

WOMENS VOICE

WOMENS' PAPER OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS



Picture: John Sturrock (Report)

WOMEN ALL OVER THE COUNTRY are making a stand over their jobs and wages.

At Progressive Metals 18 women who stopped work for a day over heating were promptly sacked and then spent 16 weeks fighting for their jobs back.

At Imperial Typewriters, the women were to the fore in deciding to occupy the factory in an attempt to save 1,600 jobs in Hull.

In Wigan and Leicester, textile and hosiery workers, again mainly women, have taken to the streets in protest over the threat to their jobs in the economic crisis.

The women at Progressive Metals have shown enormous courage and determination in their fight in Glasgow. But is determination enough?

Because women workers are burdened with looking after their kids and the home as well as going to work they are often slower in deciding to fight for their rights as workers. When they do decide to fight, women have much less experience of how to do it.

At Progressive Metals the women did not get the support they needed from the Chrysler stewards over blacking—support crucial to the success of the strike.

At Imperials in Hull the majority of the occupation are relying on Wedgwood Benn and the government to save their jobs. They are letting the local T&GWU official run the occupation, and keeping themselves

isolated from other workers around the country, instead of trying to make their struggle central to the labour movement as a whole.

In Wigan and Leicester, the trade union officials are calling for import controls to protect the jobs of their members and have got women to demonstrate for such controls. Import controls will only put other workers in other countries, other women, out of work and if foreign countries stop their imports, then all workers working for export will be out of a job. Import controls are no solution.

The only way women workers can save their jobs and improve wages and conditions is by linking up with other workers and fighting a joint struggle. This means learning how to fight and how to work in the trade union movement. It means pushing male workers into giving their support.

It is the duty of all socialists, men and women to support women workers in struggle. Women workers must start the job of building the kind of links in the trade union movement which will lead women to victory.

The Rank and File Conference for women workers on 26 April is an important first step for women in building a movement which can help deal with the special problems women face in organising on the factory floor.

For further details see page 2 and 3

Defend your jobs
Fight for equal pay

SUPPORT THE WOMENS'
RANK & FILE CONFERENCE
in Manchester April 26th

WOMEN FIGHT BACK

Support the Rank and File Womens' Conference!

When we climbed over the gates we committed ourselves to fight for our jobs, and we're not moving till we've won our jobs ...

Helen Charlesworth, senior T&GWU steward at the Hull factory

An interview by Elana Dallas, Women's Voice reporter, with Helen Charlesworth at Imperial Typewriters.

IN JANUARY the workers at Imperial Typewriters in Hull and Leicester were told the factories were going to close. Litton's Industries, a huge multi-national company which made a million pounds profit last year, was pulling out—leaving 3200 workers without jobs. 'We were stunned. We'd bent over backwards to keep the factory going—agreed to two year contracts, given full production during the three day week, it breaks your heart to think of it.'

spinsters, widows, unmarried mothers—and there are some full families employed here, mother, father and children.' This is an occupation led by women—how have men reacted? 'The men have been marvellous—they cover the night shift. The women do the two day shifts, helping each other out with looking after the kids, and then the men come in at nights. Most of the husbands are giving really good support

IMPERIAL — WE NEED SUPPORT TO WIN!

During the weeks that followed management did everything possible to split the ranks of the workers—offering contracts to 150, redundancy pay—anything that would divide the workers and lessen their determination to fight for their jobs.

On the 20th of February every worker received a letter saying that the next day was a holiday. 'To us this meant a lockout. We've never yet been given a holiday without having to negotiate for it.'

And on Friday morning they climbed over the gates and occupied the factory. 'It was the biggest thrill of my lifetime—getting over that gate and looking back and seeing the people following. It wasn't until they saw action that we became solid together. You see women don't go out to work for luxuries any more—they go out for necessities these days. With the cost of living soaring as it is we have to go out to work to subsidise our husband's wages. Anyway many of us are

as well, bringing their wives down by car on Sundays when there's no transport, and bringing food and flasks.

I must admit I'm proud to say there's never been a man working on my section. Every time they move one in I demanded equal pay, and rather than give me that, they just moved him right back out again.'

What about a co-operative? A co-operative would never work. I'd be the first out of the gates if they tried to make us do that. We've seen what happens. We want nationalisation.' What if you really can't sell typewriters? 'Then the government must put something in that we can sell. We've got the factory, we've got the facilities—we've got the workforce. Morale is high but we need outside help to support us in our fight to keep our jobs. These multinational companies can't just chop jobs and walk away and leave us on the scrap-heap.'



CAROL DOURAS is a shop steward of her union SOGAT at DRG, a printing works in Liverpool. She spoke to Womens Voice about the problems facing women workers.

'THE GREATEST THREAT to women getting equal pay this year will be redundancies and short time working. Already in Liverpool 1200 women have gone down the road this year. And that's only the beginning.

