

WOMEN'S VOICE

Number 10
5p

SMALL SLICE FOR WOMEN

THANK GOODNESS we've got rid of the Tories! That must be the feeling of most of us who've been getting more and more worried about rising rents and prices, cuts in education and welfare—and no signs of Equal Pay, or a real end to discrimination against women. So now

we've got a Labour Government pledged to keep prices and rents down, and to improve the pay and status of women. . . Can we now really hope for these things?

RENTS 1974 rent rise cancelled, a direct result of tenants' rent strikes and demonstrations against the 'Fair Rent' Act.

BUT many tenants already pay sky-high rents, and others have to claim rebates.

*Rents should be reduced to 1971 level—before the 'Fair Rent' Act.

FOOD PRICES Subsidies on food—But who pays? We do, through taxation. Rich and poor get subsidised food. Food prices are expected to rise by 15 per cent at least in the coming months—food subsidies won't be noticed.

Profit margins to be kept down to 10 per cent—but only for big

retailers. Supermarkets can cut prices on one or two items to lure us into the shop to spend more on other items!

*Food prices should be frozen completely.

BUDGET. 'A Fair And Equal Budget.'—**BUT** Family Allowances? Denis Healey said 'We are pledged to improve the present position for children, but this must wait till a later budget.' Electricity?—up 30 per cent. Also up, cigarettes, petrol, children's sweets. The budget was an *attack* on working people, and will increase the strain on women. The average wage earner will be £1.23 a week worse off because of the budget.

EQUAL PAY. Nothing, but nothing has been said! With Stage Three it is impossible to achieve Equal Pay by 1975. Barbara Castle, who drew up the bill in 1969 has made no statement about how inadequate the Act

has proved, or the need to strengthen it and remove loopholes.

*We want Equal Pay for work of equal value with no management job evaluation, and stiff penalties for non implementation.

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION. There will be new proposals. The Tory proposals, which included women working shifts and nights by removing the protection of the Factory Acts, have been scrapped.

Sadly, the prospects for an end to discrimination against women under Labour are gloomy. Already, after only a couple of months of Labour government, Roy Jenkins has ruled that women who are living in Britain and want to stay here must live apart from their husbands, if their husbands are foreign.

BUT . . . MEN living in Britain can be joined by their

foreign wives. This spells misery to hundreds of women and children all over Britain who have been fighting the Tory government in an effort to bring their families together. So in fact Labour and Tory both see wives as similar to a man's luggage.

*We need an Anti-Discrimination Act with no worsening of conditions, covering *all* areas where women are discriminated against—not just at work—and with an effective system of enforcement.

FIGHT ON. Quite obviously women can expect no improvement in the next few years, either in our household bills, our pay packets or our status in society. Instead things could easily get worse! We mustn't drop the fight just because the Labour government is pretending to put a bit of icing on the cake. Our slice will be as small as ever.



THE NATIONAL CAKE WILL BE CUT MORE FAIRLY



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LADY PACKERS required by Central Manchester firm. Light work, clean conditions. pay £14 per week, 5-day week, 8.30 to 4.30 pm. Tel 256 7255.

Gillian Ann Haynes-Wass, 27, of Church Drive, Shirebrook, was fined £5 with £5 costs by Mansfield magistrates yesterday for stealing a gas fire worth £38.75.

The case had been adjourned for reports. At the earlier hearing she told the court her husband was in prison at the time. She had committed the offence to get money for food for her five children.

Overlooking Hills Double-Fronted accommodation comprises 6 bedrooms, fine dressing rooms, en suite heating, entrance laundry room, Delightful terraced rural garden. Double agents. £185,000. Specially recommended by the

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WOMEN FOR RIBBON. Must be reliable and experienced workers. Hours 8.50-5 pm.

FIVE-DAY WEEK Commencing wage £21 PER WEEK

The low paid in our country are mainly the women and girls. In April 1972 55.7 per cent of full-time women workers were getting less than 50p an hour, but only 8.9 per cent of the men earned less than this.

LADIES We require an experienced hand to work from own home, doing jacket and minor alterations. For information contact John Nicolson, Burton Menswear, Tel: Harlow 3121, 9 am to 4 pm.

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ASSISTANT COOK Pay: £18-£19 per week

RESTAURANT WAITRESS £16.50 per week at aged 20

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red for light production and packing. Choice on 8 a.m.—10 p.m. plus piecework. — James, 226-7221.

When you should put your wife on the board 400 ways to exploit your property assets

More and more home seekers are turning to the Mediterranean sunshine and warm seas for their second homes in the sun—prices are reasonable, and the prospects of capital appreciation are so good.

Profit before Tax Properties for Sale and Investment

1970	1971	1972	1973
1,372	781	660	400

WOMEN'S VOICE Properties for Sale and Investment

JEAN FIGHTS ON!

THE sacking of Jean Jepson, convenor of Armstrongs Patents, Beverley, clearly showed how the three day week was designed to discipline workers and isolate militants. Jean was sacked in January after refusing to suspend the agreement guaranteeing 40 hours' pay. Armstrongs' workers in York had already been blackmailed into signing away this crucial agreement with threats of redundancy. In its place they were offered 32 hours' pay for three ten hour shifts. Shop stewards in York had shown in fact that the firm were getting virtually normal production while paying out 20 per cent less.

Asked to leave

Under instructions from the TGWU Jean refused to take this step and stood by the 40 hour agreement. She was immediately summoned to the manager's office and asked to leave the factory. Immediately 130 workers, mostly women, followed her but having achieved an aim which they had been aiming at for a long time, management were not going to give in easily. From here the story is one of management using every nasty trick in the book and union officials backsliding and sabotaging every effort to get Jean reinstated.

Sob story

Management's first move was to commence broadcasts over the tannoy system threatening and cajoling workers not to attend a meeting with Jean at the factory gate. 'Please be loyal to your firm and your pockets. Disregard your union', pleaded the personnel manager Clive Hillwood. Unfortunately, the majority of workers fell for this sob story and only 80 people stayed outside on the second day.

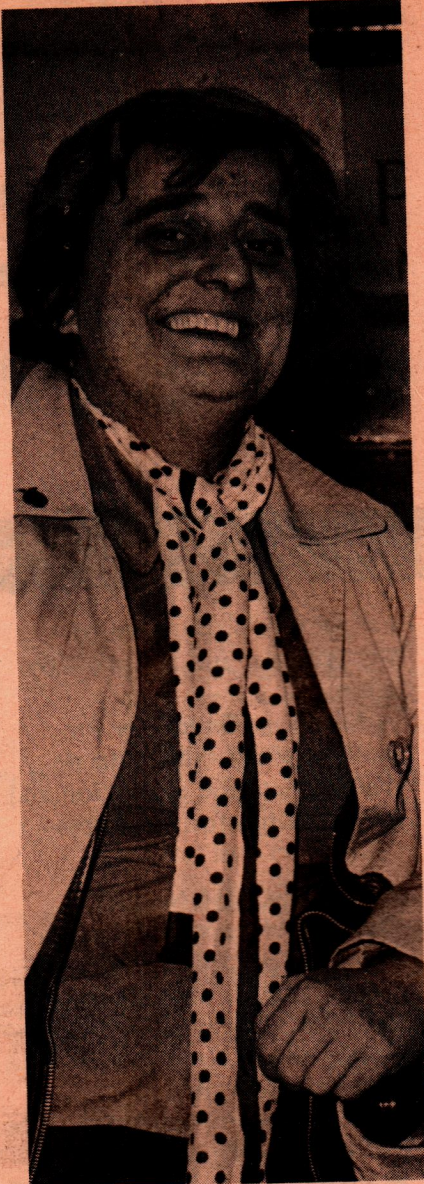
Kangaroo court

The union's answer to this attack was, to say the least, very feeble. Jean was recommended to go to a Department of Employment Tribunal to plead her case and hope justice would be done. This Tribunal turned out to be a real Kangaroo Court consisting of four management representatives, two shop stewards, who had been briefed by management for two hours and actually carrying Armstrongs briefcases, and two workers nominated by Jean. Needless to say, the vote six to two against Jean and her dismissal was upheld. Immediately after the Tribunal T&G officer Les Upfold said 'I am disgusted with this decision. I cannot have this'.

