

# WOMEN'S VOICE

THE PAPER OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST WOMEN

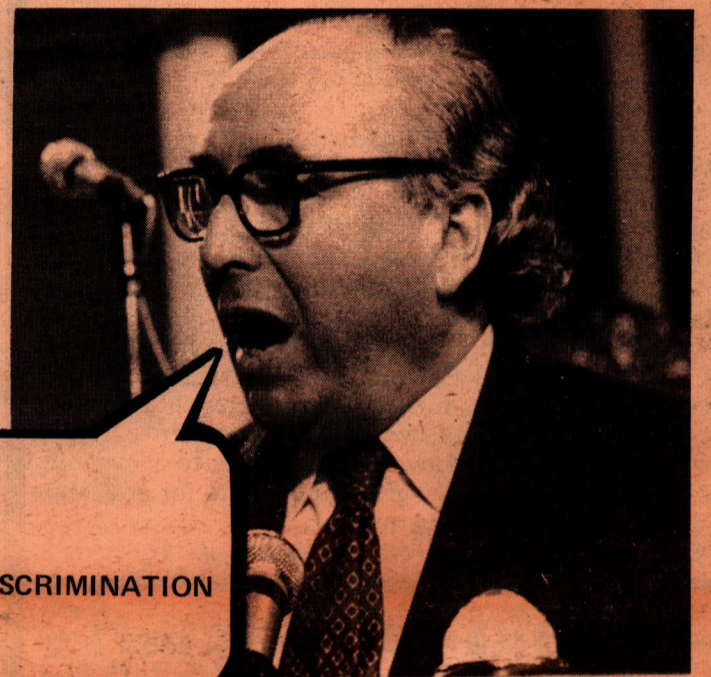
**We've been hearing it since 1888 and they are still making resolutions in the TUC, the Houses of Parliament and other high places.**



Barbara Castle

**The same old promises, promises, promises,**

1975 IS  
EQUAL PAY  
YEAR



Roy Jenkins

1975 IS  
ANTI-DISCRIMINATION  
YEAR



The TUC

- | RESOLUTIONS SINCE 1888 |                    |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1888 - Bradford        | 1918 - Derby       |
| 1895 - Cardiff         | 1922 - Southport   |
| 1899 - Plymouth        | 1924 - Hull        |
| 1900 - Huddersfield    | 1925 - Scarborough |
| 1916 - Birmingham      | 1936 - Plymouth    |
| 1917 - Blackpool       | 1937 - Norwich     |
|                        | 1940 - Southport   |
|                        | 1942 - Blackpool   |
|                        | 1944 - Blackpool   |



Kurt Waldheim (United Nations)

THE UNITED NATIONS  
HAVE DECLARED  
1975  
INTERNATIONAL  
WOMEN'S YEAR

# WE'LL ONLY GET EQUALITY WHEN WE FIGHT FOR IT!

# EDITORIAL

THE NEW YEAR came in with a crunch. Already sugar has gone up and price increases have been announced for school dinners, post office charges, gas and rates. Millions of working class women have felt the pinch in their purses. Yet at a time like this, two hundred women sewing machinists in Leicester announce that they have volunteered for a twelve month freeze in their wages. The women, who belong to the National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers, say that they are doing this in order to help their firm keep prices down, and because they do not want to price themselves out of a job. In Leicester, other women clothing workers plan to follow suit. They probably think that they are doing things for the best. They may even think that the boss will be grateful for such consideration.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Far from defending their interests, these women are harming them.

Women workers have always provided cheap labour for British Industry. Brought up with ideas that say women deserve less pay than men, and encouraged by patronising attitudes from the employers—many women believed that there was no alternative.

But last year thousands of women, unable to stretch their money any further, decided to take action in support of demands for more pay. Most of them had never done anything like it in their lives before. But they sparked off a new determined mood among women workers—a mood which says women are no longer content to remain the poor relations of the working class.

Women workers have at last found their fighting feet. That is precisely what the employers are afraid of. So long as women meekly accepted their place, employers could screw huge profits out of them. But militant women mean smaller shares for the boss. So, they will try to woo women back to accepting low paid status by saying how grateful they are for any consideration and how this will help women.

But bosses aren't in business to have consideration for their workers. Remember the typist who started the 'I'm Backing Britain Campaign'?

Her boss sang her praises in all the daily papers and said how grateful he was for her self sacrifice. But a year later, when all the fuss was over, he quietly sacked her. She had outlived her usefulness.

Sooner or later that will also happen to the Leicester women—unless they build up a strong organisation to defend their interests.

Womens Voice believes that in 1975 women should be strengthening their fighting spirit, and that we should be organising to fight for better wages, equal pay and equal rights. We want our paper to be used to spread ideas, news of successful organisation and the lessons of the disputes that occur. We want our readers to use the paper to win the struggles they are involved in.

*We wish our readers every success in their struggles to make the coming year one in which women workers go forward to fight for the equality they have long been promised.*

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ALL COPY for the next issue of WOMENS VOICE, must reach the editorial offices not later than FEBRUARY 7th

# WOMEN IN THE UNIONS

## Get rid of grading

THE GRADING system inside the SOGAT Union classes its women members as third rate citizens. We have the worst working conditions, the worst mind-bending and boring work, and worst of all we're paid the least for it.

Inside my factory I am defined as a grade 4 worker, not because I am any less capable but for economic reasons. The grading system is brought in by the management to prevent working class unity on the shop floor. Grading is prominent in factories such as the one I work in. It employs large numbers of women, a smaller amount of unskilled men and a minority of craftsmen.

You generally find the women man the machines and pack the profits and the unskilled men work alongside the women listing, servicing and doing general work. This causes antagonism. While you keep tune to an endless stream of produce, the bloke makes sure that the machine keeps on feeding you work.

In many cases he seems to have more time and more freedom. Not only that, but he is paid more. Because you are tied to a machine you resent it. You point the finger at the man saying, 'He's a lazy sod and not fit for anything but telling jokes and sipping tea.' Yet he receives a higher wage than you. This is the divided structure which the management purposely created and out of



Hugh Scanlon—president of the AUEW crosses a picket line. How serious is he when he says that his union wants equal pay for women?

which it makes a big profit.

The SOGAT Union has made steps to close and amend the grading structure. As from this March the women's grade (grade 4) is abolished. This is a start for a long battle by women and lower paid workers. In reality the ending of Grade 4 only lumps the lower paid workers together into the same grade. The fourth grade may be going but we still have to struggle to eliminate the ideas behind it. The labourers, women machinists, and craftsmen, are equally important in the running of a factory.

