

WOMIENS VOICE

THE PAPER OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST WOMEN

BOSSSES IN CRISIS WOMEN ON THE SCRAPHEAP

IMPERIAL TYPEWRITERS



DEFEND OUR RIGHT TO WORK

PRESS RELEASE

MANCHESTER WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT that over the past year there has been an increase in the number of strikes involving women workers. These disputes have been over issues ranging from struggles for equal pay to the fight against victimisation of militant workers.

Many of these strikes were defeated; they received little or no support from Trade Union leaders and male workers.

Women are almost invariably in a weaker position than men and outside support is crucial when they are involved in industrial action. 1975 is supposed to be Equal Pay Year, but already it is clear that the Labour government and Trade Unions have no desire to champion this cause. Women will have to fight if equal pay is to be a reality. And the question of redundancies must be faced. Already in many factories whole shifts have been closed down and as the economic crisis deepens this will happen more and more.

Women workers will have to struggle to keep their jobs, to struggle for equal pay and to fight against redundancy.

1975 will prove to be a year in which women workers will have to take industrial action but we must not let the women strikers of 1975 be defeated, as in the past.

At the National Rank and File Conference held on 30 November, the National Rank and File Committee pledged full support to the struggle of working women.

As part of their commitment, the organising committee are calling a delegate conference, covering the vital issues affecting women workers—equal pay and redundancy.

The Conference will be held in Manchester on 26 April and is aimed at women workers in factories and offices, to discuss the concrete steps that can be taken to ensure active support for women's strikes in the coming months.

This Conference is not intended to be a talking shop. On the contrary—the organising committee hopes that it will prove to be the springboard from which we can build strong and effective links between men and women workers. It is important that you get your trade union branch or shop stewards committee to send delegates—or better still to act as co-sponsors of the conference.

Further details and credentials from:
NATIONAL RANK AND FILE ORGANISING COMMITTEE,
214 ROUNDWOOD ROAD,
NW10



Picture: John Starrock (Report)

EQUAL PAY = EQUAL WORK

Kitty Williams interviews a male trade unionist

Man: I'm in favour of equal pay in principle, but I don't see why women should get equal pay when they can't do the same job as men. A woman couldn't even operate my machine. It's a question of strength.

Kitty: We should get equal pay for jobs of equal value. Look at the women in the electronics shops, you couldn't do their job. But the components they make are just as essential as yours in car manufacture.

Man: No, I couldn't do their job, it's too intricate, my hands are too big. There are men's jobs and women's jobs and the work men do is more valuable. Why do you think that it's generally men who get promotion? I'll tell you—responsibility is part of a man's nature, men can take more pressure than women, and handle people better. Imagine a female forewoman on this section, it would be chaos!

acceptable

Kitty: There are many reasons why women don't get promotion, one main one is that it is not socially acceptable as your joke shows. But May, the checker over there, knows all there is to know about this section, the foreman is picking her brains all the time; and if you believe responsibility is not part of a woman's nature—remember that the next time you're in hospital being cared for by women.

Man: I take your point. But what about this? Lucas allow in their budget absenteeism by women because of pregnancy and illness. You can't run industry on absenteeism.

Kitty: You're saying it's women's fault they bear children. Have you any kids?

Man: Yes, I have, well... I like kids... it's not that...

Kitty: And if the kids were ill who would you expect to look after them. Would you have time off?

Man: I'd expect my wife to have time off, but that's only because women are better with kids. I'm the breadwinner.

Kitty: What would you think of a bloke taking time off to look after his kids because his wife earned more than him?

Man: He'd have to be a pansy!

Kitty: You want to have your cake and eat it.

Man: But what about shift working

and overtime? You want the equal pay but you won't do what men do. We've got a woman training to be a setter but she's not prepared to do shift work and overtime like the male setters, why should she get the same rates?

unsocial

Kitty: Nobody should have to work unsocial hours. It can damage health and personal life. We should have fought harder for basic wages instead of falling for the shift premium. How would you feel about cooking your own dinner and putting the kids to bed while your wife works shifts?

Man: I'll accept most of what you've said—in times of full employment. But now we're in a bad economic state, there's redundancies, short time, and unemployment on the way. It's not right that women should be working while men are put on the dole.

Kitty: Is it good economic sense to throw men or women on the dole when they're capable of producing wealth? Take a minute to look outside this factory and look at our economic system—a system where thousands are homeless, while building materials are vastly over-

produced and able-bodied building workers are out of work. Look at the long waiting list for hospitals and at an understaffed, badly paid, badly equipped medical service to cope with it. Why? Because it's not profitable enough to house the homeless and cure the sick...

Man: Well, I must admit that for a woman you're got some good ideas

Kitty: For a woman did you say?

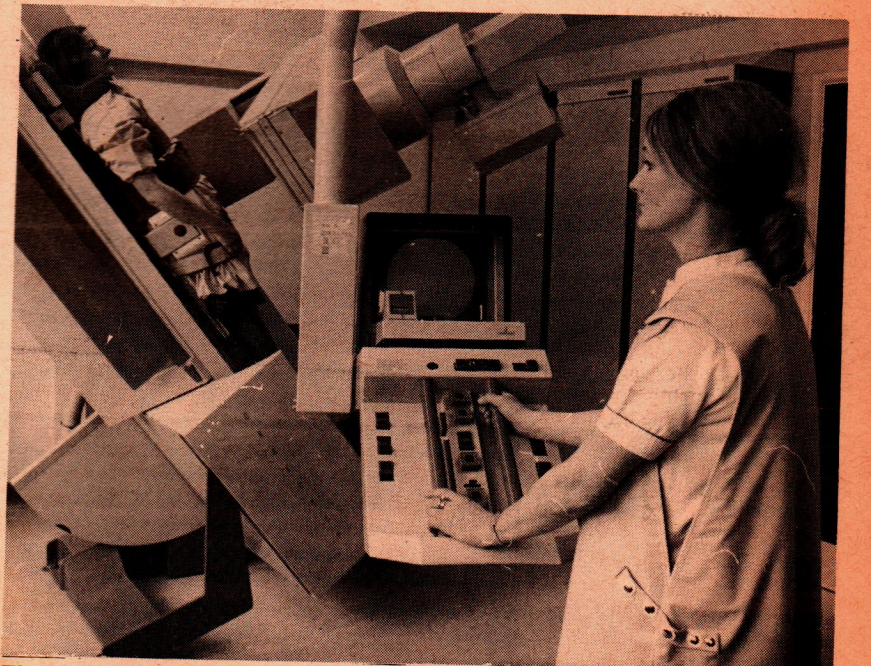
Man: Oh sorry, but look if women did get involved in union work and shop floor politics they'd be more like men. I like women to be feminine.

fluffy-haired

Kitty: Brother, you want women to work unsocial hours, look after your domestic needs and the kids, bear children and at the same time be militant trade unionists, and yet still be fluffy haired, attractive and sweet smelling. What you want is a robot—we can't combine the lot even if we wanted to. Do you expect so many and varied qualities from your fellow men?

Man: Sister, you've got me, would you like to speak at my union branch meeting next week?...

Kitty: Yes, if you arrange a baby-sitter for me!



Those men who say women haven't the ability to take on responsibility should remember that the next time they're in hospital—being looked after by women

Equality - American style

THERE IS IN THE USA strict 'equal opportunity' legislation which makes it impossible for bosses, even in the heaviest industries, to refuse women jobs. Women are getting an equal footing in industry to men and although many of them will lose their jobs in the current depression, there is no doubt that the face of American industry has changed. In the vital auto industry there is no such thing as a 'women's' job. Every job is open to both sexes and a growing number of carworkers are women. In the gigantic telephone industry, it is now impossible for men to get the traditional 'men's-jobs' in repair and installation, any openings must go to women.