About face

Astonishingly the next day he did a complete about face and recommended a complete return to work. Many workers quit in disgust and those who did return could see immediately that management would not throw away their new found power. They were warned that one false move meant the sack, and were refused their old jobs.

Five workers walked out immediately and twenty more followed in the next week.



80 suspended

It was now quite clear that the inactivity of the union was causing Jean's support inside the factory to fragment and slowly be wittled away. The union's next move was much nearer to actual sabotage when they began, with Armstrong's assistance, organising new elections for shop stewards and a convenor. At this point Jean called a factory gate meeting just before the elections and during work's time. This was obviously a bad move but one for which Jean was not solely responsible. It resulted in the 80 people who came out to the meeting being suspended for three days, many of them not returning and the virtual end of Jean's support inside the factory.

Secret dossier

The reason for the about face by T&G seems on the face of things quite astounding but Jean puts forward two plausible explanations. The first is the fact that there is, at present a vacancy for the Regional Organiser and Les Upfold had applied for the job. Obviously, therefore, he wants to keep his nose clean, and a long and bitter dispute would not have helped this. The second part of the explanation involves a secret dossier drawn up about Jean by Armstrong's management. Jean has seen this file and says it makes vicious personal accusations against her and also mentions the name of a union official.

Blacking

Jean is continuing her struggle and still has a trump card, the blacking imposed by Hull dockers upon Armstrongs goods. On 20 March after two months outside the gate the regional committee of the T&G under pressure from the dockers, changed their line and now insist that the black will not be raised until Jean is reinstated as a worker. Clearly this represents a change for the better by the T&G but it is obviously too little, two months too late.

Please send collections, letters and messages of support to: Jean Jepson, 39 St Hilda Street, Bridlington, Yorkshire.

JEAN WRITES

Dear Women's Voice,

Thank you for sending me the copy of your magazine. I showed it to a lot of my friends and they were keen to know where they could get a copy as the articles were of great interest to them.

I am enclosing a few collection forms with part of the story in detail, so if you could manage to distribute them for me I would be most grateful.

The dockers are one hundred per cent behind us in our fight for reinstatement and are blacking all Armstrongs products and are in the process of extending the blacking

to the car industry.

The trade union Regional Committee held an inquiry into my case. They agreed to abide by the decision of their meeting, and the meeting voted in my favour unanimously.

We have organised an action committee in Hull comprising various left-wing groups and trade unions and I am willing to speak to any meetings in the country that can be arranged in order to extend my fight and tell the workers what this case means to all trade unionists.

We are winning the fight—it will take time to accomplish complete victory but we will win as long as truth and honesty prevail.

Yours fraternally,
J Jepson

French workers hold up bank

FOR NEARLY two months now French business has been hard hit by major strikes of bank workers. At the centre of the strike-wave is the big Credit Lyonnais bank in Paris where the main office was occupied by the strikers for a week until the police brought in a bulldozer to smash in one of the doors. But the strikers weren't discouraged. 'We left holding our heads high, led by the strike committee banner and singing the 'Internationale'.

A key figure in the strike has been Arlette Laguiller a leading member of one of the unions in the bank. Last year Arlette represented her revolutionary socialist group 'Lutte Ouvriere' (Workers' Struggle) on television during the elections and there is now talk of putting her up as a revolutionary candidate in France's coming election for a new President. She and her comrades were instrumental in getting the strike run by a democratically-elected strike committee responsible to daily mass meetings—thus involving the mass of workers in the struggle.

One building remained occupied and served as the headquarters for the strike committee. A creche was set up and women occupiers brought their kids in with them. And they've had support from outside too. 'Lots of people in the area have shown their support for the strikers. One evening an old lady came and brought us sandwiches and bottles of beer, "I'd have liked to give you something better", she told us, "but I haven't any

more money." Often people living in the area come to give us money.'

'A few days ago the people on picket duty saw a passer-by stop by the gate and pull a 50 Franc note (£5) out of his wallet. "It's for the strikers," he told us. And then it's a hairdresser who offers us free haircuts or the cafe owner who gives us bottles of wine.'

The strike has had its funny moments, too. At one meeting with the unions, the management complained that strikers had... dropped cigarette ends on the carpet in the bosses' office. 'That afternoon, when the strikers went up to the management's office... the main slogan was, "We're coming to dirty your carpet." On another occasion the management was so anxious to keep out the strikers that it locked the doors with customers inside. 'We were interested to see how far they'd go to avoid meeting us... we started chanting "Free the customers". The management has shown that it prefers locking in the clients and risking losing their custom rather than taking the risk of meeting us.'

The police have been quite prepared to use violence beating up men and women during demonstrations outside the bank.

Last week in the early hours of the morning the police moved to kick the workers out of the last building they occupied. The strikers had held it for 33 days.

But the strikers are in good spirits. 'We are more determined than ever to carry on the strike until we win all our demands.'

R.K.



The Occupation

They said we wanted jam on it

IF YOU live in Birmingham you might have seen the headlines about our sit-in at J Lucas (King Street), and on 'Midlands Today'. We—that is the production workers, about 2000 in all and mostly women—sat in for three days. Friday March 22 and the following Monday and Tuesday we sat in to protest at being laid off. The reasons for the lay-off, briefly, are that the setters in the Lucas combine were in dispute, and when the King Street setters were on strike on Thursday the management came down and told the women they were being laid off. Just like that!

You can imagine that feeling run high—the three day week has already made life difficult enough for all of us—the management just expected us to pack our bags and trot home with an empty wage packet. We held a mass meeting and decided to sit-in, demanding lay-off pay and pledging support for the setters. Came Friday! We really gave the company a fright! They've always been used to pushing the women around, so didn't expect us to fight.



However the rest of the story isn't so brilliant. Monday and Tuesday proved to be a farce. To be honest, I'm ashamed to have to write about it, except that I feel that the lessons to be learnt from our sit-in are important for women throughout the country. Monday and Tuesday were a sell-out. The women voted to accept £6.25 for Friday, but not a penny for Monday or Tuesday. To expect more was being greedy—as someone put it: 'What do you expect, Bloody jam on it!'

But Joseph Lucas isn't going to feel the pinch, it's us who lost two days pay and most of us sat in from eight till five on Monday and Tuesday.

How Did This Come About?

There were about eight people on the negotiating committee discussing our demands for lay-off pay. Only one was a production worker, the rest were from the skilled groups. Their decision was brought back to the joint shop stewards committee, again mostly made up of skilled workers. The decision that the production workers should be satisfied with pay for only one day was therefore made in consultation with only one production worker.



The union at King Street, as at most places, has never really tried to involve the women. We've only been used like sheep at mass meetings. I think we gave the senior stewards a fright. If we had had better organisation at King Street, and decent stewards from among the women (there are very few women shop stewards even though we are over half the work force) the story would have been very different.

Even so its quite a break through at our place as we've actually shaken things up. It's the first time anyone's got lay-off pay for an internal dispute.

Throughout the country workers are going to be facing redundancies and lay-offs, and the spontaneous actions by the women at King Street has set an example for the future. A woman worker!

OUR BODIES, THEIR LAWS

Pat Blake
Southampton

BRITAIN

IN APRIL, the Lane Committee at last reported on the working of the Abortion Act. It stated that 'on the whole the Act is working well'. It is obvious that this is not true for thousands of working class women, one of whose experiences is described below.

People who believe that the recent changes in the Abortion Law provide for easy and socially acceptable abortion should take the time and trouble to see what the system can still do to the individual woman. Working class women find getting an abortion difficult. The middle and upper classes don't have these problems.

Abortion is a Class Issue
Working class women have to fight for birth control. It is only in recent years that we haven't been encouraged to reproduce dutifully to increase the 'labour force'. Thus we have upbringing and conditioning to shake free from before we can rid ourselves of irrational guilt complexes.

Unlike the ruling class the working woman has to rely on the National Health system, which is anyway ruptured and under attack from the government. It's instructive to see how this system plays on our feelings of guilt.

One Woman's Fight
The following is the experience of one woman on the council estate where I live in Southampton.

She was still recovering from an abortion when we met and I couldn't understand why she was so ill. Apparently, when she was eight weeks pregnant she was sent to a specialist. She was and is a diabetic and has already had three children—each of these three previous pregnancies was difficult and with each one she spent long periods in hospital. After the third baby she suffered a nervous breakdown from which she was beginning to recover when she found she was pregnant again.