Accepting grading in the first place is lunacy. The Union executive has up to now paid lip service to equal pay, job opportunity and the aboli-

tion of the grading system. It is up to us the rank and file members to watch for the pitfalls, to make sure, we are not forced to sell five minutes here and there, or have our lines speeded up or, most vicious of all, forced to accept three shifts. In the coming period women will be facing struggles not only on the shop floor but inside their trade unions, and the most important thing to keep in mind is that we don't make the same mistake our brothers have made. We should go forward and break down the grading systems united. The SOGAT gain in abolishing grade 4 should be taken up and extended to the complete abolition of all grades. Carol Dourass, SOGAT

## Make your union fight

THE ENGINEERING Union is the second biggest union with 1 1/2 million members. The potential power is there. But it is not used.

It's the sort of power which *should* have been used to win our last two pay claims in full. Instead our national leaders allowed the Engineering Employers Federation to get away with long drawn out negotiations with point after point being watered down or forgotten altogether. Never once did they call on the whole membership to support the demand for equal pay.

Now we're in equal pay year. Perhaps you hadn't noticed 'steps being taken towards equal pay'? Perhaps you didn't know that this was one of the points in the Confederation of Engineering Unions pay claims? You may also be ignorant of the fact that at present there's an 'intensive campaign' going on in our union to further this policy.

A few articles in the Union papers

'The Journal' and 'The Way', and now one pathetic circular to District Secretaries instructing 'District committees and shop stewards to make equal pay an essential feature on any future wage claim', seem to be the only signs of activity from the Union.

The AUEW was originally a craft union. Women have only been in the Union since 1947. We're still only one in nine of the membership, but we've got our own paper, our own annual conference, a more favourable shop steward representation on district committees than men, and seven delegates elected from the conference to the national committee. Even unions with a high proportion of women members can't claim the same facilities. But all this democratic machinery is no good without inspiration, without the footslogging at the grass roots and that's what few officials can be bothered with. One letter to the branches which few attend, one article in a paper which

many have never even heard of are no answer to the crafty deals that are being offered under the guise of Equal Pay in many engineering factories. Our members—and not just the women—need to know the pitfalls of harmless looking deals, and how to equalise the wages and conditions of men and women.

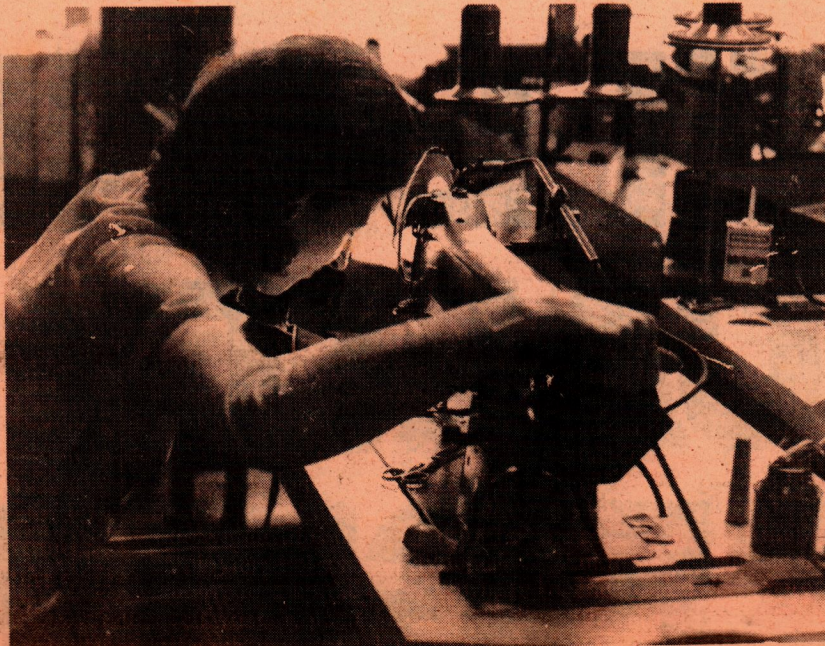
It looks as if we'll have to do it ourselves. Here's what rank and file members of the union could be doing:

Find out the equal pay situation in your factory, and get your branch to collect details of equal pay progress in factories it has members in.

Organise a publicity campaign locally, holding meetings specially suited to women's timetables!

Raise the issue at the next district quarterly if you are a steward or get your steward to do so; put a resolution at your branch to instruct officials not to sign any claim without an equal pay clause; fight for an official policy of non-ratification by District Committees of any settlement which does not contain an equal pay clause.

Last, if there have been no moves towards equal pay in your factory, you should argue at shop stewards' committees and shop floor meetings for getting a deal immediately. But first make sure you avoid all the attempts at productivity strings, grading schemes and redundancies. Hester Blewitt



from Scanlon's address to the Third Annual AUEW Women's Conference, 1973.

'Already, from October 1971 to October 1972, there has been a net loss of over 73,000 women's jobs in manufacturing. The question of equal pay must be firmly linked to that of higher living standards, shorter hours and no redundancies for the workers involved.'

# Abolish Classes not Choice

LAST YEAR Sir Keith Joseph, former Minister for Social Services, spoke out against the birth of babies to women in social classes 4 and 5, and urged the provision of better contraceptive facilities. It seemed surprising that a leading Tory should argue for better contraceptive provision. But Sir Keith had not turned into a supporter of Women's Lib overnight. Far from it—he was simply interested in preventing all the people he considered 'unfit' from having babies. He was talking not about birth control, but about population control.

His ideas are not very far from those of the British Fascist, Oswald Mosley, who said in the 1930's 'At present birth control is known and practised by the relatively well off. It is largely unknown and less practised by the poor. The result is the exact reverse of the national interest... The unfit will be offered the alternatives of segregation sufficient to prevent the production of unfit children, or voluntary sterilisation.'

But right wing Tories are not the only people who talk about population control. Plenty of well meaning but misguided people also campaign for this. And some of them have tried to gain the support of women interested in improving contraceptive facilities.

Campaigns for population control are dangerous for two reasons. Firstly population control in our society means control by Keith Joseph and his class in their interests. Secondly campaigns for control of population place the blame for poverty and suffering in the world on people who are supposedly 'surplus to requirements' rather than on the system in which production and science are used for the benefit of the few rather than to develop a decent life for all.

by Sue Thomas

Yet we must not give up our campaign for the right to free contraception and abortion because we are frightened off by Sir Keith Joseph. Women must demand the right to control their own bodies—to have or not to have children. We are opposed both to those people like Sir Keith Joseph who think that we are not fit to breed, and to those like the hierarchy of the Catholic Church who want to deny us the right to abortion and contraception.

