation never improves. And you? Well, you're vaguely hoping for some economic miracle. But is that *all* we can do?

## Japan

Perhaps we can learn something from the Japanese consumer groups. There are about half a dozen of these groups in Japan, with a total membership of some 15 million women. Last year, they waged a campaign to force large firms to lower their prices, with some remarkable successes.

## TV

In September 1970, one group representing 6 million housewives decided to boycott colour television sets, because they claimed the manufacturers were making excessive profits on them. In December, five other consumer groups singled out one firm as the worst offender and joined the boycott. Within a month, the firm—Matsushita—had begun to drop from its position as the most profitable company in Japan and sales were falling well below target. Then retail prices

began to drop. The consumer protest was the main cause of all this, although there were other business reasons too.

By January, the prices of new colour sets were slashed by up to one-third by Matsushita. Other electrical companies had to follow suit, after the Fair Trades Commission had decided that the consumer groups had a case.

## Boycott

Cheered by this victory, the housewives' associations organised themselves into a boycott of the main cosmetics firm in Japan—Shiseido. They published details of how big firms like this determine their prices. Much publicity was given to facts such as that three-quarters of the price of a jar of cold cream goes to the company for advertising and profits.

At the same time, another consumer group called 'Chifuren', launched their own brand of cosmetics—Chifure—which were sold at way below usual prices. The wide publicity given to the boycott of Shiseido helped to successfully sell Chifure. In fact, initial sales were so great that the women rushing to buy it the first day it was on sale in one large store, made such a great crush that they broke the escalator!

Astonishing successes for Chifure persuaded

many shops to start selling it, and in one day 12p had been knocked off Shiseido's share prices! The tremendous impact of Chifure made it easy to publicise the way big firms fix their prices. The secretary of the housewives group explained the campaign, 'We want to dramatize the inflated prices of major companies by putting our own products on the market and making our costs public. This is important because the big companies won't do it.'

## Effective

If these tactics worked in Japan, they could work here. If women can bring down the price of colour TVs, they could bring down the price of meat. It's quite evident that housewives can be effective if they get together, and that they can expose the rotten business rackets that go on under the name of 'free enterprise'.

But the last I read, plans were being made by the Japanese government to outlaw many of the activities of the consumer group because they were causing such havoc and embarrassment in business circles. It seems that under capitalism you can't win. *They* decide on the game. *They* fix the rules. And if you still look like winning—they change the rules. It's about time we started to make the rules.

**ANNA PACZUSKA**

# EQUAL PAY- VICTORY AT HAVANT

At the beginning of June, AUEW workers at Goodmans Loudspeakers, Havant (near Portsmouth) put in a claim in line with the national engineering pay claim. The majority of workers in the factory were women.

Management refused to negotiate at all, so the union put in for a cost of living rise instead. Management then offered £2 for women, £2.50 for labourers, £2.75 for semi-skilled men and £3 for skilled men. A mass meeting turned down this offer and voted to go on strike to get a flat £3 increase for everyone—*women as well as men*.

After two weeks strike, management finally gave in and agreed to the £3 increase for everyone.

Goodmans is like hundreds of other light engineering factories around the country. Like many factories which employ mainly women, the union was weak and there was no tradition of militancy.

Yet the women and men there dug their heels in and refused to accept what the best organised and most militant factories have always taken for granted. *They challenged the principle of women automatically getting a lower rise than men.* AND THEY WON.

The women at Goodmans are not of course going back to work for equal pay with the men. £3 on the basic rate for everyone still leaves the men with a higher basic wage. But the equal cost of living rise is a big step in the right direction.

Given the prospect of continuing rising prices, rents, etc. and the dodges which employers are using to get out of giving us equal pay, the simple demand that women get paid the same cost of living rise as men could become a very important one. If you think about it, it isn't simply a way of keeping up with men, but another way of catching up.

Women working in Thorn factories in particular should take notice of what has happened at Goodmans. Goodmans is a small part of Thorn Electrical Industries Ltd. Thorn controls the major share of the UK market in lighting, TVs, radios, cookers, fridges and other domestic appliances. It is also a major employer of cheap female labour. Last year, profits were at an all-time record level. If women in other Thorn factories were to follow Goodman's example, things could be different next year!