The gynaecologist told her that

her medical grounds were not strong enough for an abortion and that she would have to see a psychiatrist. A week later she went to the Medical Health Centre for her appointment. After closely questioning her for an hour the psychiatrist told her that she might have grounds but he would have to consult with the gynaecologist.

Ten days later she had a further appointment. The doctor told her that as she was now over the third month safety limit he would do the abortion only on condition that she agreed to sterilization. She agreed only reluctantly because she and her husband were devout Catholics and were upset by having to break their religious laws. She waited, the time dragged by. When she was 4½ months pregnant, she got a letter from the hospital telling her to be there in a fortnight. The next fourteen days were hell, the baby had started to move, she was torn two ways—should she risk her health—or go on with the abortion?

Insensitive and Callous Treatment in Hospital.

The day came for her admittance into hospital. The next morning was theatre day. She and her husband had forms to sign, pressure was put on her from the nursing staff and the young doctors. She told me that the worst part was that the young girl in the next bed was fighting hard to save her baby, it was very cruel to subject them both to this.

The next day arrived and she was operated on. When she came round she was in agony. The Nursing Sister told her not to be silly and that she was getting what she asked for. A few days later when the effects of pain-killing drugs had worn off, she found she had a twelve inch wound in her abdomen.

A few weeks later in her home she started to haemorrhage. After being rushed into hospital and examined it was explained that the abortion had made a mess of the lining of her womb which was so badly damaged that a further operation was essential. This last operation was a major one and she is still recovering from it.

This is just one case. I personally know of seven similar cases. A friend

who works in the hospital concerned told me that this is quite common, she estimated that 80 per cent of married women who have abortions go through similar experiences.

Why we Must Fight for Abortion on Demand.

A young married couple I interviewed told me that they agree with abortion but only in certain situations, a) That the baby is unwanted; b) That the mother was a victim of rape; c) There are medical grounds (mental or physical); d) The pregnancy must be confirmed (they were worried about the USA suction device); e) The abortion must be by the safest and quickest method.

These views are common amongst young people, however, the more conditions you put on abortions the more power we give to the medical mafia who think they can moralize about our lives.

Working class women will never get a fair deal on abortion or anything else under capitalism. It is our task to fight for safe and easy abortion for all women as part of the struggle for socialism.

FRANCE

IN THE last year, hundreds of French women and men, including several hundred doctors, have deliberately invited prosecution in a campaign of public defiance of France's reactionary abortion laws. France's laws on abortion and contraception are among the most backward in the world. It has only been since last year that contraceptives could be publicised or contraceptive advice services set up on a wide scale.

Before that contraception was governed by the same '1920 laws' which more-or-less completely banned abortion. One of the main reasons for this law was to expand the French population to strengthen it militarily after the First World War. There are still people on the Right who use this argument, sometimes adding that they wish to 'outbreed' the immigrants who have come into France since the last war.

But in the last few years a massive campaign has developed. The first blow was a declaration signed by 343 prominent women in literature, journalism and showbusiness who declared that they had had abortions.



This was followed by a public, signed declaration by over 300 doctors that they had carried out abortions. Last year a woman doctor was arrested in Grenoble for procuring an abortion. Massive protests forced the authorities to retreat. At about the same time the Movement for Freedom of Abortion and Contraception (MLAC) was formed by women campaigners backed by all the groups on the revolutionary left.

The official left was very slow to take up the issue. France's biggest left-wing party, the Communist Party which gets nearly a quarter of the votes and seats in elections was at first for abortion only on specific grounds and narrowly under the control of a special committee. Now the normally more right-wing Socialist Party has come up with a proposal which goes most of the way to meeting the demands of the MLAC for abortion on demand covered by the French equivalent of the National Health. But given a conservative majority in parliament the reform which will go through will probably be much more limited.

Of course it has been mainly working-class women who were hit by the law. The rich could easily afford the trip to Holland, Britain or somewhere else.

The MLAC campaign has been dynamic and daring. It has organised advice centres with subsidised travel to Holland and clinics where 'illegal' abortions are carried out with the help of sympathetic doctors (in Besancon, Eastern France, for instance, MLAC has organised 400 abortions).

The defiance of the law has been so widespread that the authorities could do nothing. When a film on abortion 'Stories of A' was banned, the MLAC simply carried on showing it and the police, after a few attempts, gave up trying to stop it.

Yet contraceptive publicity is still barely tolerated and abortion remains illegal. As parliament moves towards a decision on reform, the MLAC is mounting a major campaign of meetings and demonstrations. They are determined to win 'the right for women to control their own bodies'.
RK



'MAC' THE WOMEN'S FRIEND

Maggie Black
Coventry

I WORK at a very small, very tight-fisted firm called Rutter Tools. This firm was started off by a very nice, very tight-fisted gentleman—namely Mr Rutter. Unfortunately Mr Rutter died, and the firm was taken over by another nice gentleman—Mr McCall.

Mr McCall is kind to all the women who work for him, bringing them perfume when he travels abroad, giving them chocolates at Christmas—he also pays them half the wages he pays the men and is forcing them to work a 12 hour day.

Mr McCall, or Mac to his friends, sold out the company to a massive group—Dobson Parkes—which in turn belongs to an enormous American firm. As we all know, American firms are notorious for their non-union policies. There were only three people, all women, in the union at Rutter Tools—there are now only two, one of them got the sack. Why? She wrote to the Coventry Evening Telegraph telling them of the appalling hours she was being forced to work. The Coventry Evening Telegraph immediately 'phoned 'Mac' giving him the woman's name. (Who says the press isn't the Tory's mouthpiece!)

People at Rutter Tools are discouraged from joining a union but are granted an 'audience' with the management at the Joint Consultative Committee which consists of two men and two women from the factory and one man and one woman from the office. There are 14 people on the JCC, the other eight are management! Items brought up at the last JCC consisted of the hard 'loo paper, and the fact that the bells on the telephones are too loud. However, management has an ingenious method of putting down any militant proposals. On the bottom of every agenda is stated 'Any matter on which a decision has not been reached by the end of a JCC will be discussed by the management who will then announce their decision.'

Rutter Tools is typical of many small firms up and down the country all employing mainly women—giving the women a false sense of security with gestures like remembering all their names—anything rather than give them more money.

Women must not let these paternal attitudes fool them. They must fight to organise within firms like Rutter Tools everywhere.

What's wrong with OUR children

'WHEN we saw it on the news I thought, "I hope it doesn't happen to our children because what are we going to do about their education".' Ann Spike

'I GET the needle about this part-time schooling because at public schools they don't have none of that nonsense—their kids have got all the chances. Our kids are at a disadvantage to start with and to get anywhere they have got to fight every step of the way. Ordinary people haven't got the money, and the public schools have got the money to pay the teachers. That gives me the needle.' Shirley Waddington

These are the views of mothers of two schoolchildren in Hackney in the East End of London, talking about the staffing crisis in London schools. Like most parents they are angry about the part-time schooling in secondary schools, and the classes being sent home from primary schools.

What the hell is going on?

THE TORY government set about a deliberate cut-back on educational spending, they refused to allow the teachers a decent pay rise, only offering them about 35p a week extra on their London allowance. No wonder that in Hackney Borough alone over 200 teachers left last year. And no wonder that already in London, 664 teachers have

handed in their notice for the end of the year. Many will not be replaced. Teachers give as their main reason for leaving low salary, and housing problems as a second reason. Faced with the worsening situation of staff shortages, the teachers' union, the NUT, instructed its members to 'refuse any longer to paper over the cracks'—to refuse to take on double burdens by filling in for teachers who had not been appointed, and to refuse to cover for teachers' absences of more than three days if a supply teacher was not provided. It is this action by the teachers to defend their conditions in schools that has led to children being sent home.

Were just told to work out of a book

IT'S NOT just that children miss whole chunks of school time. Take Adrian and Christine, two 15-year-old 4th form pupils at Latton Bush Comprehensive School in Harlow, Essex. At Latton Bush, as in most of Harlow's seven large, modern comprehensive schools, some pupils are sent home early, one afternoon a week; and others are short of specialist teachers in certain subjects. 'We've had no biology teacher since Xmas,' explained Adrian—'and we didn't even choose

biology,' added Christine—'we wanted to study Rural Science but were told there was no teacher for us—now there's no biology teacher either.' 'What happens is that other teachers take us, we've had two English teachers and a PE teacher. We don't learn anything—we're just told to work out of a book. It gets so boring, doing the same work lesson after lesson, now nobody really does anything.' 'We're supposed to take a CSE exam in the subject next year, and it's too late to change to another subject now.'