The struggle for equal pay is going to be an immensely tough one. Not only will we be struggling to maintain our jobs and trying to organise women into trade unions in order to fight for what is rightfully ours. We will also be faced with fighting against the steps that bosses have already taken to make Equal Pay meaningless. Already speed ups, regradings and segregation of male and female workers are taking place so that bosses can get round the provisions of the Equal Pay Act. They also want to increase shift working in their plans to offset the costs of equal pay.

Our experience shows that trade union leaders are cooling the claim for equal pay. Women workers are experiencing the greatest redundancies in industry. Part-time workers are always the first to go and many lay off agreements mean that women workers are the first to go among full time workers too. The trade unions take the attitude that these redundancies are inevitable. Nowhere have they raised a finger in order to fight back against these redundancies. They seem unable to understand that a family cannot live on one worker's wage.

Time is running out. Women workers must organise now if they are to put up a successful fight against redundancy and for equal pay.

The National Rank and File Conference on Redundancy and Equal Pay is a vital step in the organisation of the fight back amongst women workers. It is vital that every trade unionist makes sure that his/her branch or shop stewards committee is supporting this conference and is represented at it.

In Liverpool the Merseyside District Branch of my own union, SOGAT, has agreed to send delegates from every branch in Liverpool. Other trades unionists are raising the Conference at their own trade union branches. Womens Voice Readers must do the same.'

WOMENS VOICE

is produced by members of the International Socialists.

All articles and letters for the next issue should be sent as soon as possible to:-

The Editor, Anna Paczuska, 8 Cottons Gardens, London E2 8DN.

Picture: Andrew Ward (Report)

WOMEN on strike at Progressive Metals, Port Glasgow have just had their strike settled. The factory has been closed down. Betty McCann the convenor at Progressives expressed the feeling of the women when she said of the strike. 'It is a great feeling to know that we have forced them to close down.' But at the same time they recognise that despite their determination and their 18 week long strike they were unable to make this anti-union firm accept decent conditions of work at the factory.

Betty McCann thinks that the strike has many lessons to teach workers—men and women. And for this reason the strike committee is giving every support to the Rank and File Committee's Conference on Redundancy and Equal Pay. 'It is important that women trade unionists get together and discuss the issues of the right to work and how to fight' she told Womens Voice. Members of the strike committee will be delegated to the conference in Manchester in April because the women in the strike feel that there is an urgent need to link up the fight against redundancy and for equal pay.

delegated

From the outset the strikers were isolated. Blacking of Progressive goods was promised but lorry loads of goods left the factory to deliver at Chrysler Linwood and came back empty despite the promises of support. Had the AUEW members in Glasgow area really had the interests of the women in mind they would have organised effective support for them. The building of such rank and file links that can support workers in struggle is one of the aims of the rank and file conference in Manchester.