In the past socialists were confused about this issue. In the 19th century a biologist named Malthus argued that the population had to be controlled to stop it from running ahead of resources. Some of the pioneers for birth control, like Annie Besant, got confused with the campaign run by the supporters of Malthus. Most socialists, following the lead of Karl Marx, vigorously opposed Malthus. But they made the mistake of opposing the campaign for women's right to birth control as well. This was one of the reasons that prevented women militants from being convinced that socialism was essential and also stopped socialists from being convinced about the need for women's liberation in the struggle for socialism.

Women must fight for the right to choose whether to have children or not. This means fighting not only for free abortion and contraception on demand—but also for a decent standard of living for all. We will only get rid of Social Classes 4 and 5 by getting rid of classes altogether. That means organising against Sir Keith Joseph and his class to take the power of decision away from them.



Despair and resignation on the faces of two young women who live in a Gorbals tenement in Glasgow. Sir Keith Joseph wants to 'cure' their problems by preventing them from having babies

## Women volunteers have no choice

SIR KEITH Joseph's plans for sterilising unfit workers may seem far fetched in Britain, but in parts of the world this is a grim reality. In Puerto Rico 35 per cent of the women of child bearing age have been sterilised and 19 newly opened clinics are sterilising another 1000 women per month. A start has been made on men as well. All of this is paid for by the US congress. It is 'voluntary'—but happens to fit in neatly with the plans of big business.

The US seized the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico in 1898 as a base to guard the Panama canal. At the same time they used it for investment. Sugar companies bought up agricultural land and turned peasants into wage labourers. Unions began to organise and increasing militancy led to a General Strike in 1934. The strike was lost and the leaders were brutally massacred or jailed.

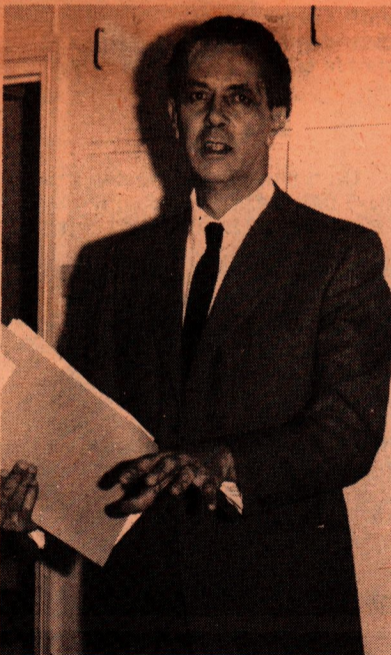
Other US companies came in to take advantage of the low wage rates and after 1934 many companies set up factories there. At the same time thousands of Puerto Rican peasants were forced by poverty and unemployment to emigrate to the United States.

tion, abortion or sterilisation. But behind the 'voluntary' window dressing the Puerto Ricans have no choice. The misery of unemployment and starvation, the squalor of the slums and shanty towns are what determine Puerto Ricans' lives. These are caused not by large families but by a system that is only interested in profit.

The sterilisation programme is not designed to solve these problems, but to make it easier for big business to rake in the profits.

The growing socialist movement in Puerto Rico is fighting against US plans for the future of the island. Only when Puerto Rican workers control their own futures will they be able to make real choices about the size of their families.

Sir Keith Joseph, who thinks poor women aren't fit to breed.



## STERILISED WOMEN SUE HOSPITAL

IN NOVEMBER over 50 women in Los Angeles stormed the Los Angeles County Women's Hospital. They were demanding an end to the hospital's policy of forcing permanent sterilisation operations on women who go to the hospital to deliver their babies.

The practice came to light when three young Chicanas filed a suit against the hospital for performing the operations without their consent.

One of the women was never told that she had been sterilised and wore a contraceptive coil device for three years before learning that she was sterile. All three women say that hospital officials lied to them when asking them to sign the forms.

The forms were brought to them when they were in great pain under heavy sedation during labour. Two of the women say that they were told that the operation was a 'temporary' form of birth control and could be

reversed whenever they wished.

The Committee to End Forced Sterilisation say that other cases have come to light where Mexican women without proper documents were told that if they did not consent to the operation then they would be deported. Other women were forced to sign the forms which are in English without having a translation made or a translator present to explain what was going on.

At the rally speakers pointed out that the policy of forced sterilisation for poor women was not exclusive to one hospital. Earlier that year, two young black women in the South were sterilised without their knowledge and consent by a government birth control clinic.

Many welfare departments demand that unmarried mothers or women with more than three children be sterilised or their welfare benefits would be cut off.

## Charge the old prices



### The situation

In the first three months of 1974 the average British family spent about 50p less per head on food than they did in the same period in 1973.

They also ate less milk, cheese, eggs, sugar, lamb, pork, bacon, chicken, fresh fish, vegetables, potatoes, fruit, and flour.

### The remedy

In October 500 people took over two large supermarkets in the suburbs of Milan. They sat at the checkouts and charged the customers the old prices before VAT. The action was carried out by trade unionists, but customers

spontaneously leapt to their defence when the police tried to evict them.

The situation in Italy is ripe for such activity because prices have risen as much as 100 per cent for many important items such as pasta and olive oil.

Tenants associations in Milan and Rome have also been campaigning successfully for tenants to refuse to pay the increases in gas and electricity charges. There have also been calls to boycott the rise in bus fares. This has been supported by the bus drivers who struck several times in support of wage increases and against the fare increases.

Clara Comolli

### Change

In the last few years US policy has begun to change. The companies which are now investing in Puerto Rico need only highly skilled workers. At the same time, in the US itself the slump has meant that the lure of jobs which led to 2.3 million Puerto Rican workers to go there, has dried up.

US companies plan to turn the island into a giant oil port and refinery complex backed up by International Companies like Shell.

Big business no longer needs the masses of poor Puerto Rican workers. So, the government obliges with a sterilisation programme.

Socialists do not oppose the right of women to choose contracep-

# 1974 the year

'The only way that we are going to get equality is not through management giving us equal pay, but through women proving that they can't be manipulated.'

Irene Chilton AUEW shop steward  
National Switch Factory—Keighley



Nurses—supported by other workers they won an increased pay award. Picture John Sturrock (Report)

## A STRIKING RECORD

In 1974 women workers fought as never before to gain better wages and conditions. By the end of 1974 the number of strikes had increased astronomically as women realised that the only way to get what they wanted was to go out and fight for it.