Below we print an interview with JUNE MARRINER, one of the shop stewards at Goodmans, and secretary of the strike committee.

## What caused the strike?

Our basic wage was very low—£13.37 for women. We were fed up with all the other local factories getting more than us and fed up with having to work so hard to earn the bonus to bring us up to a decent wage. Prices were rising sky high and everyone's rent had gone up in April. We'd just had enough.

**In 99 cases out of 100, women are prepared to accept a lower rise**

## than men. Why was it different at Goodmans?

We've got a large proportion of women who have to support themselves, either because they're single, widowed or divorced. We managed to convince the others that we needed the money just as much as the men. After all, the rising cost of living affects women the same as it affects men. The men were marvellous. They supported us even though they'd been offered more than us, and the skilled men had nothing at all to gain for themselves from the strike.

## Did people see the strike as a step towards equal pay?

I think most of the women would want equal pay with men if they were doing the same job as a man. But the trouble is that in Goodmans, men don't do the sort of work we do. I think all the women would argue that we have the right to a decent living wage—regardless of sex. During the strike there was a widespread feeling—among the men as well as the women—that we were not just fighting for the money but fighting for the *principle* that the women were entitled to the same rise as the men.

## Had you had a strike before?

Never. Only a walk-out one afternoon a few months back over management not passing on urgent messages about children.

## How strong was the union?

Before the strike we only had 100 members out of a total workforce of over 600. Nearly all of these were in the old factory where the women were older and had been working at Goodmans for anything from five to eleven years. In the new factory where most of the younger girls worked, we had very few members. After the strike we had 350 members.

## Were the women as militant as the men during the strike?

Yes, definitely. Out of about 350 on strike, we had 223 regular pickets—the majority of whom were women. At the beginning, Ron, our convenor, made a rule that no women were to do the night picket. We got this changed and in fact it turned out to be the women who formed the regular hard core at night.

## Were the women's husbands and families behind them?

There was a bit of trouble in the beginning where a few women's husbands did object to them being out on strike and picketing. But most of them seemed to rally round in the end, bringing up wood for the fire at night and supporting us in general.

## What did you do about the Industrial Relations Act?

IGNORED IT COMPLETELY!

## Did you get any help from other factories?

We received messages of support from several local factories and one sent us a donation. We got in touch with the Thorn Shop Stewards Combine Committee through Fisher Bendix—Goodmans

is a part of the Thorn empire. They promised to help us with blacking if we needed it and sent us a donation. We also received a donation from a Thorn factory in Bradford.

**What do you think the long-term effects of the strike will be?**

The strike has been terrific for the union. People have been able to see what workers can do when we really fight together. When we go back after the holidays we'll be able to confidently set about improving conditions. Management will have to listen to us now. One good thing about the strike is that people have really got to know one another. Before the strike, the two factories were kept separate and we knew very little about each other. Now things are different.

**Do you think that the fuss over Women's Liberation during the past two years has affected the women at Goodmans?**

Definitely. They read about it in the papers and you hear it discussed in the factory all the time. It boosts their morale to hear that women all over the country are fighting for their rights—especially working women like the ones at Fakenham. But working class women are not taken in by the gimmicks. You have to lay it on the line—present them with the facts and leave out the frills. If you lay it on the line they know what you're on about—particularly the older women who've had the experience of a home and family.

Working class women have very hard lives. They've been brought

up to think that housework's women's work—especially the older women. The woman does a hard day's work in a factory—and it is bloody hard work—and goes home and starts on all the cooking and housework while her husband sits with his feet up.

**Why do you think women are less militant than men?**

Women have been brainwashed from when they were children. The idea that women are worth less than men is a kind of slave labour idea that's been passed down the ages. Women's jobs get classed as unskilled labour but many of them are far more skilled than the jobs men do and require very intricate work.

Equal pay is not enough though—women also need equal opportunity. We need to be able to get training and promotion on the same scale as a man. Women are classed as second-rate citizens all the way down the line. But they're gradually waking up.

**Do you think women are getting more militant?**

They're having to. We don't work for pin money any more. With rents and prices rising and all the other things, women today have got to get a decent wage to keep the home running.