BOGUS

The American 'equal opportunity' legislation is a gain compared with the bogus British 'equal pay' Act. But there are disadvantages. The nightmare of shift work which dominates the lives of an increasing number of men is now faced in America by women workers. Working class women were never strong enough to refuse to adopt shift work.

There is now a national working class women's organisation called the Coalition of Labour Union Women (CLUW) and that is better than the middle-class circus that used to dominate the women's struggle. But it is also under the total control of women trade union bureaucrats. Women workers in America are learn-

ing the lesson that all militants are forced to learn. When you start fighting the bosses you have to take on the union leaders as well.

This situation in CLUW, the severe impact on women of the growth of mass unemployment and the disastrous cut in real wages that has affected all American workers point to the fact that the future of the women's struggle in the USA is inseparable from that of the rank and file movement. Not only because women are a large part of any work force but also because men are finding that their fellow workers who happen to be women, and sometimes wives, refuse to be treated in the old ways. Women may still be forced to accept the insults to their intelligence peddled by the mass media, but they won't accept it from their brothers on the shop floor. They have gained a measure of equality in the factories. They won't accept total inequality in their homes.

HORIZONTAL

The remarkable thing about these developments, is that when male militants are forced to stop regarding women primarily as the opposite sex whose basic position in society is horizontal, then they become better militants. It probably has something to do with the fact that if you accept women as full members of the working class army, then your army becomes stronger...
Glyn Carver

'WIFE BEATING IS HEREDITARY' recently announced the eminent Dr John Gayhurst of Westminster Hospital. In a speech to the World Psychiatric Association he explained the roots of wife beating in the only way he knew how—without knocking the system. From his statement we may conclude that he, like all the other social scientists who are paid to patch up the cracks in a rotten society, has no adequate or honest explanation to offer.

Opressive

Wife beating and all other forms of bullying do not occur in a vacuum. They are the ugly result of violent oppressive societies. The Yanorama Indians of South America, who are a notoriously warfaring tribe, beat their women in order to show male physical superiority. This is regarded as admirable in societies where the ability of men to kill and dominate is respected. People might scoff if such a simple explanation were offered to account for the behaviour of men in our complex modern society, but facts show that the need for primitive aggression has not been eliminated. Ireland and Vietnam expose the thin veneer of our civilisation. Rich and powerful people in our society, more than any others, know the value of violence. They use it constantly to maintain

'Wife beating hereditary'

their positions of privilege and domination.

A basic feature of capitalist society is that the majority of workers will never be able to enjoy the fruits of their own labour.

Paradise

To a man with his nose pressed against the company store window, the capitalist paradise appears close enough. But it is always just out of reach. This causes frustrations that can easily give him the idea that he is a failure in the eyes of society.

With the smell of defeat high in his nostrils he returns home to the one piece of property that society allows, even expects, him to dominate. So, his explosive frustrations are turned not onto the cause of his misery, but onto his 'whipping boy'.

Each weekend, our hospital casualty departments receive many such 'whipped boys'. The majority, when recovered, are returned home until the next time. Others commit suicide. Some die from their injuries.

Recent investigations show that

one out of every 200 wives are in danger of being severely beaten by their husbands. Three quarters of the battered wives interviewed admitted to living in fear of their lives.

Joke

Divorce may seem the obvious answer. But it is a sick joke when the filing of a divorce petition can be the equivalent of signing your own death warrant. Unless friends or relatives are willing to provide accommodation and protection for a woman and her children, she will be con-

demned to the matrimonial home where her husband will eventually be served with the divorce petition. You can imagine the consequences. The husband is usually loath to participate in the escape of his victim. So, the beatings continue.

Attention

With few exceptions, the plight of the battered wife and her children attract little attention. Many pay lip service to female emancipation but appear to be unable to do anything to help. Unperturbed, the authorities drop ineffective hints of legislation like constipated mice. Unlike 'real' crime, the battered wife poses no threat to property or the state.

Socialists must support the fight for female emancipation by every possible means. This will include providing adequate means of escape for domestic prisoners, and the building up of new standards for the way that human beings behave toward each other. This will not be borne out of good intentions, but out of organising solutions to cope with a real need.

Gay Smith



Scenes at Chiswick Womens' Aid—the centre set up in 1971 by women to provide shelter for battered wives and their children.



The house in West London which became the Chiswick Women's Aid in 1971 must have seemed too good to be true to the women who found their way there. In the four years since then such battered wives centres have opened all over the country. Now there are at least 38. The situation is so bad in London that some social workers, knowing their own departments are incapable of providing help, recommend women to go there instead!

Charity

The problem is that the centres, and the book, only provide half the answer. They provide on a local, charitable basis what the local authorities can't or won't provide. They spend their money on mopping-up operations when it's too late for them to do anything else. It's another vicious circle, comparable only to the viciousness of the circle that battered wives are in. In the end we have to do away with the source of the problem that causes wife beating. But to do that we have to know what the cause is. The book only provides half an answer.

All too easily it slips into blaming the men in this world, rather than the society that rears them. This is understandable because it is they who do the beating, but why do they do it? And why do battered wives often in their turn batter their children? What is the solution to the problems facing husbands that batter? Prison? That notion, unfortunately, creeps in.

Violent

You can't breed violence out of a system which is essentially violent. Kindness to the next generation will not change a world that is brutal. Reading this book will not change the world, but it will help you understand it.

Margaret Renn

* *Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear*, by Erin Pizzey, Penguin, 45p.

Who are the wife beaters?

MY JOB mostly is concerned with mothers and children. I often go home hating the whole male race.

It's not often that I hear the 'other side'. Now and again one of the 'battering fathers/husbands' comes in, usually one of the times wife and kids have left home. They are the sort of blokes that really make your hackles rise, belligerent with attitudes guaranteed to make you want to get them out as soon as possible. But they leave me more saddened than any amount of black eyes.

Usually they are looking for ways to hit back at their wives for leaving them, the most obvious being through the kids. One bloke came in wanting me to take his youngest off his wife as she was 'mad'. His only justification for his belief was that she'd gone to live with a 'black bloke'... 'they're different to us, different ways, food—it's not a healthy way for an English boy to be in'. I couldn't shift his racist opinion neither could I change his mind about using those sort of tactics to retaliate for the tremendous hurt he was feeling. The hurt and bewilderment are real, they really don't understand why the wife has left.

Often their childhood was spent watching violent parental relationships. Father being remembered as a 'manly' idol ruling the household with an iron fist! The best time of their lives is seen as the playing, fighting and drinking with the lads, before girls began to be taken seriously.

Relationships with wives have to be a very private, possessive thing. Caring is weakness and makes them vulnerable. One husband described the attitudes perfectly with this

story of a family wedding party... He was already 'on guard' as the two disco lads were obviously after 'one thing' and he wanted to be sure that wasn't his wife. During the party his sister-in-law came over to chat. He told her to 'push off' so that his wife wouldn't get the wrong idea. This developed into a row with his wife as she had upset her sister, during which he hit her. In the melee that followed one of the disco chaps comforted his wife and was promptly thrown down the stairs for being too fresh.

Housekeeping money is judged by the husband, and given out of 'generosity'. Presents are usually in monetary terms—Mr C won some £300 on the dogs and took his wife out to buy her a ring—'all she would have was an £8 ring' he said to show me how ungrateful his wife was not to choose an expensive ring!

When she leaves he can't understand she's gone of her own accord. In his terms he's a good husband. Someone must have influenced her, or there's another man. It's hard to accept that maybe his ideas are wrong. Newspapers and magazines reinforce them every day.