When asked what would happen if the situation didn't improve, Adrian said that boredom would 'set in' and they wouldn't want to work in other lessons either.

'It's dreadful for the younger kids being sent home—they're missing important lessons and their whole education will suffer.'

In many primary schools the effects are no less disastrous.

It will take years to catch up

'Where the children are struggling to learn to read and write and are getting all these set-backs it's going to take them years to catch up... Where you double up classes, what chance have you got of treating any child as an individual and knowing what their little needs are—you haven't got a chance.' Shirley Waddington. 'When Steven got sent home it started opening my eyes and when he got sent into another class when his teacher was away. The teacher doesn't know that child's little ways and the child doesn't know that teacher's ways. So he'd go off into a corner into a world of his own. I'd meet him from school and I'd say, "Didn't you read your book?" and he'd say, "The teacher didn't know where I was." For three weeks he hardly had a reading book in his hand. The class was all split up in different parts—all their friends all split up—I don't think that's fair. The child is getting set back. He was on the same reading book for three weeks, and he'd come home upset—he said, "I want a new book"—how can you explain to a child of five or six that he has to wait for his teacher to come back? And when the headmistress takes the class, often she has to leave the class because she's wanted elsewhere

and they have to get on on their own—then they get into mischief and get shouted at and punished—it's not the child's fault or the teacher's fault, it's the Education Board's... If there's a teacher away the head should be able to pick up the phone and say 'Miss So and So's away, so please send Miss X', but they can't do that any more. I'd like the education officers to come down and try to teach these children and give the teachers a break.' Mrs Spike.

Who's fault?

THE PARENTS at one London school certainly don't blame the teachers! Mrs Ann Spike is one of the leaders of a parents' action committee at her child's school. Mrs Spike is very clear why she is fighting for the teachers. 'We want the best for our children—if the teachers got a better chance our children would get a better chance too.'

Mrs Spike and some other mothers at Princess May infants school in Hackney got together and took a petition round all the other parents:

'We the undersigned are strongly protesting about pay and conditions of our teachers, as our children's education is at stake. We feel that better pay and working conditions would attract more people into the profession and our children would have the correct education which is their birthright.'

311 parents signed, out of less than 350 at the school, and a parents' action committee was set up at a school meeting. Now mothers and fathers are taking petitions all over the area, to shops, workplaces, etc. . . . Links have been made with parents and teachers at other schools, a deputation has been to the Education Office, and a demonstration through the streets is planned for next term. The teachers are delighted by the support. It's easy for parents to turn against teachers when their kids are being sent home during school hours. But as Mrs Spike said,

'The way to get strong protest and support from mothers is to send children home—then they will start to think when their child is on their doorstep. Then a mother knows she will have to do something, because what is she going to do about going to work, about finding her wages? Mothers

will have to support the teachers, come to the meetings and fight for the children's education. Unfortunately I fear that when it all boils down to it, the government won't want to know.'

What's wrong with our children?

MRS SPIKE has no illusions about what sort of deal working class children get. The latest petition has a sentence that reads, 'Why should a child from Richmond stand 9 times more chance of going to university than a child from Hackney?' In school buildings, class sizes, staff ratios, equipment, playing fields and other facilities, schools in working-class areas are much worse off than in well-to-do places. Shirley Waddington who has three children at school in Hackney and took part in a campaign to prevent the closure of Edith Cavell school explained, 'In the war when I was at school it was terrible, with 40-odd children in each classroom. After the war the government said, just let us get ourselves straight, and after that we'll be back to smaller classes with 20 odd.'

What's happened to all their promises?

WHAT INDEED? Yet the Edith Cavell school was threatened with

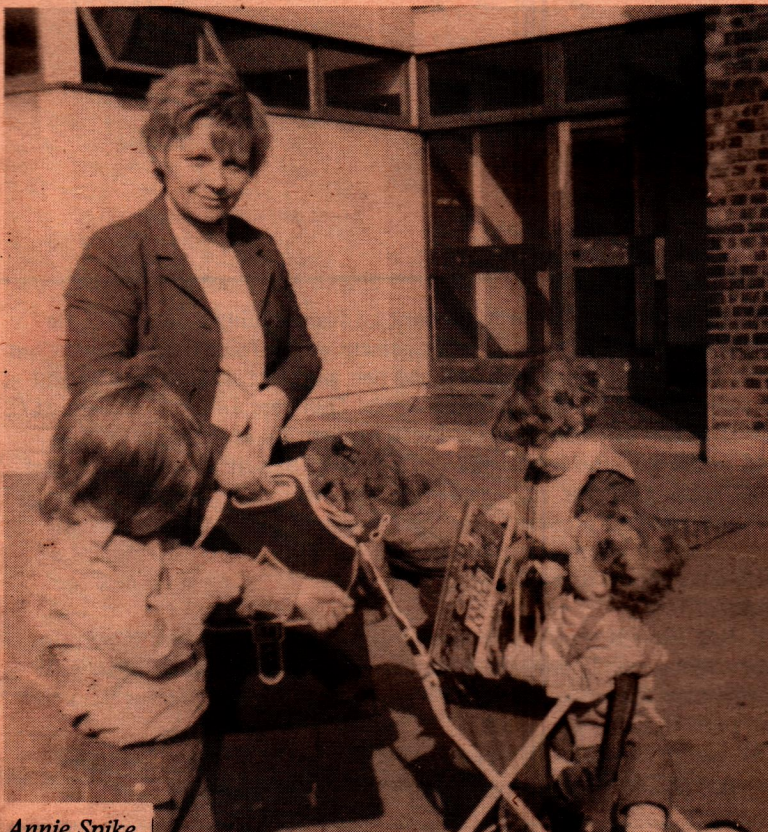
closure because in South Hackney under 30 were under 30 were 1980s. But at ILEA said that entitled to so Shirley put it, 'As if you're l a bit of grass—entitled to. Th the chance to of freedom, re themselves. No many square i get over, you'

Meanwhile public school pools and 100 caters for the working class education for want their ch lives.

Is that all got to believe

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Annie Spike



Shirley Waddington

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You know you're just going to push a button in a factory

'Even if the teacher can explain to them that they should make the most of opportunities, even if they do then they are only going to end up in a factory and teachers must think to themselves when the children are mucking about, Why bother, are we really doing these kids a favour when they are only going to get frustration later in life. When they know you're not going to use your experience, you're just going to push a button in a factory?'

'In working class families father comes in, turns on the tele, he's tired; mother comes in, she's rushing about to get a bit of dinner up—there isn't any conversation, they all sit down and watch the box for light entertainment. Parents don't have any time to sit down and read and educate themselves. The child thinks my mum works in a factory and we're alright—you don't realise till later that you're stuck in a boring job with nothing to show for your work.'

You want to leave

'When you're at school you want to leave—at the age of 13 you see a couple of kids who have just left school all done up in smashing clothes, you think once you've left school you can go to the dances and come in and out at what time you like—there's freedom attached to leaving school—you've got your independence.'

I didn't like school

'IT WAS the way they presented things at school, like history 'open your book at page so and so', ... geography 'tea and silk come from India' etc. It doesn't mean anything to you, but if it's put over as a story in an interesting way you can enjoy it.' Shirley Waddington.

But interesting teaching means more time spent preparing, more time spent collecting material that will relate to individual children's interests—this becomes impossible if teachers are too overburdened.

Do as I tell you

A HIGH teacher turnover also means that teachers don't get to know the children and cannot take a personal interest in them. The feeling that school doesn't care gets worse. And no amount of shouting for the return of the cane will help this.

'To tell you the truth it was the discipline that turned me off school—you were never allowed to express your point of view—it was

"do as I tell you and don't ask why or how". "Stand up for the National Anthem whether you believe in it or not." No matter how little they are children still have their own point of view and you should never ignore it. That makes rebels of them. In Tracey's comprehensive school they do have a lot of freedom—the teachers have a smashing attitude, they're not all old spinsters like in my day, but this old "don't do as I do, do as I say" attitude still goes

on, especially in primary schools I think.' Shirley.

With harassed teachers teaching large classes the progressive educational methods go out of the window.