They fought hard and over a variety of issues. Many struck for more money—for equal bonus, threshold payments and the implementation of national wage agreements. A large number fought over disciplinary matters, to defend the shop stewards who had been sacked for standing up to the employers. Some fought long struggles for trade union recognition.

### MILITANCY

In most instances the strikes took place among workers who had no previous experience of trade union militancy, in factories like GEC at Erith where there had been no disputes for over 20 years. Some like the workers at Kenilworth Components in Leicester had not even got previous experience of industry let alone of trade unions.

### BACKWARD

In a number of disputes women shed their traditionally 'passive and backward' role and led the way showing men workers how to fight. Women at the National Switch Factory in Keighley led the fight for the implementation of the national engineering wage rates for skilled men, after their own claim for equal pay had been granted. 27 Asian women at Imperial Typewriters initially came out on their own demanding £500 they had been swindled out of under a bonus scheme. Later they were followed by hundreds of other Asians.

### STRIKES

Many of the strikes were long-lasting, far longer than men's strikes, as shown by the strikes at SEI Heywood—11 weeks, Wingrove Rogers in Liverpool—17 weeks and Imperial Typewriters in Leicester which lasted for over three months.

Invariably the outcome of the strike was determined by the attitudes of other workers to the women on strike. Where women got support they won. Wingrove Rogers workers won because no lorries crossed the picket line; because the dockers and the railwaymen blacked supplies to the factory and finally because the District Committee of the AUEW, the engineering union, threatened a one day strike in the whole of Merseyside. Under that threat the management caved in.

### UNITED

Women at the National Switch Factory in Keighley won their demands because they were united with the men workers. Nurses who gained the active support of miners in South Wales got an increased pay award.

Unfortunately in the majority of cases women got no support and they were beaten. Women on strike at SEI in Heywood battled determinedly for 11 weeks. They received good wishes from all over the country. But the men workers scabbed on them. Effective blacking was not organised. Appeals were not made around the GEC Combine of which SEI is a part. Finally the strike was sold out by the union officials and lost.

### SUPPORT

Again and again what came out of the women's strikes was the need for outside support. For women, who are in a weaker position than men, outside support is crucial. Small sections of women cannot win alone no matter how determined they are.

Women also need the help of more experienced trade unionists in setting up the running of a strike. Women workers are often without experience or knowledge of how to run strikes.

'When I joined the factory,' said one striker at Imperial Typewriters 'I never knew what a union was, nor a shop steward.'

Strikers at Wingrove Rogers said they had no idea about blacking

until a sympathetic IS trade unionist came down to the picket line and started talking about such things.

### BURDEN

On top of all that women strikers have to bear an additional burden because of their domestic commitments. Picket duties are more difficult to arrange because second jobs as housewives and mothers have to be fitted into the rota. Who can look after the children? How are women workers to counter the tactics such as those used at SEI where management persuaded the local authorities to shut the nurseries to the children of strikers as their mothers now had time to look after them themselves?

### VICTORY

To take even the simplest step, to achieve the smallest victory, women workers must generalize their struggle. They must gain the support of other workers and of housewives in the area.

### MONEY

They must organise delegations to other factories in the area, and to factories in other towns to collect money.

They must appeal to the Executive Committee of the relevant unions, through as many trade union bodies as possible to make their strike official.

They must call on the relevant unions to instruct fellow male workers in the same factory to support them and to expel men who scab on women's strikes. There can be no toleration of such scabs.

In 1974 women stood up and showed that they could fight. But in many cases they were beaten. In 1975 they must win. In 1975 women must not be left to fight alone. To win they must gain the support of the rest of the trade union movement.

LAST YEAR Hackney teachers went on strike for better pay. They enlisted the support of parents in a Parents Action Group. Linda Peffer joined the group. Impressed by the need for trade union organisation she joined NUPE—the National Union of Public Employees. She tried to recruit the women in the kitchen where she worked. One woman who joined was later sacked. The others were frightened off . . .

Chaine Rosenberg talks to Linda Peffer about what followed.

'I WAS disheartened and told the sad story to some teachers I had met through the Parents Action Group. We decided to try and find out what was happening among ancillary staff in the schools in Hackney.

'It was impossible for me to get to other school kitchens in working time, so, the teachers said they would find out the situation in their different schools.

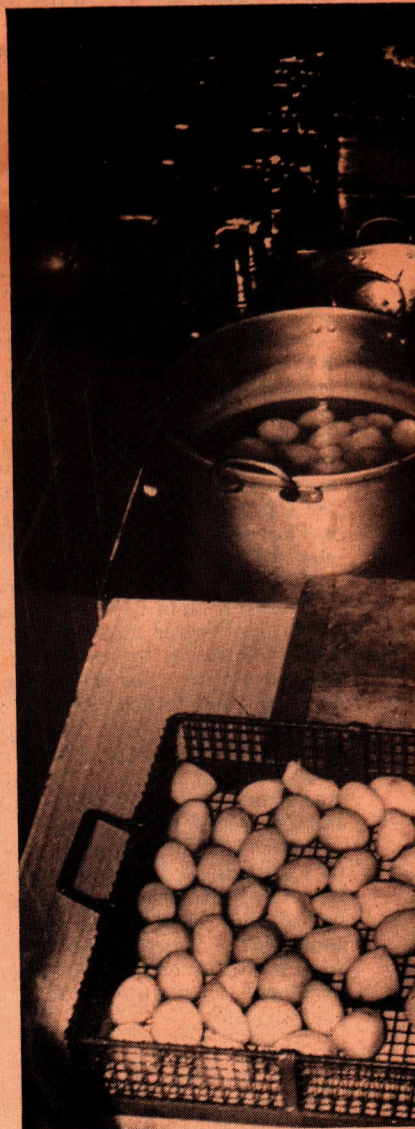
'The teachers spoke to kitchen assistants and cleaners. In one school the women were keen to hold a meeting which they did one evening in the school. A number of kitchen staff and cleaners came along and met one another for the first time.

'I was invited and so were a couple of teachers.

### Problems

'They talked about the problems of their work and pay. Why are they given no idea as to how their weekly wage packets are made up? When a new pay agreement is made what does the money represent? Did they get London Allowance? Did they all get threshold payments? How do you know if you are getting the right pay if you don't know how your pay is made up? Teachers are paid full pay during the holidays, why do ancillary workers only get stand-by pay?'