He loves and needs his wife and to an extent is destroyed by her departure. He'll spend days following her around, disrupting any attempts at her setting up a new life. How does he try and tell her?... 'I promise I'll never hit you again, that's all finished, I want you back, but I'm going to have to hit you if you won't listen to me.'

The only chance these blokes have is a change in society so maybe they will begin to understand that women are people too...!
A Health Visitor

book review

DO YOU KNOW a woman who gets beaten by her husband? Do any of the men you know beat their wives? Do you know kids whose lives are in constant danger from their parents' beatings? No? Then read this book* and think again.

Rare

Wife beating isn't something rare. It goes on all the time, among all classes of women, all over the country. But it must be one of the least talked about causes of death and serious injury. The women themselves talk about it least of all. Because they are frightened, and because they know there is no way out of the vicious circle. As the stories in the book relate, the police, the social workers and local authority housing departments are incapable of doing anything when violence begins to physically tear a family to pieces.

At best the children get taken into care. But that actually costs the state more than it would to provide families with sufficient money when they need it—before the tensions become so enormous that they only have one outlet.

Battered women come up against an insurmountable wall of problems. Combined with their own insecurity



Erin Pizzey—author

this makes the situation critical. Again and again they go back to their husbands, to be beaten once more. Reading the book you build up a real resentment for the 'do gooders', who are always encouraging them to go home and sort it out.

TEACHERS: WHY WE STRUCK

WAS YOUR KID kept out of school recently because teachers were on strike over their new pay deal, the Houghton Report? You might have wondered what we were grumbling about. It didn't sound too bad, an extra £385 million. But it wasn't shared out equally.

For the Heads there was an increase of up to £40 a week. For the classroom teachers it was only £4. Promotion opportunities in Primary schools are far fewer than in Secondary schools; what's more Primary schools are staffed largely by women. So a high proportion of the teachers on the higher scales are men, in spite of their comparatively small numbers in teaching as a whole. The teacher who enjoys teaching and is good at it for its own sake has no hope of rewards—these are reserved for the 'careerists'.

One of the reasons why those who do the least teaching get paid the most, is that the National Association of Schoolmasters (exclusively for men) and even the National Union of Teachers have supported a career structure. The Houghton Committee scorn the idea of a flat rate for the job as being unprofessional and our unions take the same line. This results in a salary system that does nothing for Primary school teachers or classroom teachers.

Reward

The Houghton Report will make the immediate reward and the prospect of promotion much greater for graduates than for those of us who are teacher trained. The report states

Sal Jenkinson,
Comprehensive School in Hackney

its approval of an 'Ultimate aim of an all graduate profession' and follows by saying that 'more men teachers are needed, particularly in Primary schools'. There is no indication that graduate training is to be made more available to women than it is now, so the increase in promoted posts can only be to attract male graduates who could otherwise get more money doing other jobs. The female-teacher-trainee who has worked herself to a frazzle gaining her expertise, will only be able to stand and watch as they come in

over her head.

Houghton has also advised a change in the points system whereby money is allocated to schools depending on the number and age of the pupils. Houghton has increased the points younger children are worth, but at the same time has decreased the value of points! Result—back to Square One, whilst giving the superficial impression that things are being done for the neglected Primary schools, which is where most women teachers are.

Welcome

One item in the report women can only welcome. It recognises that women should receive increments in pay for time spent raising children.

The report 'notes' this and 'recommends' that the position should be 'examined'. Although the recommendations which are designed to divide and confuse teachers have in some cases already been acted on, this one will be the least urgently considered. The only way to produce results is for women teachers to make sure that all teachers and parents understand the implications of this report. Its careerist, divisive proposals must be fought for the sake of the education you would like your kids to receive.

£6 million for them —more cuts for us

LEICESTER COUNTY COUNCIL has approved £4 million cuts in education, while at the same time the City Corporation plans to purchase palatial new offices at £6¼ million.

Over the years, there has been a gradual decline, with poor facilities and outdated equipment. Staff shortages have meant that during two years in infant school, my son had six different teachers. The proposed reduction of a further 300 teachers, expected particularly in primary schools, where the least resistance is likely, can only worsen this situation and lead to even larger classes.

Children have been robbed of school milk, dinner prices have been raised by a so-called socialist government, and the schools have been forced to raise funds for essential equipment by organising jumble sales, garden fetes and the like. But never before has so much been taken

£6¼m. 'instant' Civic Centre plan
CITY TO BUY NEW
GIANT OFFICES

Headlines from Leicester newspapers indicate clearly what the priorities of 'our leaders' are...

Leicester Mercury
MOVE TO RESTORE £1m
SCHOOLS CUTS FAILS

away in one fell swoop.

Increases in the price of school meals are almost beyond the reach of most families with several children—

particularly those that are one-parent families. It costs us £3 a week for school dinners alone. The nutritional value of meals is to be decreased—my kids have recently been offered sandwiches for school dinners.

It's not only in education, but in health and social services that budgets are being slashed. The effects are gravely felt by those who need them most—the working class. Make no mistake, these cuts amount to class warfare. The working class are being called upon to pay for a crisis that is not of their making.

The trade union bureaucracies have failed to take a lead against the cuts, and the building of a strong rank and file movement is the only answer. The young teachers of Leicestershire are in the vanguard of such a movement and many protest meetings and demonstrations have already been held.

Enid Khan

SEE YOU ON APRIL 26th!

1975, INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR, may be a red-letter year for the likes of Margaret Thatcher. But for the rest of us working women, it will simply mean a greater flood of pious resolutions about 'rights', 'equality' and 'the quality of life'.

1975 is also international Economic Crisis Year—and that's what working women are going to feel most, in their pay packets and on the dole. Last year women fought back against lousy pay and conditions—at Salford Electrical, Wingrove Rogers and Imperial Typewriters. Women bakers, nurses, hospital technicians and radiographers went on strike for the first time ever. Many of them lost.

This year we can't afford to lose—the bosses are fighting for their lives—at our expense. Already there are large-scale redundancies amongst women at Imperial, Joseph Lucas, Rawplugs and Walls.

Other women workers, like the knitters at Leicester, have been taking a pay cut to 'avoid redundancies'.

THIS IS NOT ON. We didn't create this economic mess and we're not going to pay for it. But to fight effectively, we need all the help we can get. And that's what this Rank and File Organisation Women's Conference on 26 April is all about—a chance for women trade union delegates to exchange experiences and organise to fight for equal pay and against redundancies.

Judith Jones is a nurse at Salford Royal Infirmary, and the chairman of her NUPE branch. She was one of the rank and file leaders of the nurses strike last year, when she helped to set up the Manchester and District Nurses Action Group. She is well aware of how much the Rank and File Organisation helped nurses to organise their strike and win support from other workers.

'I want to emphasise how im-

portant this conference is', Judith told Womens' Voice. 'Everyone knows that the majority of workers in hospitals are women, and most people think that hospital workers have equal pay. But the wool has never been pulled over their eyes in the case of women ancillaries, as they are almost all on the two lowest grades of pay. The last pay claim called for 'equal pay for women', but as usual, like in many union claims, it was the first to be dropped.

If we want equal pay for the work we do, we must realise that we're going to have to fight for it. That's why this Rank and File Conference is important. Instead of just talking about it, let's see women taking a stand for themselves, pushing for delegacies in their union branches and coming prepared to get something done. By swapping experiences, we can get some concrete ideas which can be taken back and fought for at work.'