Promises like dead roses

IS THIS what we want? Those teachers and working class parents who do care about the education of their children must stop waiting for the promises to come true. The Labour government hasn't

shown itself in any great hurry to pay teachers more money or invest much more in education. As Mrs Spike said after she came back from the Education Office, 'They are giving you all sweet talk but it's bitter really. They could give you the roses, but they could be dead.'

And reality for working class children is bitter. Isn't it time they got roses too?

Celia Deacon





I've had this feeling of wanting to hurt my children

Dear Womens Voice, THERE HAS been a lot of adverse publicity recently on the 'Battered Baby Syndrome' as Anna Kerr tells us in her article in Womens Voice No 9. In it there was one sentence which sums up the attitude of the public, which has been influenced by the media of the press and television, and that was 'the emphasis now seems to be entirely on conviction and punishment rather than understanding and treatment of the parents concerned'.

The whole article is an eye-opener to many people who say they cannot understand why parents hurt their children, and it is the people who say this that have no children or do not suffer any financial worries.

Personally I feel that it is the capitalist system itself which has created the problem of 'battered babies'. Rising prices, frozen wages mean not enough money to go round to buy food, pay the bills, causing a mother to wonder where the next meal is coming from—these are real problems to real people caused by greedy inhuman profiteers, whose avarice forces up food prices etc. This results in unnecessary stress and strain on parents, mainly the mother, for it is she who stays at home, cooks the meals and looks after the children.

All this must have an unnecessary psychological effect on the mother, whether she lives in high-rise flats or in a house with a garden. An effect which makes her capable of physically

hurting her children, even though she may love them very much.

I have had this same feeling of wanting to hurt my children myself, and I have had to go out of the room in case I really did injure them. It is an inexplicable feeling, probably one of frustration and resentment of the fact that one is tied by the responsibilities of children. This is a product of an inhuman society, one which tutors young girls to believe that their one aim in life is to get married, have babies and live happily ever after.

Let us stop daydreaming! It would be alright if one had plenty of money and could afford a nice house and a nanny to take over the responsibility of bringing up the children, but how many parents have that sort of money?

We must have a change in the society which shouts for punishment for parents who batter their babies, for one that will support parents, especially mothers, and face up to the fact that we need paying for a full-time job.

Lynne Shutt, Coventry

routine

Dear Womens Voice, I THOUGHT Anna Kerr's article on baby-battering in the last issue of Womens Voice was very good. I think most mothers experience

intense feelings of impatience, frustration and momentary hatred at times, usually arising from the physical conditions and the emotional state of the mother. Often the child is the only person around and he/she gets the brunt of it. Children can sense that something is wrong and often react by being naughty and more demanding than usual, making everything even worse. Looking after children is a demanding, time-consuming and full-time job, it is not the wonderful fulfilling job that society makes it out to be unless of course you are rich, have all mod-cons and outside help. Most mothers experience a great degree of resentment at times, they are tied to the home in isolation with little chance of escape and guilty feelings of wanting to get out of it all. It does not help either if child-rearing is left to the woman only, many husbands take little part in the caring for children and don't realise how difficult and frustrating it can be with the endless routine of washing, cooking, shopping and child-caring to look forward to. It takes a lot of effort and personal sacrifice to do all this successfully, the fact that we are 'lucky' (?) to be at home cannot compensate.

I think there are some ways in which child-battering might be reduced. I think all children should have the chance to go to play or nursery school from 3 onwards or even younger. I know the difference

I feel now that my little girl goes to play-school twice a week, I have some of my freedom back, I can do what I like for a couple of hours and not be interrupted or pestered. This may sound selfish but I think it is of utmost importance to us both. Emma learns that she doesn't need me all the time and gets the opportunity to play and mix with others. I have a couple of hours to recover myself—it is all too easy to identify with the child and give yourself up for him/her losing your own sense of personality. Free time helps me retain my sense of perspective about my situation and gives me time to visit places and people difficult to get to with a child plus pushchair.

It is also vital I think to try and keep some independence, I think women need to go out, meet other people, and have some interest outside the home. Too many women relate to the world and life outside the home through their husbands only, perhaps if they could get out more, meet others to discuss their problems and enjoy some social life without worry about the home and children then things might not get so intense and the incidents of child-battering might decrease.

After all, running a home and family involves a lot of routine and with nothing to think about or look forward to it can all get too much and end in disaster.

Yours sincerely,
Elsbeth Allcott, Leicester

A NEW LOOK

For many months people have been writing to us saying that Women's Voice would be easier to sell, easier to write for and more interesting as a newspaper. For this issue we've had lots of short interesting items sent in that fit in to a newspaper much better—and we're convinced too!

We hope you like the change, and we hope you'll write something for the next issue of our 'new' paper. Barbara Kerr

Soft soap and Red tape

The letter from 'Dot', Birmingham in the last issue of Women's Voice, provoked a lot of response. Here Dot has written another piece, and we've included the feelings of two other readers on the subject. We hope that more readers will send in their experiences.

From Dot
You have probably read the article in the last issue of Women's Voice (Number 9) on the Social Security System and the terrible system it portrays. I would like to go one step further into this terrible system and that is some of the rights we have and we all do not know them, or accept just what they tell us.

From experience again, two weeks before Christmas I applied for a clothes grant for me and my three children, and they sent for me. They told me in an off hand way that the money they gave me is supposed to cover clothes as well, and the fantastic sum they give me is £5.95 per week, but my total income per week including maintenance is £14.35, so how on earth can anyone cope on this sort of money. However back to the grant, the officer said he would look into it, but doubted that I would receive any money from them.

The very next day I had one of their usual red tape letters saying I wasn't entitled to anything, so I went straight down to the offices and asked for an appeal form. I filled this in straight away and I had to give 101 reasons why I was appealing, so I told them how come a man who has a family and hasn't worked for years could get one and I couldn't be on my own unable to work yet (but I didn't mention the man's name).

About one week later I had a visitor from the Social Security and it was obvious that her visit was to soft soap me into dropping the appeal and she said she would see what she could do for me. However the Giro did come the next day for £26.25, this is what they said no to, and if I hadn't have appealed this is what I wouldn't have had in the first place.

What I am trying to point out to Women on their own in general and in difficult circumstances, to fight for themselves, because no one else will. They won't tell you that you are entitled to a clothes grant every six months, and yet the last one I has was twelve months ago and that was for £13. Even after all this I

had to fight for it, it is well worth it, and what have you to lose by appealing (nothing). It is well worth going out of your way for what is rightly yours, and it is.

It makes you wonder if these officers at the Social Security (or the Manager) gets a Gold star like at school for every refusal they make and succeed with it.

All I can finish with is if they treat you with contempt, treat them in exactly the same way. I know they are only doing the job they are paid to do, but would you choose an occupation like that? So I repeat myself, if you have trouble appeal, its well worth it.

dependent

From Joan

As a new reader of Women's Voice, I was particularly interested in Dot's experiences with the SS. I am divorced with two children, living (or rather existing) on what the SS provides. No one expects to be kept in five star luxury but the allowances are not consistent with the cost of living, so many people are driven to 'fiddling', not because they are dishonest but because they have to.

The system is discretionary as the cases of two women I know clearly demonstrates. Admittedly I do not know the full facts but on the face of it things seem very unfair. One woman, divorced with one child, has capital and has bought a house. I believe the SS pay the interest on her mortgage. The other girl, with a baby, currently living with her parents but wanting independence, is taking a degree at a University with creche facilities. Not only did the SS take away her allowance but she is unable to obtain a grant. This proves the SS system is geared to keeping those on it dependent and to denying them any facilities for using their intelligence either for their own benefit or that of society at large.

My personal grouse was the cohabitation ruling and the underhand way investigations are carried out. I find the presumption that a stable relationship with one man is more reprehensible than having a different man in every night is illogical to say the least. A succession of different men is far more likely to be bringing in payment than a situation where one man stays. I had someone living with me and nosy neighbours (I was not informed who) went to the SS and told them. My allowance book was taken away and we had to manage on his inadequate wage. The rich are entitled to privacy in their lives while the SS take it upon themselves to pass moral judgements on people like us and

punish us accordingly like naughty schoolchildren.