'A cleaner was injured and had to take two days off work. Was she entitled to compensation? What about injuries such as burns? Why were



## School ladies organ

# women fought



Kenilworth—Women strikers showed the way. Picture John Sturrock (Report)

## KENILWORTH BOSSES DIVIDE AND RULE

Soonu Jehangir

LAST SUMMER 30 Asian women at a plastics factory in Leicester walked out in support of seven of their sacked sisters and a few days later, after some tough picketing, bought the 20 male machine operators out with them! The women then recruited the men into the Transport and General Workers Union. This is quite fantastic by any standards, but especially so if you consider the position of Asian women within their families.

### FIGHT

The sackings had come in response to a successful fight by the women in response to their sweated wage of £13 for a 42½ hour week. They had won a very modest basic of £18.00. It was their initial success which in turn encouraged the men to fight their miserable wages and conditions. The men were working a compulsory 60 hour week each receiving a different wage and taking home less than £25.

The women's struggles against sacking turned into a golden opportunity for the men to improve their wages and conditions. This provided a solid basis for unity between both the male and female workers.

The practical basis for unity had been established. But both men and women strikers lacked experience of organising a strike. They looked to the TGWU to lend support. It was not forthcoming. For workers already on the brink of poverty the refusal of strike pay was a serious blow. The District Organiser promised a district levy—but did nothing. He was never seen on the picket line. This further demoralised the strikers.

### LEAD

Throughout the six weeks' strike the women were always in the lead. They organised the picketing and sat in the driveway to stop lorries. They chased out the women from the social security who had come to persuade them to collect their cards.

The bosses tried to break the militancy in announcing 17 redundancies and proposing a 3p per hour rise for the men. The union accepted the offer without it being put to a mass meeting and voted on. But the women organised a meeting for the next day and rallied the men behind them. The meeting voted unanimously to reject the offer and stay out.

### HOSTILITY

After 17 weeks of hardship with no strike pay, only £60 collected from the labour movement and in the face of union hostility, the men yielded to the attempts to split them off from the women and accepted a £5 flat increase and the sacking of 17 women.

A fortnight later the management took on more women. Unable to split the workers on racial lines the management tried and succeeded in splitting them on sex lines. They succeeded because other workers failed to give moral and financial support, and because no pressure was put onto the union to organise effective support. It is a bitter lesson. We should organise to ensure that similar defeats are not possible in 1975.

## FIGHTING IS BETTER THAN TALKING



Strikers at SEI were weakened because men and women scabbed on the strike. Here women scabs are booed as they go into work. Picture John Sturrock (Report)

IN 1974 sixteen part-time cleaners succeeded where all the magnificent speeches failed. They managed to force the Engineering Workers' Union Executive Council to part with some money. The women work for the AUEW at its Peckham headquarters. In June APEX, the office workers' union negotiated Phase 3 increases plus threshold for its members working at the AUEW. The cleaners expected the same. But they were refused.

### EXECUTIVE

When it's a question of a new chandelier for their main staircase or a grandfather clock for their council rooms the AUEW Executive are only too willing to part with their members' money. But cleaners wages are different. At conference after conference, AUEW officials

give fighting speeches about the plight of the lower paid, but they won't do anything to help their own low paid workers.

### PICKET

So the women voted to strike and put a picket line across the gate. The TGWU shop steward and the Executive Council's chauffeur joined the picket line. Office supplies were turned away. In three days the cleaners had won an 8 per cent increase, backdated three months and a threshold payment as well.

The cleaners had shown that it was possible to win as much in two days' strike action, as it had taken 250 office workers at the AUEW six months of frustrating negotiations to obtain!

Peter Davidson, APEX

the cleaners doing the same amount of work with less workers than before?

'Then we asked why were the Union officials so distant? Why do you never see them? Why don't they give you information about anything?—There's a six month probationary period. If a woman is called unsatisfactory—a word that does not have to be explained by the supervisor—she can be victimised and not given a second chance of employment at any school in London. Why does the union allow this? Who does the union belong to anyway—the official or the members who pay their salaries?

### Organised

'It was obvious that to get properly organised the kitchen staff and the cleaning staff would have to elect representatives. These would take responsibility to see that the women were in the union. They would pass on information from the union and would take up matters such as industrial injury, unfair dismissal, and so on.

'The meeting was a very good beginning. Then one said "We've got to meet again. It's no use just stopping here." They decided to get in touch with as many other schools as possible through their families, and friends and through teachers, to have another larger meeting.

'This way we hope to get the whole borough organised. The members would go to monthly union meetings and make their wishes known. They will get information about their pay conditions and their benefit rights.

### Difficult

'School kitchen staff and cleaners have worked hard in hot and difficult conditions for a long time. They have never got together and are complete strangers to one another, even though they work in the same school and are in the same union. They have not been known to stand up for themselves and demand the rights that most well organised workers take for granted. But if they organise they can do so. We have made a beginning.'

dinner  
get  
ised

# Letters

Your views are wanted

We would like to hear from readers. Send your letters to: Womens Voice, 8 Cottons Gardens, London, E2.

## Consultants unfair contract

Dear Womens Voice, The latest action by consultants in defence of a 'fair contract' (which means the right to have private patients) shows clearly that they are prepared to endanger the very existence of the health service in order to protect the private sector in medicine, which benefits only the consultants and the very few who can afford their services. Consultants often charge more for one private consultation than a hospital porter or domestic earns in a week.

No group was more abusive in condemning the hospital ancillary staffs strike, which meant short-term discontent to patients in an attempt to win a decent wage for thousands of workers. These same people are prepared to harm patients to protect the elite, privileged position of a few top consultants.

The BMA has already set up agencies (which will operate like nursing agencies) in the major cities, and are organising for a very serious battle.

Other health workers must organise in the unions to defend the health service. We must demand an end to private practise and this pandering to a privileged few at the expense of the service as a whole.

Mary Baker  
Medical Student  
Manchester

Maternity grant of £25 would hardly cover the cost of a pram let alone provide for the baby. I was told that nothing could be done.

In deep distress I wrote to my local Labour MP. He went to the Social Security with me... I explained that the £7.60 seemed too little after £13.93 Sickness Benefit. It turned out that I was entitled to Earnings Related Supplement.

It also turned out that the ruling that friends or relatives are responsible if one lives with them can be waived.

Because I fought I did achieve something. I hope you will publish this as I feel that if more people fought the system they could at least receive more than they probably do at the moment.