THE NUMBER OF UNEMPLOYED has reached 750,000 and is still rising. It is taking place not just in the big car industries but also in the more traditional industries such as textiles, shoes and light engineering. In all these areas women have been the first to be hit. In factory after factory twilight shifts and part time women workers are being laid off. Many small firms are threatening a close down altogether unless workers accept wage cuts and higher productivity.

British Industry is being restricted to pumping money into the production of luxury goods—such as

cars—for export.

Less money is being put into the traditional British Industries. As a result, the lower paid in the traditional industries—many of them women workers are suffering.

It is traditional that women should be the first to go. It is forgotten that many women are single with children and that they need their jobs just as much as men. When there is a crisis all the old arguments about men needing jobs are trotted out. These redundancies must be fought. In addition the arguments that women only work for pin



600 FACE S

SOME DISTURBING rumours are coming out of Maldon, a small town in Essex where Ever Ready employ 600 workers to make transistor batteries.

By chance, some of the workers read in a newspaper that there was a possibility of their factory closing down because management want to shift all the machinery to one of their factories in the Midlands. Since the rumours began a few weeks ago, there has only been one meeting and that was little more than a good-will gesture from the area manager. The T&G convenor has promised to do what he can to save jobs, but apart from that, there has been no signs of any union activity...

Meanwhile the workers, and 80 per cent are women, are waiting in no-man's-land to hear whether the chop is coming or not...

Maggie Newell

Blow

Redundancies always hit hard wherever they occur, but in Maldon this would be a severe blow. It's mainly a rural area and jobs are hard to come by. One of the biggest advantages of working for Ever-Ready is the bus service they put on for their employees. Day shift workers clock in at 7.30am, and work till 4.30pm. As one of the workers, June Thorpe explained, 'without this kind of service, (local transport

is very poor) it would be a waste of time looking for other factory jobs. The only alternative would be shop-work and that pays about half of what we earn at Ever-Ready'. June has worked at the factory since leaving school eight years ago. Her wages help to support her mother and two school-girl sisters. June's mum is already worried about how the family will manage if the redundancies do come off. As she said, 'It's hard enough to manage as it is these days without that sort of worry.'

Another worker, Sandra

'You never dream you can be made redundant and happens and you think "Oh my God". A lot of women are angry at the closure that they're saying they won't be able to do even decorating or gardening. Sandra Hilton—one of the 600 workers at Ever-Ready is threatened with closure.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LIVE ON THREE-DAY WEEKS

REDUNDANCIES AND SHORT TIME are sickening words which the bosses are threatening us with. We know from past experience what this means for the working class family.

Last time my husband was on three days we had just begun to think about our holiday. We had to forget about that.

You get afraid to put the fire on—its expensive anyway, and now the electric has gone up again its more than you can afford.

We have three kids, and I found I was having to get two meals out of

the price I normally pay for one. The men get depressed. They have loads of time—but no money to be able to do even decorating or gardening.

The people say 'But you're alright. You have a little job of your own. Start putting your money in with the housekeeping'. But women have been putting their money in with the housekeeping for ages. They don't work for pin money.

But this is not our crisis. Our men are working as hard as they ever have



Women fight for sacked steward

money must be challenged.

In some industries employers implement a graded system of redundancy where women are the first to go followed by single men and so on. This has already been operated in BSR in Birmingham.

In many workplaces the women are not unionised, or even if they are they are ignored. Time and time again women who have been made redundant do not even bother to fight back. But they must and they must be supported by male trade unionists. Already women in a few factories have shown the way—women workers

at Yarnolds in Wolverhampton, and Progressive Metals in Glasgow show how women must organise to win.

With both men and women workers facing redundancy there will be greater difficulty in meeting all the bills at home. Bills, HP and rents will be squeezed. Housewives will find things harder whether they have jobs or not.

Women affected by redundancy must defend themselves and their right to work. On the home front housewives must organise to picket shops with high prices.

Juliet Ash

FOR SIX WEEKS 35 Asian and white women who work at Yarnolds in Wolverhampton stood alone picketing for nine hours a day. They were striking in protest against the sacking of two shop stewards. After six weeks they voted unanimously to continue the fight.

It all started when some of the women organised themselves into the TGWU (Transport and General Workers Union). Management disagreed with their right to unionise and immediately marched the two stewards Josie Bradley and Carol Price out of the gates. The same day several of the white women came out in support of their sisters. After a meeting organised by the Indian Workers' Association, most of the Asian women came out too. The strike was declared official.

Stay out

'We want the union in. We won't go back until then. We must stay out and we want the men in the TGWU to stand with us,' said one woman striker.

There is an amazing feeling of solidarity among the women which

has overcome the language problems between the Asian and white women.

They lack experience of how to organise a strike, but their sheer stubbornness and determination has led them to find out how to organise a picket, where to get support and how to black goods.

Picketing

Most of the women are married but that has not prevented them from doing their share of the picketing. They have all received great support from their families. For the Asian women in particular this has been a great step forward.

When the women were feeling particularly disillusioned and support was lacking, husbands rallied to the picket lines to encourage the women. One Asian woman explained, 'My husband told me we must fight to the finish because many of us in Wolverhampton are struggling to get the union into the factories.'

After nine weeks the management still refused to budge. They are trying to win the women scabbing inside the factory by promising them a £6 increase to bring their wages up to £19 for 40 hours.

But the strike is being effective. The skilled women are out so management cannot meet all their contracts. Supplies have been blacked or prevented from going in by the pickets. International Socialists sympathetic to the strike have been picketing Yarnolds shops in the Midlands, urging members of the public to boycott the firm until the strike is won. Local trades unionists have given support. Delegations from trades councils and rank and file workers from local factories are coming to the picket and money is coming in.

Organise

This has all been done by the women themselves. The local trade union official gave little help.

The strike might not have lasted so long if the union had been prepared to educate its women members on how to organise, and how to deal with their particular problem. At Yarnolds the women have shown that they can fight as hard as any man, that they are not passive. Other women can learn from the determination and organisation displayed by these workers. Mary Larkin and Michelle Ryan



CRAPHEAP

... has also worked at the factory since leaving school six years ago. She lives 14 miles away from home and is totally dependent upon the firm's bus. She knows that there's almost no chance of finding her job in the area. Some of the workers have lost no time in going for more definite news—instead they are looking for whatever jobs they can get. Sandra however, and some of her mates prefer to hang on and see what can be done. Some of the girls talked about holding onto the conveyor belts and machinery.

Leadership

But these are tentative ideas—at the moment nobody really knows how to start... Clearly the main problem is the lack of available leadership. The issue is important enough to make many of the women angry. The jobs are to be saved though, it's not to take more than anger... Women will have to get organised against themselves. Until recently many of the women couldn't see any sense in joining the union.

... then it's women are so... let go of... own'. ... Essex which is...

BE ON A WEEK

... and so are we. So why should we accept a lower standard of living so that the bosses' can maintain their profits? They keep telling us it's greedy workers who are to blame. And they tell the people that are least able to pensioners and people struggling to keep up their families to make the sacrifices. And until we stand up and back by demanding full work we are cut in our living standards—bosses will carry on expecting us to pay for their mess.

Ken Knowles

12-week battle over 5p insult

FOR OVER 12 WEEKS women workers at Progressive Metals in Glasgow were on strike. They walked out for a day in protest at being offered only 5p extra to work in extreme cold. The next day they were sacked.

But this is no ordinary fight over discipline. Women at the factory which makes car parts for Chrysler and British Leyland believe that the strike was deliberately provoked. Betty McCaron, the convenor, told Women's Voice, 'A few months ago Mr Price, the owner, called me into his office and told me that Chryslers were going on short time. He knew this even before the men at Chrysler. With orders bound to fall he has obviously found an excuse to sack us so that he wouldn't have to pay us redundancy money.'