An even worse thing happened to me, which involved another person in a more serious predicament than myself. I had living with me a pregnant girl who had been turned out of her lodgings and job when her condition became known. She had applied for a job and registered on the dole. While waiting for the red tape to disentangle itself she was penniless. The SS presumed she was paying me rent as the law required her to do so and deducted my allowance accordingly. This meant I was legally required to make a profit out of someone's misfortunes, where I had only wanted to break even by taking money for food, and had to maintain an

extra person on an even smaller allowance than I had been getting for myself. I could not have managed had it not been for a generous cheque from a good friend.

We need a campaign to get the entitlement scheme OFF THE OFFICIAL SECRETS LIST and in simple language so it can be distributed to everyone who needs it. How is this to be done?

surviving

From Marg

I too am an 'unsupported mother' living or should I say, just about surviving on Social Security. I also, like Dot (in last issue of Women's Voice) have had numerous bad experiences with SS snoops etc.

After almost three years on SS and countless hours spent sat in the offices, countless arguments, disagreements etc, I have not on any one occasion come away satisfied. I have almost taken enough of the inhuman treatment.

But all this still does not prevent me from claiming for every thinkable item that I may be entitled to (and I am not greedy).

The advice I give to all unsupported mothers is:-

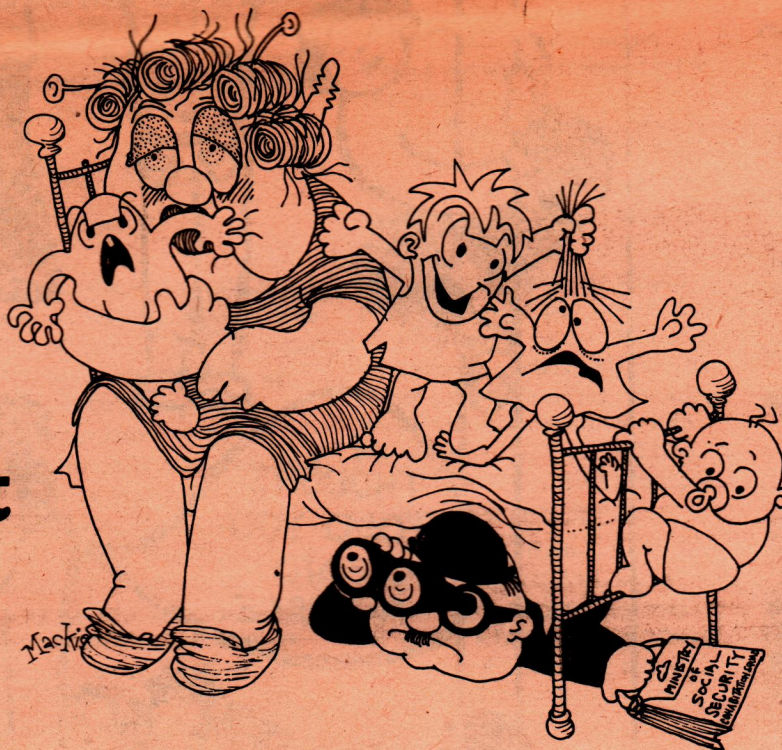
Never become disheartened and give in. No matter how many wasted hours spent in the SS offices. FIGHT AND NEVER STOP FIGHTING.

If all unsupported mothers felt this way then I am sure we would not be fobbed off with answers like:- 'Sorry we can't help'.

How many times have we heard that one? or 'your SS benefit is sufficient to pay for rent, electricity, child's shoes, clothing, heating, food etc.' I'd give my week's benefit gladly to see the (behind the counter assistant) manage and provide all these items out of a weeks payment of SS.

I suggest that through Women's Voice we form some kind of unsupported womens union, so as to enable us to help one another to demand in strength better treatment from 'the little gods behind the counter'. Better payments etc.

United we can demand, not beg. Then perhaps one day someone will listen to us.



Uphill Struggle

Dear Womens Voice, AFTER reading Deidre Hickey's article in Womens Voice I felt I must write to you concerning our adventure playground.

We started up in much the same way as the group described in your article. It has been uphill all the way for us—constant battles with councillors, holding demonstrations, etc. We have one play-leader, who does get some help from the committee. We have, at last, had a building completed—this has electricity, water and toilets and contains a playleaders' office (used as a storeroom).

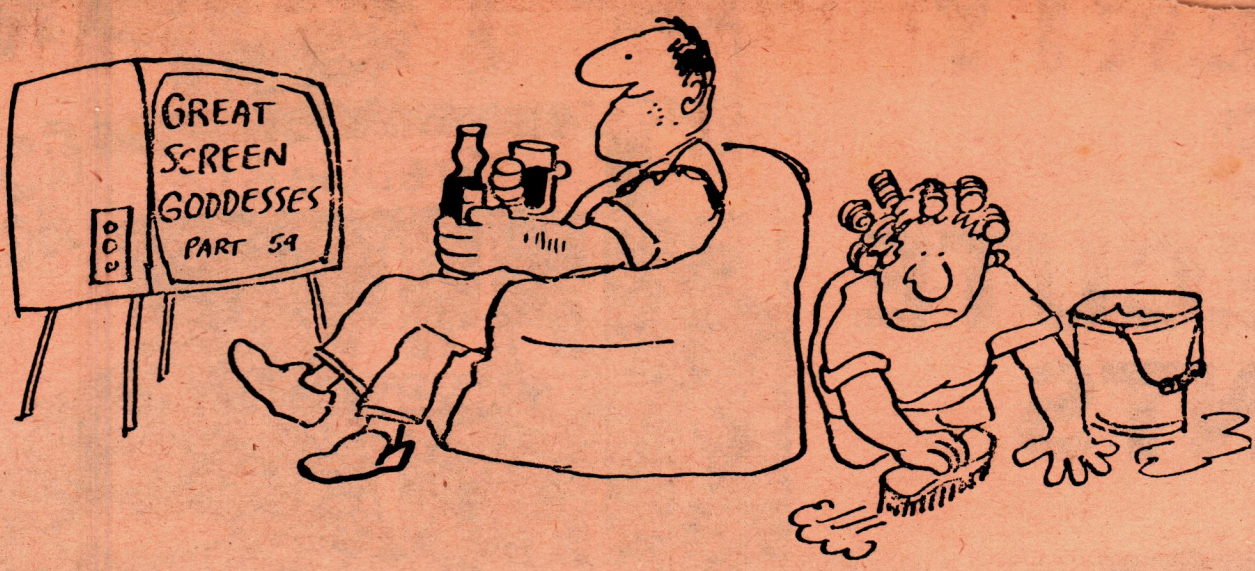
We are now busy raising money by raffles and jumble sales to pay for furniture, inner walls and floor sealing. We have hardly any support from people in the area.

I have however enlisted the aid of ten parents to help with a sponsored walk. 17 children are walking. This is our biggest venture yet.

My husband and I have constantly to hold the interest of the committee. When I feel that their interest is weakening I create tasks and ask everyone to help. I also suggest some fund-raising activity to rekindle interest. So far this has worked very well.

I hope this letter has helped in a small way. I would welcome any ideas from your readers.

Yours faithfully,
D A Williams, (Sec. Blaenymaes & Portmead Adventure Playground Association)



TILL DEATH US DO PART

Jean Clark

WE ALL have conditioning built in us from the moment we are born, when I say 'built in', I don't mean literally. In other words, from the moment we are born the greatest influence in our lives is our parents. They tell us not to do this, not to do that, but we never get any explanations to many of our questions.

Pretty Girls
Our parents have taught us that little girls have to look pretty, with pink bows in our hair, and that we should always look like a picture of beauty at all times, and that we mustn't get our pretty dresses dirty. But boys are taught and expected to look

tough, and wear jeans and t-shirts, and it's quite acceptable to many parents for the boy to behave in this way. How many times have you heard the saying 'Boys will be boys'. Some of us are even guilty of this ourselves!

We play with pretty little dolls and prams, boys have guns, cars, submarines, tanks, trains. Notice how we have the toys that are pretty and 'feminine', and boys have 'masculine' manly things. The next step is when we go to school. Girls are taught

cooking, needlework, homecraft, typing. The boys are taught the so-called masculine things such as woodwork and metalwork.

What will I be when I grow up?
We then come to the stage while still at school, the boys are thinking of careers, the girls of marriage and children. The connection between the toys given to them, dolls-babies, and their subjects at school, housecraft, cookery-marriage are plain. The girls have accepted the fact, because of what they have been taught, that a woman's place is in the home.