If women were more interested in unions and fighting for their rights, they'd stand a better chance of getting equal pay. I think women are frightened of unions because they see what it can do in men's lives and they know it means hardship for them. But once it hits them that the union can really do something for them, women are more militant than anyone.



# LETTERS

There is, in my office, great resentment about wages in general, this being caused almost as much by the many different grades of pay, as by the low rates of pay. It is a privately run concern and as such has no 'minimum rate' as is enjoyed by Local Government offices etc. Many women think that, as they accepted the job on these terms, there isn't much that they can do about it. What argument can one use against this?

The management tell us that we don't need unions—our wages are revised automatically twice yearly. They don't mention, though, that this does not automatically give us a pay rise. Not belonging to a union, we then have to negotiate individually for our pay. Since the introduction of the Industrial Relations Act, the management have put out a circular stating that we can join any union of our own choosing and the women seem to be quite interested. I am sure that if they were approached most of them would join. They are beginning to realise that belonging to a union and all asking for more money together is much better than asking for more money on your own. We are in a very powerful position. For instance, if we were to stop work in our office, the works would come to a halt, and yet, because we are unorganised we continue to work *and* grumble about the wages, but do nothing.

Most women think of themselves as housewives who go out to work. Therefore they do two jobs—one very poorly paid for the majority of us—and one not paid at all. I am sure we all realise this. What can we do about it? I find, in talking to other women at work that they know instinctively that they are working class and exploited and that their husbands are too, but there it ends. They see no overall pattern—that the dockers, the miners, the postmen, etc, are all someone's husband and equally exploited—and therefore women come to the wrong conclusions. These other workers are not,

as they and *their* husbands are, just trying to make a decent way of life for themselves. They are 'ruining the country', 'greedy', 'lazy' or 'Communists'. This sort of thing is helped along very nicely by the press and TV.

Another comment I have to make about women—we are split into groups. There are the working women who think that the women who stay at home just 'mess about all day'. The women who stay at home all day see the women who work as 'career women' who neglect their husbands, family and house. I think, on the whole, that a woman tries to play the role which society has set out for her and it is when this conflicts with what she would really like to do that she starts to feel resentful. There must be more scope, perhaps in the shape of socialist women's groups for this resentment to be channelled along political lines. **Mrs S.W., Huddersfield (name and address supplied)**

I liked the copy of WOMAN'S VOICE. I found most of the articles interesting, but they lead me to ask 'What are you going to do about it?' This really is a problem with a lot of women. We are all agreed there's plenty wrong in the world, but then we close our front door and forget it. You need to give people a lot of facts. I know several girls who say they're socialists, but they have got very conservative views about things like strikes and racial discrimination. Your paper must explain this sort of thing carefully and try to change people's attitudes. I think you have a very hard job, because you will have to change women's *ideas*. But I wish you luck. **Mrs G Lunn, Watford, Herts.**

Dear Editor.

I have recently read the first edition of *Woman's Voice* and was pleased to find that I liked it. Why pleased? Well, what is there for women to read that doesn't pander to the 'How to catch a man and once caught how to keep him' brigade?

The magazine neither talked down to me nor assumed I was a blue-stocking. I gave up reading 'books for women' years ago. I reckon they do more harm to the cause of Socialism than 100 years of the *Financial Times*. But there is nothing else on sale at bookstalls throughout the country for women than the old tripe, which is where I come to the point of this letter. **WHY ISN'T THERE?** The Socialist movement isn't new. So why hasn't more been done to educate women to the fact that they are hideously exploited under capitalism, that those of us who need to work, either in the home or if fortunate, outside it, are continually patronised and underpaid (noticed what the pay is in supermarkets, where women lug heavy boxes about because they are too damn mean to employ men to do the lugging?) My local supermarket, advertising for shelf fillers and checkers out, boasts 'upwards to £15 per week'. The women work long hours and one of them told me they were refused stools to sit on at the check out because they would cost too much! Another local firm I applied to for a shorthand typist's part-time job was asking for two typists, one from 9 to 12 and one from 1 to 5. Each woman would be paid £7.50. £15 a week for full time shorthand typing facilities, whereas if they had taken on a fulltimer they would have had to pay her £18 at least. Nice going. Most of us put up with it because we have to work so it's no use being proud about it. Take what is offered, and hang on to it because it's not so easy to get another, not for part-timers. And how is anyone going to get all these women to join Unions when they know that they are likely to get the push if they make a fuss at their place of work. I just

happened to buy a Socialist Worker one day out of curiosity—before that I didn't even know it existed. Likewise Woman's Voice, because I went to a meeting and it was on sale. How on earth can anything be done for all these women if they are not aware of their rights, or that anyone wants to help? What we need is something to draw their attention—demos, publicity, anything, that does not blab on about sexual freedom when it is economic freedom they really need. Get the message over to many more than a select few. I don't know how you do it, I don't have the brains to work it out.