Scab labour works two shifts inside the factory. They are brought in on Fridays and not even paid overtime. Mr Price is well known for his underhand methods. Some years ago he was fined £100 for not paying the women's Insurance Stamps.

The strike was made official by the AUEW—the engineering union. Work has been blacked and lorries are respecting the picket lines—but more help is needed for the women to win.

The determination and courage that the women are showing in their fight for the right to work shows the way forward for women workers all over the country who are being made redundant.

As Betty McCaron summed up, 'We are not only fighting for ourselves, but for the working class as a whole. Every trade unionist should support us.' Angela McHugh AUEW

'WHEN WE TOLD THE BOSS we were forming a union he wouldn't hear of it. It wasn't just the low wages that we were complaining about. They gave us 12 units for a curtain, but if you made a mistake they'd cut four units and make you do it again for nothing. Then suddenly they cut the rate for cushion covers from eight to six units. There have been previous attempts to form a union but they all failed. This time there is a fight.' Josie Bradley, Yarnolds Shop Steward.



Women picketing Yarnolds shop in Wolverhampton to gain support for the strike
Picture: John Sturrock (Report)

'You've got to dig in'

Asian women speak about why they were fighting to get the union in:-

'WE FELT that only the union could protect us against unfair dismissal. The bosses wanted a Works Committee but that was no good because the girls did not know exactly what had been agreed upon and the manager would come around and contradict what they had said to us,' explained Madhu Behen.

Then why had they not walked out at once when the shop stewards were sacked? 'Many of us didn't know exactly what had happened. Frankly we were terrified. The managers and foreladies surrounded us, and told us to stop talking and

get back to our machines or we'd be sacked on the spot... But once we had the mass meeting we all decided not to go in again. It was easy.'

They talked about how it felt standing on the picket line. 'In the beginning we just stood around,' said Gogi, 'but after four weeks we got fed up. We linked arms and stood across the gate and swore at the women going in. The next day they were brought in special vans. The manager pushed us aside roughly. The police told us to clear off. They have been round our houses telling us not to bother the scabs.'

'It has been difficult for some of the married women with little children. Their husbands feel that if they are on strike they should have the

time to stay at home and mind the children. But some of the husbands and sons have stood with us on the picket line. My husband, a bakery worker, was recently on strike himself and he supports us.'

Another woman said, 'I thought that a strike was something that lasts a day or two—and then you walk back victorious. But now I know it's a battle. You've got to dig in for weeks if necessary.'

'We used to be frightened of the bosses,' said another, 'but now that we are fighting together we are no longer afraid. Whether we win or lose, it won't be the same inside again.'

Sarnu Jehangir

Picture: Peter Harrap (Report)

Letters

Health

I USED to allow the kids I teach to eat sweets in class—until I saw photographs of children with almost completely rotten teeth.

Sweets are almost solely responsible for tooth decay and gum is as bad as chocolate, if not worse. It stays in the mouth for longer and the sucrose—the cheapest form of sugar and the most destructive—has plenty of time to work its way into the gums and the cavities. Crisps and peanuts, on the other hand, are nourishing and harmless.

At school, I was determined to make the children spit out their sweets. In justifying my sudden ban on sweets, I found myself developing a story which went like this:

"You spend nearly all your pocket money on sweets and what do they do for you? They ruin your teeth and make you fat and spotty. Who gets the money you spend on sweets? Not the people who sweat in the factories stamping out endless fruit gums and wrapping chocolates. No, the money goes to the men who own the factories and they don't do any of the real work, and the worker gets a measly wage while the directors sit on millions. And some of the biggest sweet producers have factories in South Africa where the black people earn next to nothing ..."

I'd go on to talk about the conditions of life for black South Africans and the black kids would get very angry and, in several lessons, before I'd even suggested they spit out the sweets they were lining up at the bin to get rid of them.

All the big confectionary companies make enormous profits which increase every year. It is the same with cigarettes and tobacco. The government spends the same amount on the National Health Service as it earns from the tax on cigarettes and tobacco.

They spend a minute amount on anti-smoking propaganda because it is in their interest to ruin people's health. —MELANIE MCFADYEAN, Hackney NUT.

Claimants union

I AM separated with five children. Last winter I had no fire. For three weeks I was pushed around by Social Security officials. Then I contacted the Claimants Union. They promised to send a representative to be with me when the SS visited my home.

The SS visitor insisted I could only claim for a paraffin heater (with five children!). The rep arrived and argued my case. I ended up with a gas fire and a £78 clothing grant.

People don't know what their rights are. The SS deprive people of what they're entitled to. You have to fight them all along the line.

The Claimants Unions are there to provide the information and backing that people on social security need. We are a union—not a welfare organisation. We don't fight for people—we show them how to fight ...

We have nuisance power—the power to demand our rights but only in the present system. We realise the need for links with other unions. We try to help workers with information about Social Security when they are on strike.

The Claimants Union is important for all those who are going to be on Social Security for a long time. Women

bringing up children on their own are the most victimised. Things are bad enough on a low budget—no nursery schools to help you get a job and live—without fear of Social Security snoopers.

Some women tell me their lives have become a nightmare, frightened to be seen anywhere with a man and always worrying about money. —BARBARA COYNE, Birmingham

Social Contract

THREE YEARS ago, when we were first married, we spent £13 a week on rent, food, outings, clothes etc. Now, even

though we have moved out of London, we spend more than that on housing.

Food prices rise constantly. But the problem is not that there is a shortage of food. Where I live, apples rotted in the orchards last autumn. I have also read of milk being poured down disused mines and grain being dumped in the sea.

Too many people want to make a profit out of our basic need for food. If we housewives got together we could picket the shops to demand cheaper food and to demand that they stop oversteering and racketeering.

We must also join in the fight against the Social Contract to ensure wages keep ahead of price rises. My husband's union, NALGO, settled under the Social Contract.

WE HELD A DEMONSTRATION to celebrate International Women's Year. We decided to burn objects with which women are oppressed, such as feminine toys, law books that discriminate against women, pornographic magazines and romantic books. There were 15 of us, dressed in different ways, a bride, a pregnant woman and a sexual object complete with long false eye-lashes, pink wig and red high-heeled shoes.

An angry crowd jumped on us and we were surrounded by thousands of men. They separated us and destroyed all our posters. They undressed those who were masked and hurled insults at us, such as 'women only in bed' and 'go home and do your cooking'. Some of us escaped. Others had to fight.

Later we heard they had spanked an old lady who brought a broom to burn. They also undressed a girl of 17 from a nearby school.

The only thing we can compare this with is the spectacle of the Roman Coliseum or the burning of witches in the Middle Ages.

Conditions of working class women are deteriorating here with the economic crisis. Several letters in the press have called for the government to fire all women so that 'heads of families' can have work.

TERESA CALDAS, Lisbon, Portugal.

No recent wage agreements have contained an equal pay clause and, in some places, women get less than the minimum laid down by the law.

We need strong international help. We ask you to publish this and also to demonstrate and write to your Portuguese embassy about this.

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

NOISS women's conference

130 DELEGATES and observers from the National Organisation of International Socialist Societies met in Leicester on 8 February, for a conference on women. The conference opened with Kath Ennis, author of the pamphlet, 'Women Fight Back', speaking about the Marxist tradition and its relation to the feminist movement. A lively discussion followed, covering the need for separate organisation, feminism, and how IS students could intervene at their colleges. Afternoon workshops on topics such as Women in the National Union of Students, IS Societies and Women's Groups and how to work with Women's Voice, were followed by a general session. Resolutions were passed urging a campaign around nurseries, abortion, and contraception in the colleges, and calling on the NUS Executive to take up actively these demands. Others urged greater participation in the women's movement, and that IS Societies should work with women's groups on specific issues. Finally the conference expressed its opposition to the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child and resolved to work to expose the anti-working class nature of its aims. —JULIA HATTS, Kingston Poly IS Society

Women's Rights meeting

ABOUT 500 women workers attended a meeting in Southwark on 25 January organised by the local trades council on the question of Women's Rights. Speakers included Tess Gill from the National Council for Civil Liberties, May Hobbs of the Cleaners Action Group and Marie Patterson, chairman of the Women's TUC. Red Ladder theatre performed a play about women's oppression and exploitation.