Second-Rate Job
Before girls do get married though, they usually start in some second-rate job, with second-rate pay, because they weren't trained for skilled jobs. Many of the boys are trained to be electricians, engineers, locksmiths, and technicians. So inevitably the girl ends up getting married without even thinking of a career, whilst the boy has a career to think of. So we have a marriage, and the woman ends up staying in the home all the time, has children, does the cleaning, housework, washing, shopping, cooking and has the children screaming for attention. The man is away from all this drudgery. He works five days a week, she works seven, he has all the evenings just sitting there watching tele while she runs around like a servant.

And yet when its time for bed, and he wants sex, and you say you're too tired, he gets the hump and that begins rows upon end. He has all the weekend to go to the pub, yet we can't go because there's no baby-sitter to be found. But have you ever thought to yourself, 'Why is it that he can go out, and I can't? They are just as much his children as they are mine, so why, why, why, do I end up sitting indoors, standing in for a baby-sitter? It should be me going to the pub, I work a sight longer hours

The Mag. To top it all, which is the biggest propaganda machine going. It drums it into you, and your children even more, that we should be happy with what we've got, this is the woman's way of life, happy and smiling while we are doing the weekly wash. Then the so-called superior, Stronger Sex have women stripping off for them, to sell a cigar, newspaper, car or motor bike. They are glamorous women with beautiful dresses and make-up, and immaculate hairstyles, while all the time they are convincing you more and more that this is the way 'things' (women) should be. While we're running around after our husbands serving his supper he is in front of the tele. They are shoving into our men's minds that these women are the type his wife should be, and should look like. Men are filled with sexual fantasies by these 'Glamour Queens' and when we have sex with our husbands we are only second best even then because he is releasing his sexual fantasies... But neither of the partners ever question why it is that the woman should be exploited and used this way. We have never questioned it because, we have accepted it since our childhood. It's been drummed into us, we've been INDOCTRINATED!

Inferior
Many times most of us have thought 'I wish I looked like her on tele,' and we begin to feel inferior, because we look tired, or washed out, or our hair is a mess. This is wrong. WE are the Real Women. The women on tele are just the same as us, they've had the same indoctrination, but they've gone overboard for it till it's become their way of life, their way to earn money, by actually selling their bodies for money. But they're not women any more, they have made themselves into objects. They have accepted all the nonsense about women being soft and gentle, without minds and thoughts. They go along with men in the belief that men are the ones who should rule, and we should obey.

We Will Not Obey
We have rights and we will get them. Men and women, and also children, should get together and shake off this indoctrination that the system has forced on us for years. We must get other women on our side, and put our ideas forward where ever women are being discriminated against. But remember that all this starts in childhood. Take a look at your sons and daughters... Do you want your daughter to grow up, thinking she's got to make herself into an object? Do you want your son to grow up using women like we're being used? Start to smash this vicious circle now and teach yourself and your children about EQUALITY. That's just a small step. We won't get equality till we change the system that controls the tele and the education process.

BLACK DEVIL WHITE GOD

BEING A WOMAN and black makes one a double prey for the capitalist system. I need not tell you the plight of women in this society. 89 per cent of black women go out to work in Britain, mostly in the worst jobs like catering, cleaning, badly organised factories for such long hours and ridiculously low wages. And just like all working women, they come home to cook, nurse, do housework, shop—you name it! Black women's kids are most likely to end up in Educationally Sub-Normal schools, because most black parents do not know that they have a right to question and to refuse to sign the forms. The authorities know, and take advantage of this. One ESN school in London stated that three-quarters of its immigrant pupils should never have been sent there. Black women's husbands are a source of cheap labour, and victims of nights and awkward shifts. Yet black women in STC Southgate, who do the same job with the men, and get less money came out on strike with the men last year. This shows that women in some places are aware that common interests exist and should be fought for. The struggle at STC was only one of the many things that are happening, and it's clear that the time has come for black people to unite with the rest of the working class to fight the system and change the unjust society. For years the working class has been deeply divided—the whites have been kept in complete ignorance of black people's culture.

Martha Osama



both religious and state education has been partly responsible for this.

RELIGION
The church in Africa and the West Indies was staffed by missionaries who taught the natives how to read and write with books that glorified the whites and down-graded the blacks, for example white God, black devil, evil is black and good is white... In the same way, Christian books and teaching in Britain have shown the working class as either beggars or lepers or crooks.

SCHOOL
In the same way in African and West Indian schools the equipment, teachers, books and subjects have nothing to do with black people's lives, which leaves black children feeling like second class human

beings... In British schools full of British working class kids, the subjects studied and the teachers have nothing to do with the way the kids live or with the jobs they will end up doing. As schools give the idea of being 'always right' the kids begin to feel there is something wrong with them. As I said, the people in power use similar ways to keep down black people, and white working class, and it keeps them happy to see us fighting against each other and not them!

WORDS

The English language that is studied by both black and white kids in Britain, has many words that do not only devalue the image of blacks, but inflicts an inferiority complex. Examples are:

BLACKmail, BLACKleg, BLACK-market, BLACK sheep of the family—all related to dishonest or unpleasant things. From an early age black children develop an inferiority complex, and white kids are encouraged by adults to look down on them. It's not surprising that black people often fear and dislike whites, and the result is a tendency for black people to turn inwards towards their own organisations. This gives them a sense of identity, security and dignity, but many now realise that this kind of separation cannot solve our problems.

Workers have common problems and only through united action can these problems be solved in the interests of all working people. Every man and woman should play a part in this, but it is really the job of the trade union movement to forge this unity, and this can only be done by tackling racial discrimination in industry in a principled way and by waging a campaign against racist ideas.

DIVIDE AND RULE

The policy of divide and rule is completely against the working class interest. It is used to oppress black people and to keep white working class people in their place. Education,



Jean Clark with her kids

PROPERTY PIMPS PERSECUTE TENANTS

by MARGRET RYAN,
Islington Tenants Action Group

I've always belonged to a Tenants Association—we used to operate from the Co-operative Hall on Tuesday nights and pay 15 bob a night for the room, and we used to have some little lawyer come along and give advice, so I've always felt militant in that respect, and so friends and myself started making a list of people who were in this terrible trouble. First of all there was Mrs Webb and she had been there about 40 years—a widow woman at 17 College Cross. I went past the door one day and found her sitting crying on the stairs.

She was one of the best mothers in the world, she had a boy who'd had a road accident which made him a little mental—he was in Friern Barnet and every Tuesday she used to go along with cigarettes and a bit of chocolate for him. It happened just like it always did in these cases—a ten or 12 roomed house. Firstly they got rid of all the tenants and leave one isolated person—maybe a widow, maybe a crippled person or someone who is sick. They got rid of all the tenants in that house except Mrs Webb. That evening I asked her what was the matter and she said 'Those people who've bought the house are not giving me any peace. They've been round and said I've got to get out, out, out.' So I told her she was a controlled, protected tenant and an old-age pensioner, a sick lady and a widow and I asked her if I could help.

CHUCKED OUT

She said she knew she's have to go because the property prospectors, her new land-lord had been round and said she was holding them up from selling the house. I told her that they were not buying the house to live, in just buying it to sell for profit and she said she'd follow my advice. Next morning I couldn't find Mrs Webb. The newspaper man who had served her for years told me that she took fright and went. Eventually I discovered they had played a confidence trick on her—chucked all her furniture out, got the keys from her and got the house vacant. They put her with another woman in one room in Pleasant Place and told her that they would be finding her a flat. At the weekend she asked the women for a rent book, but the woman said 'There's no rent book here. I've been told that you're going to relatives in the country. I've put you up for a week to oblige the new owners.' The last I heard of her—she must be about 76 now—Mrs Webb was in an old people's home, having lost her home, her furniture.

A TOWN HOUSE

Their profits are enormous. For No. 23 alone they paid £2000 and sold it for £55,000 and boasted that they still had the backyard to convert into garages. They started operating in College Cross in 1963, and there are two houses still standing empty, waiting for the value to

go high enough. Nos 31 and 33 have been kept empty, wondering which government's going to get in, seeing which way the law is going to go—those two houses are there, while homeless families walk the streets, pointing up to the sky in accusation of cruelty because they're standing empty.