Janice Wormald,  
Darlington,  
County Durham

## Success overseas

Womens Voice is definitely the most impressive socialist womens' publication that I have seen. I have been circulating copies among my comrades about 12 of whom are interested in IS. I would greatly appreciate it if we could make an arrangement to receive 10 copies regularly.

Please write back soon. There are several eager readers and activists itching to receive Womens Voice.  
Abbie Bakan,  
Toronto,  
Canada

## Presents for the family

I recently saw an advert by a famous London firm in a magazine I was reading. In these days of Social Contract, belt tightening and self sacrifice it is difficult to decide on gifts for the family. Perhaps their offerings will help readers who are undecided about what to buy for their families.

You can grace your dinner table with a silver pepper mill at £31 or a gold toothpick at £21. Or there's a gold keyring—a snip at £36. For practical members of the family there is a 9ct gold paper clip at £44, and the £45 cigar piercer is sure to please all the smokers.

Kids might try treating Mum to a watch at £600, or save their pocket money for Dad's £135 cuff links.

It is all another world isn't it? While we have to struggle and argue to make ends meet, there are people out there casually buying gold trinkets with the cash they have earned off our backs!  
Glennis Tew,  
Coventry

## Social insecurity

Social security is a service that we all pay for but seldom benefit from... Often petty officialdom blocks our way.

I am an unmarried mother-to-be and have been unable to work since I was 3 months pregnant. I was on Sickness Benefit. Then when my Maternity Allowance became due I phoned the local office to say that I had not yet received it. They advised me to apply for Supplementary Benefit. I got £7.60 and decided to contact the office again.

The following day I saw a young man who began speaking before I had sat down. 'Now Miss World... what's all this about?' I explained that I was getting £7.60 Supplementary Benefit and that it was not enough to live on.

I was getting the maximum that Social Security would allow me. The

## No cheers for family allowance

I work on school dinners. At our school the dinners are excellent. I always believed that children from deprived backgrounds would bolt down their dinners. To my amazement the reverse happened. I find the reason is that deprived children don't get used to the taste of different meats and vegetables, so, when they start at school they won't even taste things that they are not used to. Only chips are eaten. We throw away a great deal of cooked meat which is left. But chips are always finished. As our standard of living gets worse these children suffer more. Free school dinners are not even touched. It is at home that the standard of living must increase.

At the moment everything seems to be working against that. Today my husband received his tax code number. It comes into effect next April—at the same time as the Family Allowance is supposed to go up. The government has already prepared itself to get my family allowance increase back into their coffers.

My husband is a borderline case tax-wise so, we can't claim free dinners. It costs me £2.40 per week for dinners. With bus fares on top that comes to £4 per week. I get £2.90 in family allowance and my husband pays £3.40 tax.

In April I will get an allowance of £4.50. Dinners are going up and will cost £3. Bus fares are to increase 20 per cent, so that makes £6 plus more tax from my husband. I will be at least a pound worse off. So I for one will not be cheering about the Labour Party's increase in Family Allowance.

If ever there was a need for socialist women to raise their voice it is now. Men won't because they are more concerned with work and don't see the problems of family allowance.  
Sadie Blood,  
Newton Le Willows,  
Lancs.



Women workers picket Associated Automation, Willesden. Report Back Page  
Picture Chris Davis (Report)

## Propaganda for equal pay

1975 is Equal Pay Year. It will be a record year for sellouts by unions and con-tricks by management unless women are militant and are prepared to fight for what is—morally and legally theirs.

Apathy is a major obstacle. By the time you have come home from work, cooked the tea, put the kids to bed and done the housework, it is easy to see why the majority of women have stayed silent for so long.

Sheffield IS are about to embark on a propaganda campaign to highlight the urgent need for militant action. This involves the use of posters and the wide

distribution of leaflets giving information which is not readily available about the Equal Pay Act, local trade union organisation, etc.

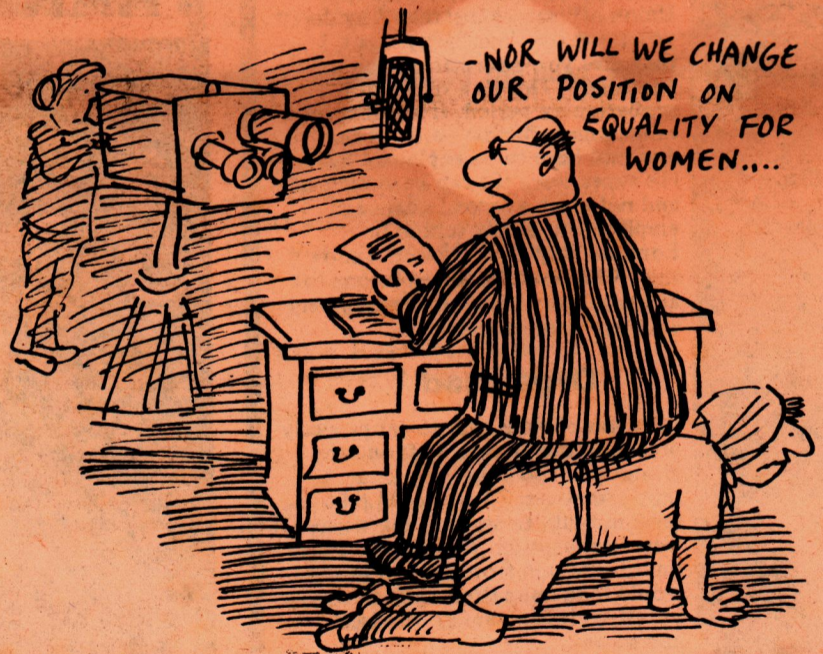
A film relevant to women workers will be shown on February 5, followed up by a public meeting on the 5 March. We hope that many women workers in Sheffield will attend. Babysitters and transport will be available for all women who wish to attend.

It is essential to have an exchange of ideas between IS branches and we hope to see more letters and articles in Womens Voice from those who are involved in

work organising women. We need to learn from each other.

The National Rank and File Conference on Equal Pay planned for the spring is something that Womens Voice readers should be working for. If it is to be a success we must start organising to get delegations now.

Equal Pay is just one of the issues that must be fought and won in the struggle against the countless injustices which our society inflicts on women both in the home and at work.  
Pauline Lumb and Carole Dale  
Sheffield



## Student discrimination

DESPITE their privileged position as students, female students still face discrimination. The National Union of Students debated and passed a wide-reaching policy resolution on 'Women in Society' at annual conference. There have since been several NUS conferences on women, and the turn-out indicates that many women within the NUS are looking for national leadership for the campaign.