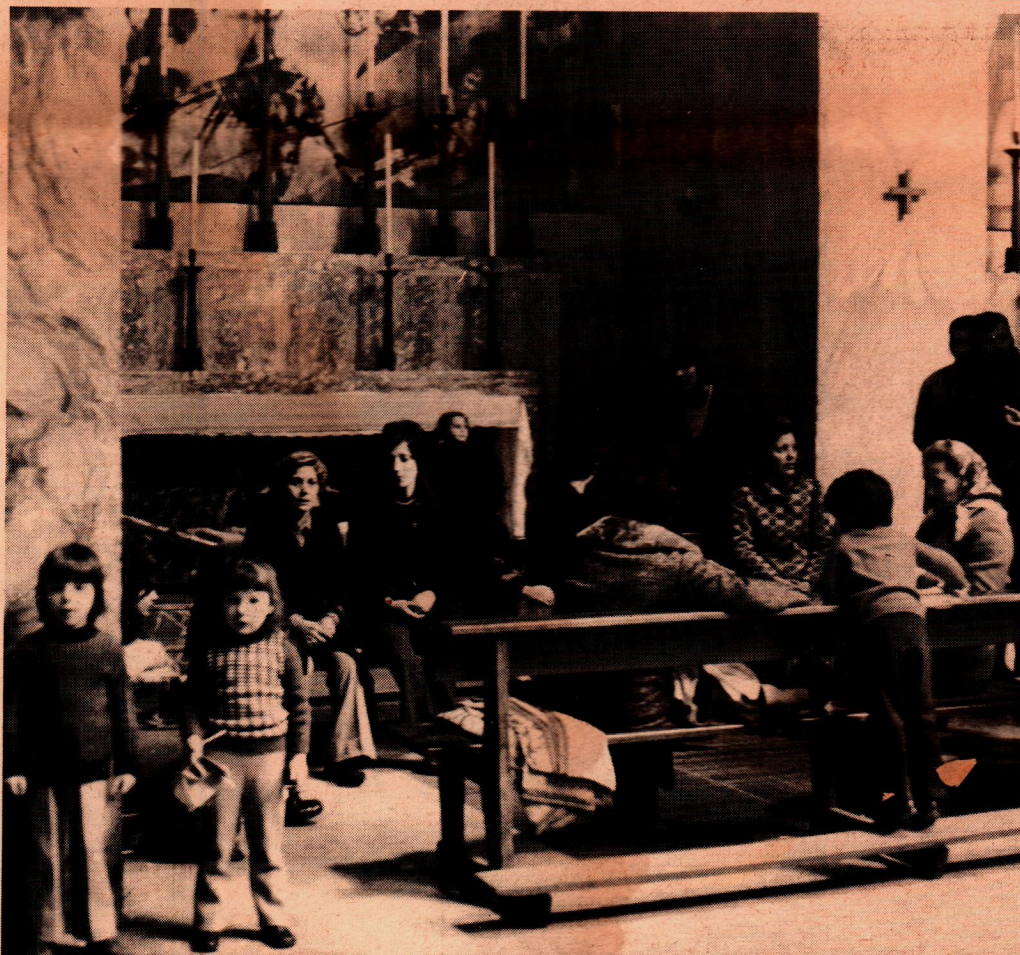
The discussion was most useful. There is a shortage of child-minders in Southwark and we were told that Southwark had been granted £10,000 under the Urban Aid Grant scheme to provide child-minders. One old lady said wasn't it about time there were creches in factories. She had been involved in creches on the street corners in the Thirties and thought it was time we moved on from this. 'Can't the factory nurseries be under union control?' asked another woman.

We were told the Women's Committee were seeing to the question of having creches at Trades Council meetings.

A woman who works in a disabled workshop complained that she never even heard about union meetings. The chairman of the Trades Council told her a representative of the League of the Blind regularly attended the meetings. 'Well,' she said indignantly, 'he should let me know—he's my husband.'

On the Rockingham Estate they have been fighting for 30 years and have now won a nursery. The Trades Council said it had been in favour of playgroups for many years and that mothers could go to college to learn how to look after children. This was greeted with derisive laughter.

The meeting ended with the Trades Council saying they would have a meeting to discuss the issue. We sold 50 copies of Women's Voice. —MARY PHILLIPS, Southwark.



Rome: Over a hundred women shanty dwellers occupied a church on the outskirts of the city after the police had forced them out of apartments in which they were squatting.

Classified Ads

WOMENS VOICE and women in the International Socialists are planning a series of meetings on International Women's Day —8 March.

For details, contact your nearest IS branch or write to IS Women at 8 Cottons Gardens, London E2 8DN.

branch, workplace or college. Details from CAST, 11c Cabell Street (01-402 6087).

The Revolutionary Dynamics of Women's Liberation by Sabina Roberts. This pamphlet provides a perspective for the present Women's Liberation Movement and shows the way forward to mass action on the streets. From Ann Fiander, 2 Cobbs Cottages B/S Arlesford, Hants, or Compendium Books (15p + 8p post).

WOMENS VOICE needs two volunteers to keep a record of wage agreements and redundancy among women, using news cuttings and other information sources. London area preferred. IS members only. Write to Womens Voice, 8 Cottons Gardens London E2 8DN.

Battered Women: How to Use the Law by Tess Gill and Anna Coote. 30p from NCCL, 186 Kings Cross Road, London WC1 9DE.

We have set up a study group to investigate the occurrence and treatment of rape and would like to hear the experiences of any victims. We are particularly interested in what advice and information doctors offer on how the potential physical consequences are managed, eg possible VD and non-venereal genital infections, pregnancy, psychological effects. Our ultimate but still very remote aim is to offer reliable advice to women in a crisis centre. Information confidential.

Any woman who would be interested in co-operation, please write to us (there is also a short questionnaire which might be of help). Rape Medical Study Group, 26 Talfourd Road, London SE15.

I would like to know more about the International Socialists

Name _____

Address _____

Please post to:
Womens Voice,
61 Tylney Croft,
Harlow Essex

NEWS

A PRESS conference with caviar butties and booze was the way Women For Life kicked off their campaign for repeal of the Abortion Act in January.

The 12 founder members say they are in favour of Women's Liberation—but oppose abortion. They gained a great deal of publicity.

Cynics might suspect that this is merely a trendy new image for SPUC, the anti-abortion organisation, but the ladies vigorously denied this, though some admit to being Catholics and one has marched with SPUC.

They spoke eloquently about the need for better conditions for unsupported mothers and more money for contraceptive research, but were not willing to campaign on these issues.

Apparently for them, women's liberation means ignoring the majority of women's demands and undermining the right of women to make decisions about their own lives.

Funny kind of liberation organisation that ...

NEWS

IN SOMALIA, ten men were shot by firing squad for opposing a new decree giving equal rights to men and women. It was decided that equal shares of inheritances should be awarded—where previously they were distributed two to one in favour of men. Tell that to your local male chauvinist next time he starts getting uppity.

NEWS

WOMEN with husbands who work shifts, or who work shifts themselves, will know about the misery it causes.