In this district alone there's hundreds of empty houses and thousands of empty rooms, and the property prospectors have boasted to the Islington Gazette that within a few years' time they've made £10 million. There are properties that they thieved from the tenants and are now re-selling back to Islington Council. Their Agents advertise in the County Magazine—'Come to Islington for your Town House. We still find you a house where you will be near the theatre, near the ballet and near the City.' And these same houses are bought and sold again down the years, always using the same agent.

WANTED ONE WINKLER

The owners are the property prospectors who put the houses in the hand of agents who cannot operate in a district without buying themselves a 'winkler', providing him with a car, a jolly good wage at the weekend and telling him that he has £5000 bonus for every house emptied. So by hook or by crook he's got to get the tenants out. Usually they live miles out of London and make themselves look presentable with a posh suit on, the loan of a Jaguar from the property prospectors, who need each other in order to operate and also both need an Estate Agent, who is supposedly a respectable front for them. The winklers get the keys from the Agent, but they can also get in without a key.

For instance, I stood in College Cross and watched a posh young man drive up in a Mini, get out with a knife, go in and thieve a TV from a tenant's flat. The TV was found in the office of the property prospectors and when that case came before the Judge, he said 'I want that TV replaced in the same working condition that it was in when taken away from that man's home', and the case was finished. Why weren't they prosecuted? Mr F is one of the worst; he's been on the most heart-breaking cases—he comes along with a slimy grin, asking 'When are you going?' Tenants are frightened, think that he's a big deal and it's his house. He says 'I want to move in here and if you don't get out we've got rooms upstairs which we'll fill with blacks and they'll stink you out.' He goes downstairs to a black family and says 'You want to move out because there's fascist white people moving in here.' So he plays one colour off against the other—has done all along.

GET OUT!

One of the worst cases was Emmy, who I saw going to her doctor's one night, saying her house was emptied of all its tenants in Stonefield Street—a corner house, everyone had gone but her and what courage she must have had to stay there all alone! There was winkling going on day and night—she never knew what time they would call, the winklers, agents, property prospectors. This poor woman is a kind of cripple from birth—one leg twelve inches shorter than the other and has a surgical boot—the weakest again, you see? She wasn't ready to do battle—very depressed and going to give in, so we went round to see her.

There was already the Barnsbury

Association, the tarty people coming into the district and they wanted certain side streets closed for themselves and the safety of their children—they wanted iron railings put up to prevent traffic going in or out apart from their own residential cars—but it was to hell with you and your children on Liverpool Road where the heaviest traffic was going up and down without railings.

So the Barnsbury Action Group set up their own Association and they came along with me to Emmy's. Same old story—she said 'I've got to go. They're sending people to view the house all the time, looking in all the rooms, saying these people are going to buy the house and I'm stopping them selling it by being here'. We found out that she had been offered two dirty, damp, old rooms at the top of a house, where she would have had to come down four flights of stairs in the middle of the night to a communal toilet in the back yard, the rent would have been £2 per week more and she would have lost the advantage of being a controlled, protected tenant.

We told her not to accept it, but the winkler had been round and told her she had to go and had ordered the removal firm for 9.00am. He had also promised to phone the gas and electricity people for them to come and cut it off. So 20 of us went along at 8.00am, taking tape recorders and camera. First the removal men came. We told him it was no removal but an eviction and he said he wanted paying for the time he'd wasted if she wasn't going and went off to the winkler. Then the gas and electricity men came, but when I asked them if they wanted to be involved in the eviction of a sick, old lady who's been winkled out on behalf of millionaires, they said they didn't, being good trade unionists, and went away.

STUCK OUT

Finally, word got back to the winkler, who came on the hurry up, thinking he only had the old lady to deal with—he had his pyjamas on under his suit and his hair had not been done. When he got upstairs he found himself surrounded. We told him we were very interested in this eviction—he said she had promised to go and we said, 'How could she? She's not even seen the other rooms but we have'.

We asked George Cunningham, the MP, to come round because we thought it was time that someone in authority got on to this job, as a few of us were spending an enormous amount of time going along to these evictions and supporting people in the courts—working people were having to take time off work to do this sort of thing. He came round to see Emmy

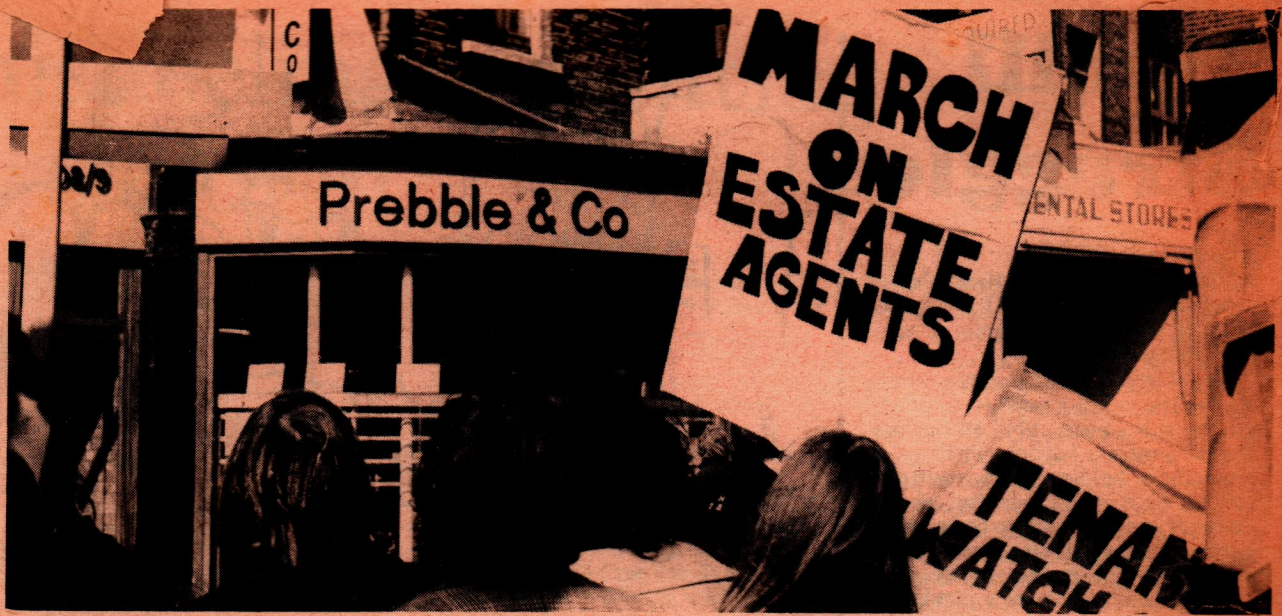
and was very concerned. He wrote to the owners, saying she must not move until she is offered comparable accommodation at a comparable rent. They offered her a flat and she finally had to move, only to find that they had cracked the sewer pipe running underneath her kitchen—she was stunk out! But she's had to stay there; it's not been a very happy move.

PICKET

What we've done as the Barnsbury Action Group is to picket the Rent Office and I don't think anyone paid their rent for a few days! The office where they pay is a scrubby little place called House Management, and if you're in a house where they want you out they take the rent from you and sling your book back at you! They keep them separate because they don't want the weekly rent-paying tenant to know the big negotiations of the cream of the big money. I mean, if they've got a house advertised for £50,000 and a client in there chatting they don't want such as you or I going in there paying our rent as a weekly tenant and knowing that they want you out to let the bloke with £50,000 come into it! The Agents started off in Upper Street, Islington with one little lock-up shop and were sending their little scrubbing brushes of clerks round looking for empty properties, pushing notices under the doors asking if people were willing to sell their houses and let them operate for them.

STREAKING

Still our publicity has affected the Agents. They were embarrassed and must have felt very guilty. The day that we marched to Islington Green, we had to march past their office. The interesting thing was that their advert board, always full of adverts for £20,000, £30,000, £50,000 houses, was empty, so that spoke for itself, didn't it? Then they went to their lawyer who dished out letters, threatening certain people who they thought the weakest of the lot (including me) and asking for apologies so they could publish them at our expense, taking back what we had said publicly about them. So one of their friends who was their tenant had the courage to write back to them 'Get Streaking!' I went to my lawyer and decided to reply by a legal letter, saying that I had been on the picket and on the march and did speak from the platform in Islington Green, expressing my horror and disgust at the winkling going on, BUT I HAD NO APOLOGY TO MAKE! The fight goes on.



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