But I know that employers have been making huge profits out of the sweat of women for too long. I have done homework and had to plead for my money over the telephone and then get paid short. And that was from someone who was handling massive contracts for big firms for envelope typing and filling. My typewriter, my house, being rung up or called on any time of day or evening, for the princely sums of anything between 2/- and 4/- per hour!

Tried being a temporary typist? The agencies make a huge profit out of temporaries, mess them about, try to make them work longer hours than they really want, and even get the money wrong at the end of the week. Sorry to have been so long-winded. Looking forward to your next issue, Yours faithfully, **Sylvia A Larking (Mrs.), 17 Edward Road, Hampton Hill, Middlesex.** (Not a member of I.S.—more a sympathiser!)

P.S. Personal experience. I am lucky enough to have found a part time job reasonably locally. They give rises around Easter annually. I got £1 rise and was pleased. However, owing to the fact that my direct superior had used his initiative in hiring me, the Big Boss discovered I was getting more money than the morning typist. I was told I would have to work an extra half hour to make up the difference which had occurred because of an oversight. This was when I had already had the rise for two weeks. I refused, and the £1 was taken away, in spite of my own boss saying that I did a darn sight more work than the morning lady anyway. I put up with it because I didn't know what else to do. My husband was furious and said I should have refused both to work more or take less, in which case I would have been out on my ear. Needless to say, I am now looking around for another job because I was too outspoken at the time and haven't been allowed to forget it.

# EQUAL PAY

*from front cover*

The Equal Pay Act comes into effect at the end of 1975; by the end of next year the government could insist that women were earning at least 90 per cent of men's rates.

And yet whilst the Tory minister says in public, in the House of Commons, that he will shortly be taking steps to remind the employers of their obligations under the Act, he says privately in the talks with the TUC representatives and the Confederation of British Industry (the employers' union): 'I foresee immense inflationary problems if I were to implement the discretionary powers under the Equal Pay Act and impose a compulsory target of 90 per cent of male earnings for female workers by the end of 1973.'

This is the crux of the matter—we want what is rightly ours, but the government and the employers will not give it to us because it is going to cost them. They are only interested in profits, and one of the best ways of making a profit is by paying workers (and particularly women workers) short, and keeping the rest. Figures show that in the year up to May 1972, the average gap between the lowest women's rates and the lowest men's rates narrowed by 2.4 per cent in the national agreements.

At this rate, it will take ten years to get equal pay.

If steps are not taken now to bring women's earnings up to the level of men's the jump will have to be so great in 1975/6 that no employer will entertain the thought. 'Too inflationary' will be their cry.

But don't presume that just because there is an Act that the employers will be compelled by law to do anything. On the contrary, there are no legal sanctions in the Act, no penalties—fines or jail sentences—for employers who refuse to pay. Section 2 of the Act, which refers to 'disputes and enforcement' says nothing about this. The only allowance that is made is that a woman can claim up to but no more than two years in arrears in pay, if it is proven that she has been unfairly discriminated against.

This claim has to be made through an Industrial Court—that is, the courts set up under the Industrial Relations Act. In other words, only those unions who are prepared to co-operate with that Act will be able to have any come-back under the terms of the Equal Pay Act. So, the only real alternative is for women workers to push the unions to fight now—but will they? In these talks with the government and employers were the leaders of all the big unions—Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon included. Yet they have made no public statements on the real facts of these talks: they have made no declaration to fight, yet they must know that is the only way to win.

We have to make them fight—to organise the unorganised women, who don't stand a chance under the terms of the Act; to demand equal pay where we think it should be paid, and not just for what can be proved as the 'same' work; to demand equal pay now, as our right, and not when it suits the employers.

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