Nobody to cuddle up to in bed, no-one to go out with in the evenings, always tired, always having to be quiet at home for fear of waking a sleeping shiftworker.

Naturally, we were pleased to hear that some women were actually taking up the cause of shift-working husbands and campaigning against night work.

MPs, who earn a measly £5000 a year basic, have to work late several nights in a year.

Their poor wives are frustrated with the unfairness of it all. They are concerned about the effect this has on their marriages—all that commuting between two homes causes terrible strains, didn't you know?

So what the hell do they think real shift work does to workers' lives? They would be better employed finding out about that than moaning about their overpaid existences.

Perhaps someone might notice and demand parity for working-class housewives!

NEWS

Heard on the radio: '75 per cent of the women in the Holloway prison have never seen a solicitor.' So much for the just society ...

NEWS

IF YOU heard some of the bigoted Tories arguing against Margaret Thatcher, you may have been moved to some feminist sympathy for her fight for leadership of the Tory Party.

But we should not hail her victory as a victory for Women's Lib.

Don't think of Margaret Thatcher as a feminist hero. Rather as 'Thatcher the Snatcher' who took free milk away from school children when she was Minister of Education in the Heath government.

Or think of her as Mrs Dennis Thatcher, whose husband's directorship of the bankrupt Burmah Oil company, is being subsidised with taxpayers' money—our money.

No, sisters, we don't have anything in common with this woman. She represents the most selfish, arrogant, insensitive section of the British Upper Class.

REVIEW OF 1975

by NIGEL FOUNTAIN

JANUARY International Women's Year is celebrated by Brenda and Ron with the news that Ron will be able to spend more time looking after their two children. He's been laid off by Prostrate Motors International.

Brenda, encouraged by Barbara Castle's promises of equal pay, applies and gets a job with Ratespro Plastic Injection Teddy Bears. Her task is to fire eyes into Teddy Bears faces with an air pistol.

FEBRUARY Brenda decides to join the Soft Toys and Small Furry Animals Amalgamated Operatives Union. She is declared redundant.

Brenda is supported in her fight to preserve her job by her sister workers. They occupy Ratespro. Management

explain that the bears are no longer competitive with Japanese bears.

The workforce start a co-operative and appeal to Mr Benn for support. They market their own bears, but because of a shortage of eyes this range of Blind Bears does not sell well.

MARCH: The Ratespro dispute goes to independent arbitration in Iceland. Brenda returns home. 'Dad, there's a lady at the door', says daughter Doris.

Ron has found a job as a packer for Tropsater Export, a company selling glass eyes to an oriental bear company. On the TV, Brenda hears that Barbara Castle is worried that 'progress to equal pay may be hampered by irresponsible shop-floor action.'

JULY: Brenda gets a night off to go and see Ron in prison in the Hebrides. Upon arrival she is told that he has been released on bail.

AUGUST: Returning home early from work, Brenda runs into Ron before he goes off to his new job. Celebrating their re-union, they decide to take a late summer holiday.

SEPTEMBER: The family arrive at Stareport Holiday Camp on the Manchester Ship Canal. While her children are playing at the Disney Kiddyfactory, Brenda is persuaded to enter the Miss Cattle Market contest—and wins!

OCTOBER: Returning home, Brenda is disturbed to find that Art Strobe (Catering) Ltd has been rationalised. She is out of work.

Barbara Castle announces a new commission to examine equal pay.

NOVEMBER: A telegram arrives telling Brenda that her victory at Stareport has got her to the Miss World contest.

Ron goes off to begin his 20-year sentence and the children are sent off to school.

Brenda makes for London. Swept away by the excitement of the big city, she embraces Michael Aspel and finds herself being presented with a teddy bear and the winning sash by none other than Lord Prostrate Motors, Ratespro, Tropsater Export, Soaptrert Investments, Kiddyfactories Ltd, Stareport Holidays Ltd).

The following morning the papers celebrate her victory. 'Jailbird's wife wins Miss World' says the Mirror. 'She's no virgin', says the Sun. 'Heartbreak of Miss World's Children' proclaims the Express. Heartbroken, she returns home.

DECEMBER: Brenda learns that her title has been awarded to Miss Samurai Bear of Japan. But she is cheered by the news that Barbara Castle has announced a new scheme to boost her earnings at the bakery.

To speed equal pay the workforce is to be divided into two groups, A (men) and B (women) who will, in the short-term, be lower paid.

To boost this second group's earnings, special private clinics will be opened where women will be able to obtain sex-change operations which will be paid for out of their subsequent higher earnings.



Predictably, these Bunny Girls got massive publicity for their message. And, sadly, they got their way. But many others are fighting to regain their dignity. Mayfair's Playboy Club had to close when 700 bunnies, croupiers and caterers voted on whether to join the Transport and General Workers Union. Their action was sparked off by the sacking of ten staff.

WOMEN'S DAY March 8th

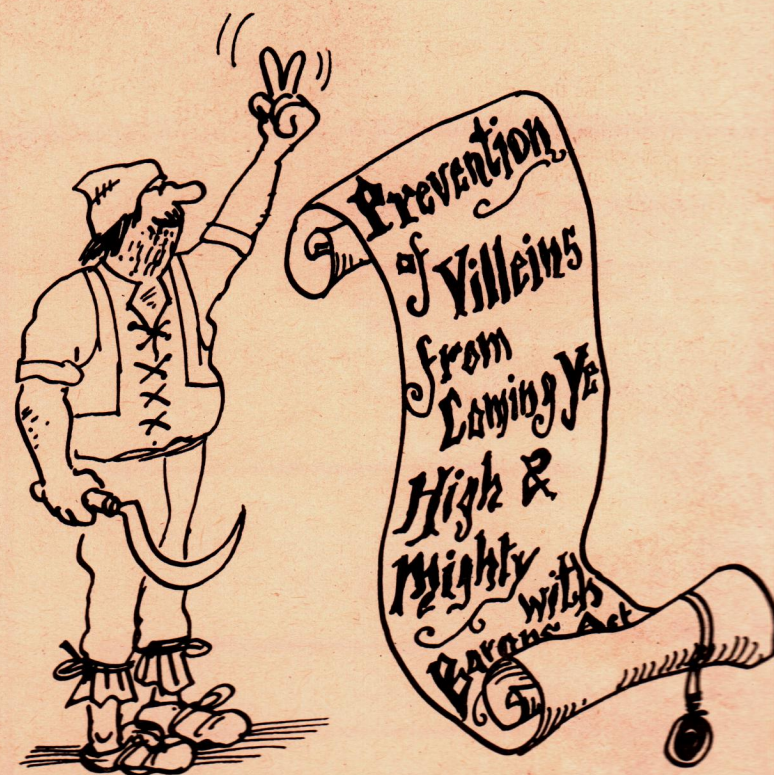
Womens Voice and women in the INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS are planning a series of meetings on International Women's Day: March 8th. For details, contact your nearest IS branch or write to IS Women at 8 Cottons Gardens, London E2 8DN.

WOMENS VOICE is written and produced by members of the International Socialists.

We welcome letters and articles from all our readers—we would particularly like to hear how women are organising at work and on their estates.

All copy for the next issue should be sent to the editor:

Anna Paczuska
Womens Voice
8 Cottons Gardens
London E2 8DN
to arrive by March 14th.



Women's Voice Production Team:
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Abortion: MPs set to turn clock back

ON FEBRUARY THE 7TH, several hundred women demonstrated their opposition to the proposed changes in the Abortion Act. Carrying placards with slogans like 'Not the Church, not the State, Women must decide their fate' and 'Neither Harley Street nor Backstreet', they marched to parliament to lobby their MPs.