Local struggles have taken place, organised and supported by individuals within the Students Union, unconnected with the NUS campaign. The NUS itself has not initiated any such activity at the local level. The NUS slogan on nurseries is 'Every College Should Have One', meaning that they are a basic need like libraries and canteens. An NUS survey revealed that few nurseries exist in colleges, and those that do are inadequate and expensive. Despite this obvious need for a national campaign, the NUS has failed to give the lead. The Executive has tried to take us issues affecting women without involving the membership on even the most basic demands.

As a result, most Students Unions are unaware of the existence of a 'Women's Campaign' and are totally inactive. This has led many women students to see the solution in terms of working through college Women's Liberation groups, where they exist, and concentrating on gaining support for the Working Women's Charter. These are substitutes for the real work that has to be done to get a campaign off the ground. IS students have argued for a concentration on 'Nurseries, Abortion and Contraception' to start a national campaign. This must be coupled with guidance and leadership from the NUS. All students fighting discrimination must push their local Student's Union to adopt NUS policy and fight for it. If any campaign is to be successful it is vital to take the struggle further than the feminist movement. As 'Women in Society' resolution says, the discrimination faced by female students is a symptom of the structure of this society which is based on divisions between classes, races and sexes.  
Carolyn Clark NUS

Women Fight Back  
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People needed to live and help in a Therapeutical Community. No experience necessary. Please write to: Elizabeth Winkler, c/o Moonfleet Bookshop, 39 Clapham Park Road, London, SW4 or phone: 01-677 1811.

NOISS Day School for Women. Saturday 8th February at Leicester University. All members of IS students' societies are invited. Write for registration to IS Student organiser, 8 Cottons Gardens, London, E2 8DN. Tel: 01-739 1878

Come in Hilda Muggins—a 30 minute play about the way women are oppressed and exploited under capitalism. Ideal for provoking discussion at your trade union branch, workplace or college. Contact CAST at 11c Cabell Street, Phone: 01-402 6087

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I would like to know more about the International Socialists

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Harlow, Essex

# LAWS DONT BRING WOMEN EQUALITY

## More action needed

1975: YEAR OF EQUAL PAY! What a joke this is. The Equal Pay Act was supposed to have given all women at least 50 per cent of the men's rate by December 1973. It even gave powers to the Secretary of State to enforce this target. But neither Tory nor Labour Secretaries of State have bothered to use their powers. Not because the target 90 per cent was reached by December 1973 or by December 1974. But because they're not prepared to force the employers to do anything the bosses don't want to do.

The situation is scandalous. Whole industries have made no moves at all towards equal pay. In September figures were published to show that the situation had remained static, or worsened, in over a fifth of the 226 national wage agreements monitored. Women were actually worse off compared with men in agricultural jobs, in pubs, and in sweetie shops. The textile industry was really bad. In the Midlands cotton spinning and weaving and hosiery finishing the situation had actually got worse. Almost everywhere else in the clothing and footwear industries the picture was only slightly better.

For those women who have been able to make some progress, things are still not rosy. The money paid in any job doesn't simply depend on whether a man or a woman can do it. Skill and training are also involved in the job.

Eight out of ten adult working women are in one of four types of job:

- Office and communications 30 per cent.
- Catering, domestic etc services 20 per cent
- Unskilled and semi-skilled production 16 per cent.
- Sales 10 per cent.

Women are still shunted off into these women's jobs in a process that starts at birth. When needle-work and cookery classes have ended at school and it's time to leave, most women just don't stand a chance. In 1973 only 21,400 of the 107,000 girls who started their first jobs had any training courses attached to their new work. And some three-quarters of this lucky lot were being trained in hairdressing and manicure. This compares with 64 per cent of boys who got training. A grand total of 452 girls obtained apprenticeships throughout the entire UK manufacturing industry.

As the latest Government White Paper on Equality for Women points out: 'The restricted nature of the opportunities open to young women to train for skilled work reinforces the tendency for women to fill the lowest paid, least satisfying jobs.'

While it's nice to know that the Government knows—it would be even nicer to know how we're going to put things right.

Anyone who imagines that all that's needed is more legislation is living in cloud cuckoo land. We've got legislation. We've had it since 'Red Barbara' Castle was last in government. And still neither Tory nor Labour ministers do anything about it.

The lessons we must learn from this is the same one the working class have learnt time and time again

## European bosses evade equal pay

1975 IS EQUAL PAY YEAR. But many employers have no intention of paying equal wages to women and have even threatened to do away with women's jobs altogether if forced to pay equal rates. Clearly the law on its own is not enough.

Women in the Common Market have in theory had equal pay for over 10 years. But a survey published by the Common Market Commission shows that in reality they have no such thing. Employers have found many ways to avoid equal pay. 'Women's work' has technically been abolished but it still exists. Only now it goes under a different name—'light' or 'asexual'—which is paid at a lower rate.

Women doing the same work as men are entitled to the same pay. In whole industries this has led to the employment of exclusively female labour—to keep the wages down. Even where women are entitled to get equal pay—they don't. Employers



Police breaking up the picket line of women on strike in Flint. Does anyone really believe that employers who are prepared to go to these lengths to resist women's demands will voluntarily give them equal pay?



## Marjorie wins a prize

OUR Women's Voice prize for the 'Bag of the Year' goes unquestionably to Marjorie Proops for her column in The Mirror.

Old Killjoy moaned her way out of 1974 with a complaint about the Post Office's 'Dial a Father Christmas' service. Such money wasting schemes, she claimed, would never see the light of day if women ruled the Post Office. A grim picture of female power which we wish to disassociate ourselves from entirely.

Then Marj bawled her way into the New Year with the terrifying headline 'An Awful Warning to Bra Burners'. It wasn't a dire warning about chest infections, Marj was concerned about reports that liberated women can damage male egos. Worse still, some men had actually been stricken with impotence when confronted by self confident women.

industrial matters'. Yet they are quick enough to use the law against workers who try to picket effectively.

It is clear that if the government is opposed to implementing the equal pay laws then it is only prepared to talk about equal pay to impress. The Equal Pay Act is only for show, a law without teeth. There is only one way women will get equal pay and that is to do what women strikers did in 1974. Fight for It.

Linsey German

Marj was worried because 'we may gain equality but stand a fair chance of losing the sexual satisfaction that a virile masculine man provides.' That kind of nonsense sounds really great coming from a woman who claims to be in favour of female emancipation.