They were protesting at proposed changes in the law which would make abortion harder to obtain. The law which marked a liberalisation in attitudes towards abortions has resulted in an increase in the numbers of abortions performed on the NHS. But liberal critics insist the law has not gone far enough. The bureaucratic procedures involved and the prejudices of doctors in working-class areas has meant that many women still use the 'facilities' of backstreet abortionists.

Some 160,000 abortions occur legally every year. Changes in the law would cut this figure by 60-70,000. Male MPs want the changes because they claim the law is being

abused. 'Why, it's almost abortion on demand,' said one, as if this were some heinous crime.

The bill has gone to a select committee, which is expected to recommend the changes. Half the government voted with the Tories and the only MP who spoke against the moves was howled down.

The changes are a strong anti-working class measure. Rich women have always been able to get abortions on demand. The changes won't affect them—abortions will still be there for those who can pay. But the new measures will put them beyond the reach of working-class women who can't afford the Harley Street fees. This would undoubtedly lead to more backstreet abortions and more unnecessary suffering.

Women must oppose these measures. We should pass resolutions in our workplaces and trade union branches calling for the TUC to use its strength to oppose these measures.

Linsey German

Maternity leave: It's our right!

THORN CONSUMER ELECTRONICS is a large international electronics combine and like most other combines they try to treat each of their factories individually. Unhappily for us they do this for the wrong reasons—such as different levels of pay and conditions. There is also a noticeable lack of communication between the union branches for the women's section; and especially with regards to women's rights.

Some of the most important rights are not taken up or seemingly are not thought important enough for discussion. For example, the question of maternity leave—in a factory that employs 2500 women—in my factory Bairds.

As a woman union member and a member of the International Socialists here in Bradford, I put forward, together with three IS members who are shop stewards, some ideas on maternity leave to the shop-stewards' committee. This meeting brought to light that few stewards had thought of this and even fewer had read anything about maternity leave. Although there is a lack of enthusiasm they are slowly going through the motions.

Poor

This is directly related to the poor representation women have on the committee relative to their numbers: five out of six of the employees are women at the factory but nearly one out of two of the stewards are men. On top of this sections of women workers on production are very poorly represented, in terms of the number of workers per steward. Many groups

Maternity leave in other countries means, for example, official time off to visit pre-natal clinics without loss of pay and jobs remaining open for a length of time after the birth. Some examples from Common Market countries are shown below:

COUNTRY	LEAVE	PAY
Belgium	14 weeks @	60 per cent
France	14 weeks @	full pay + 1 year unpaid
Germany	14 weeks @	net wage + 18 for twins/premature
Italy	12 weeks @	80 per cent + 6 months at 30 per cent
Luxemburg	12 weeks @	50-75 per cent
Holland	12 weeks @	full pay

of women workers are very isolated for one reason or another, such as the Asian women and the women on the twilight shift. Another factor could be the lack of confidence on the part of the men stewards in the potential of women, and it is true it was sections of women workers who held back during the recent strike.

Nevertheless, the union has to show itself as relevant to the needs of women workers and this question of maternity leave is one way of doing this.

Maternity leave is needed most urgently. Young unmarried women and others who are pregnant are going without necessary medical treatment, and face no security of jobs or retention of seniority on returning.

One can only hope women will see this as their right and take an undivided stand in this fight in their factories. This may then give these women workers the confidence to fight for other necessities such as flexible hours for women with children and factory nurseries, and to overcome the backwardness some of the women showed during the strike.

At the moment things seem to be moving slowly on this issue, but we IS members at Bairds are going to take it up over the coming months and fight for this important right for the women who form such a large part of the workforce here.

Anne Stothers, AUEW.
'Float' Inspector at Thorn Electronics

Local hospitals for the chop

ONE WAY in which the health service is being cut back is by closing down small local hospitals and sending everyone miles to the nearest 'super-hospital', such as the new Charing Cross and Royal Free. These new places often look impressive and the argument in their favour is that they can afford to install and run the sort of complicated machinery which modern medicine uses.

But over half the medical problems in our society are not the sort that can be helped by large machines. They are conditions which are either not fatal but cause a great deal of suffering, or which cannot be helped unless the social conditions of the sufferer are understood. A high proportion of people with these sorts of conditions are women—high blood pressure, depression, cystitis. Many problems can only be successfully dealt with if the patient comes for treatment early in the course of the disease and carries on being treated for some time. Pregnancy itself requires frequent visits to a clinic.

journey

Last century Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson set up a Euston Road hospital, which is staffed and run largely by women and specialises in treatment and research to alleviate women's suffering. This hospital now seems likely to come under the same axe as the nearby Liverpool Road maternity hospital, and its patients are to be sent to the new Royal Free in Hampstead. But how many will suffer in silence rather than face the long and awkward journey to a remote and unfamiliar place?

Struggles have been fought before to save local hospitals. In Poplar the fight failed. The dockers were not willing to take up the cause, even though it was the nearest casualty department for men in a dangerous industry. In Northwick Park, on the other hand, the hospital authorities were prevented from selling off part of the hospital to private developers



Picture: Chris Davies (Report)

when local builders threatened to stop work on the rest of the hospital site.

The power over these decisions is held by the Area Health Authorities and these offices can be picketed. Local people must link up with workers inside the hospitals under threat. The trade union officials will be sympathetic, but they can do nothing unless their membership is fully aware of the situation and local people are campaigning. Most important of all is the support of unionised workers in vital industries near the hospital—building workers, railmen, car-workers and dockers. *A cut in the health service is a cut in wages.* We pay for it through our stamps and taxes. These close-downs represent another attack on the living standards of working class people.

Mel Bartley

How we're fighting for nurseries

NORTH EAST LONDON Polytechnic has a day nursery. Several students arrived on the first day of term with their children. An empty classroom was taken over for the nursery.

The cafeteria staff at the college bring their kids too. And Pat Olley, the organiser, says: 'I've turned 30-35 people away because I can't take any more. People are really desperate for a nursery place. Women don't necessarily want to go to work. [Some people say women only go out to work to provide luxuries.] But they have to.'

Mrs Wheeler, a neighbour of Pat's who remembers the wartime nurseries, says, 'They had plenty of nurseries during the war. If they wanted us in the munitions factories again they'd soon set them up.'

'It's heartbreaking turning people away at the nursery,' says Pat. 'There

were two people yesterday. One man said his wife is heading for a nervous breakdown because of the terrible living conditions in their flat. She wants to go out to work to get a better flat. But she's been told that there is a six-month waiting list for nursery places, by Newham Social Services.

slave labour

'The other one was a girl who has been trying to make some money by addressing envelopes at home. It's like slave labour. She needs someone to look after her daughter so she can earn more money in a factory.'

'People don't want to work but they have to. The only alternative is child-minders. You get guilt feelings about leaving your kids with them. Most child-minders are doing it as a source of income. They are in the

same position as those mothers who go out to work. We need proper nurseries.

'After seeing how many mothers need day nurseries, it dawned on me to get the women together. As an individual you can't do anything. Instead of just sitting back feeling useless, we must organise ourselves. Working class women are very passive, but you can only take so much. We're being pushed into it.'

'That's why we started Newham Women's Action Group. We've all got the same problems. We're going to campaign for more day nurseries for Newham.'

'The women's Group is going to bring the problem home to them, so they can't ignore it any more. You can talk till you're blue in the face. The only thing they understand is action.'

Interview by Jenny Jackson

SUBSCRIBE NOW TO WOMEN'S VOICE.

75p for 6 copies, £1.50 per year. Fill in this form and return to 8 Cottons Gardens, E2 8DN

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____