In reality Marj probably doesn't care a fig about emancipation. As a highly paid Fleet Street journalist, Marj is much more interested in maintaining her position of privilege. That means keeping things as they are—not rocking the boat and not going too far—with Womens Lib or anything else. That is why she echoed Harold Wilson's appeal for unity in her column, and tried to make out that all women have the same interests.

Marj really doesn't understand the problems facing working class women. That was made quite obvious when she raved a recent report from the Church of Wales. Convinced that we'd all be wildly excited about it, she wrote enthusiastically that their proposals to drop the 'giving away' part of the marriage ceremony would be doing a 'great service' for women. Daringly she suggested the Church of England should follow suit.

Does she honestly think that any church will solve women's problems? But then she wouldn't know. She's never had to feed and clothe a family on a working class income.

We would, however, like to deny the rumour that Marjorie Proops is applying for a job as the first ever woman vicar in the Church of England. It doesn't pay as well as a job on Fleet Street.

A Socialist Worker publication

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Mass picket at Scotts Bakery, Bootle. A carload of scabs was stopped by militant pickets—many of them women. Picture John Sturrock (REPORT)

# BAKERS SOLD SHORT

'AFTER THIS last settlement the differential between men and women is more than before the strike. In a union where two thirds of the members are women that is absolutely disgusting' said Millie Hughes. Millie, who is the union representative at Scotts Bakery in Liverpool, told Womens Voice, 'The whole thing stinks of a sellout. When men leave baking it is women who take their jobs over. The industry is run on cheap casual labour. Young girls are doing really heavy manual work and get half the pay.'

'Women who have been in baking for fifteen years are being made redundant only to be taken on again a few months later on a casual basis. This makes it difficult to organise union activity.'

'But even with these kinds of drawbacks the militancy shown at the time of the strike was fantastic—only to be sold short by the union.'

'But the feeling is still there. After the sellout there was a meeting in Birmingham attended by 60 rank and file bakery workers. We set up a committee to help build a reform movement in the union.'

'We will meet again to draw up a programme of demands. And we have agreed to keep in contact over any disputes that arise so that no one is left isolated and picked off.'

'One of the things we will work towards is to make sure that at this year's bakery conference the demand for equal pay and an end to de-casualisation will not be just empty phrases.'

Report by Eileen Healey.

## Lucas lays off women

PREDICTIONS of unemployment as a result of the economic crisis are already coming true. As always, women workers are the first to go, as recent events in the Lucas combine show. In Burnley, at the Lucas Northbridge works, 350 workers on the 'twilight shift' have been sacked. One woman worker told Womens Voice that she thought the sackings of women at this time might have something to do with it being equal pay year. In other parts of the combine the story is the same. At the King Street plant in Birmingham, the 'twilight shift' has been laid off. In the same factory one section of fifty day workers, mainly women, is being laid off one day per week and also suffering work sharing. That's the Happy New Year Lucas wished its women workers.

## Gradings work against women

To pave the way for equal pay—Join the Bakers Union Today...

THAT'S what the Bakers Union Journal says—and to show they mean it the Annual Conference of the Union last year voted overwhelmingly for £40 for 40 hours—equal pay to apply immediately.

In practice, however, things are not so rosy. Under the new settlement operating from December last the union has agreed to a pay structure which is thoroughly anti-women.

Workers in the industry have been regraded. The basic divisions are bread makers (men) and confectionary workers (women). And the 'womens' grades are paid considerably less than the men's although in fact the job descriptions as outlined in the Working Agreement are virtually identical. A female mixer/

dough-maker does the same job as a male mixer/dough maker.

There are nine grades in the new structure. The top three are all male, maximum basic £31.17. The bottom three are all female, maximum basic £23.72—a differential of £5.35—but that doesn't mean that there is equal pay even in the areas of overlap in grades 4-6.

Under the new agreement men bakery operatives have gone into grade five while women bakery operatives who do the same job have gone into grade nine. The basic differential is £5.69 for the same work!

This grading scheme came as no surprise to the union. When they went to arbitration the arbitrator was helped by an employers' official and a union official. So, they must have known all about it.

# CAREER STRUCTURE MUST BE FOUGHT

THE HOUGHTON REPORT on teachers' pay produced an insulting offer to the worst off teachers and a huge rise for the head teachers. The National Union of Teachers who have a majority on the negotiating committee has sold out to the backward policy of a pay structure for career teachers which has long been advocated by the National Association of Schoolmasters. If you don't know what a career teacher is you can find out from the NAS General Secretary Terry Casey who said: 'We have always fought for career teachers and by definition all men are career teachers'. Two thirds of teachers are women. However, this does not seem to bother the Powers that Be. This year Reg Prentice Education Secretary, announced that the purpose of the Houghton enquiry was 'that the pay

structure should recognise the need to give more adequate rewards to career teachers.'

The Houghton report emphasises the differences between teachers and tries to undermine their common interest by having huge pay differentials between different teachers.

These differentials must be eliminated. Scottish Teachers have already shown the way with massive strikes both official and unofficial. Already in England there were beginnings of strike action last term in Birmingham, Liverpool, Leicester and London. These beginnings must be built upon. Teachers must fight in their schools and union branches and get the report rejected.

Jeannie Holborow NUT

## Locked-out workers need support

AT A MASS MEETING at the beginning of January, 600 workers at Associated Automation in Willesden, London voted to occupy the factory unless five scabs were sacked. The strikers have been locked out for eight weeks in a dispute over threshold payments and London Weighting allowance. Their decision met with an immediate response from management who had hitherto been reluctant to negotiate. The management agreed to sack the scabs. Shop stewards have put pickets on the gates and women have been prominent on the picket line. But office workers, members of the TASS and APEX unions have continued working. Strikers are appealing to these workers to honour their picket line.

The shop stewards at Associated Automation would like to form links with GEC workers in other parts of the country. Other GEC convenors should write to them at Willesden Trades and Labour Hall, 375 High Road, Willesden, NW10.

The dispute has been made official. The strikers need moral and financial support.

Messages of support and donations to Shop Stewards Committee, A E Ford, 21, Stanley Park Drive, Wembley, Middx.

Picture Page 6

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Edited by A. E. HALLIDAY, O.B.E. General Secretary

**BAKERS' UNION MEMBERSHIP TARGET**

42,000 women work in the industry. Our campaign to reduce the gap between male and female rates must have the support of the women. With 16,000 women members we still have a job of organising to do

**TO PAVE THE WAY TO EQUAL PAY JOIN THE BAKERS' UNION TO-DAY**

... but the top three grades are all male, the bottom three all female.