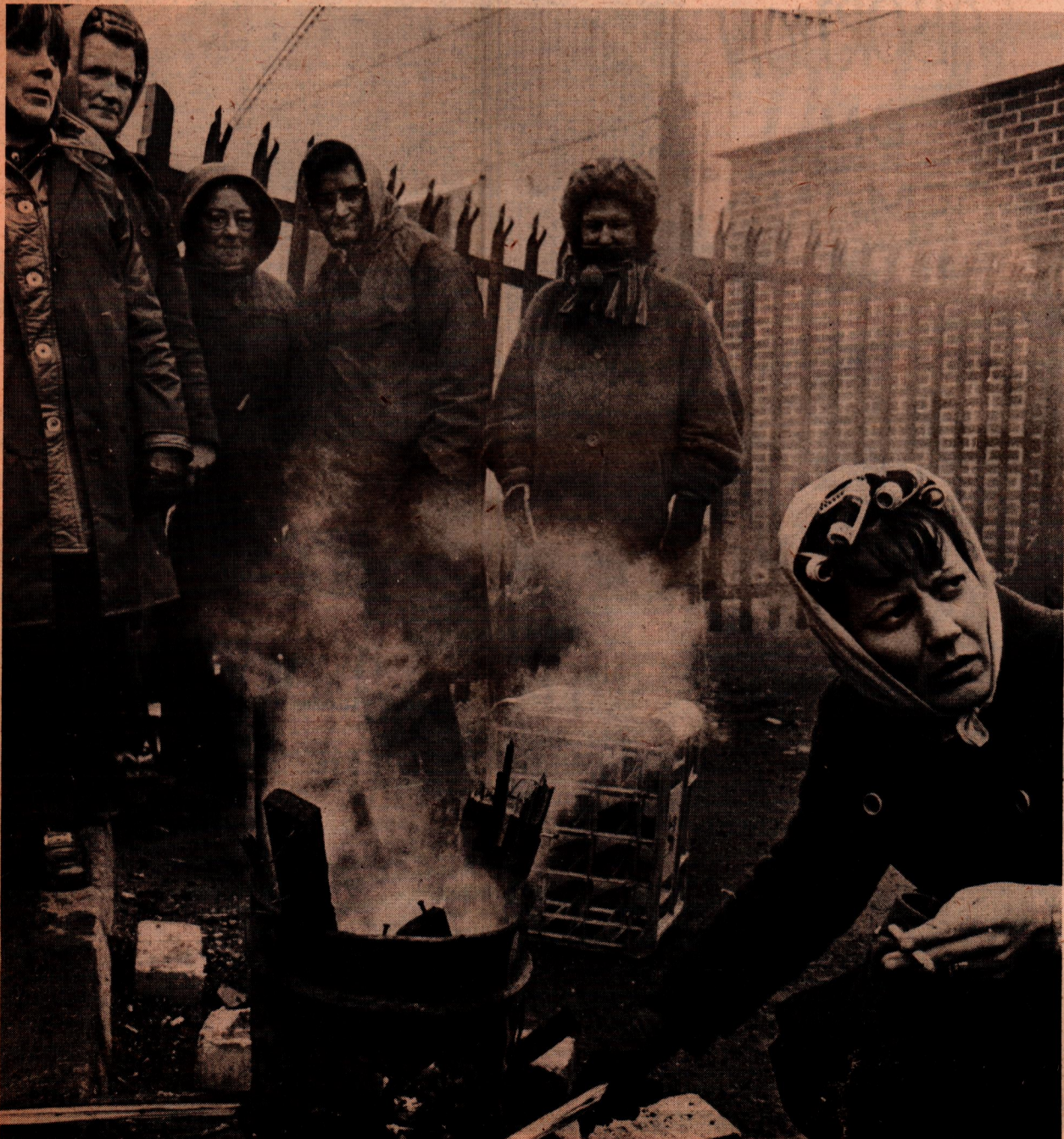
The Conference, which was called by the National Rank and File Organising Committee, has been sponsored by the SEI shop stewards committee in Eccles, Manchester, the ASTMS Central Branch in Leicester, the NUPE branch at Withington Hospital, and the NUPE United Hospitals Branch in Manchester.

Write for details and letters of invitation as soon as possible to: Roger Cox, Secretary Rank and File Organising Committee, 214 Roundwood Road, London NW10.

and at Progressive Metals —'a great feeling ... but many lessons'



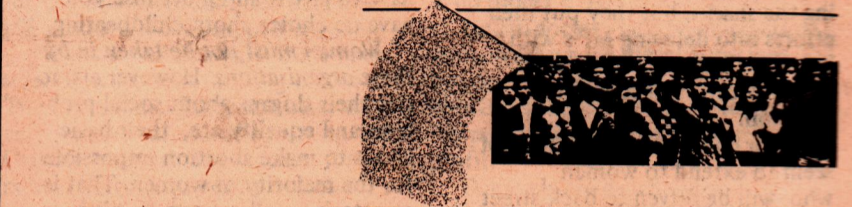
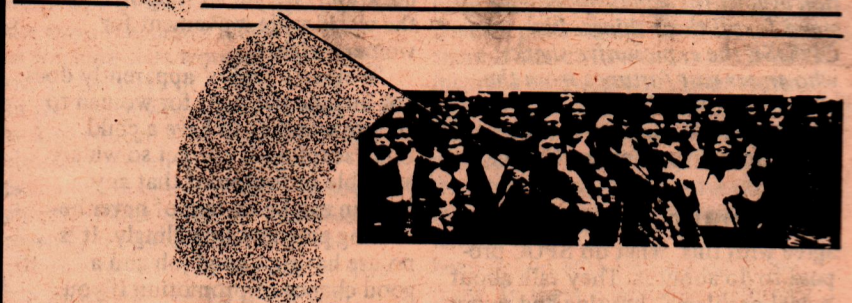
Betty McCann, Progressive Metals convenor



Picture: John Sturrock (Report)

Above: Keeping warm at Progressives

REVOLUTION



IN PORTUGAL

WE WILL NOT BE MADE REDUNDANT

IN PORTUGAL many of the workers are women. Compulsory military service meant that all men over the age of 18 were forced to join the army and were sent to fight the ruling class' savage colonial war in Africa. So, large numbers of women were forced to work in the factories and on the land. In many cases the state or the factory management provided creches simply to make sure that women were available to work—because in Portugal where the Catholic Church supported the fascist regime—women were treated as breeding machines. The Dictator Salazar actually awarded prizes to all women who had over 200 kids. But the infant mortality rate was the highest in Europe.

Before the coup women workers in agriculture were receiving 70p per day—half the male wage. Women textile workers in Coats Paton were paid 77p per day—when the cost of living was only slightly lower than in Britain.

Control

Now the demand for equal wages has been raised in the struggles that are taking place in factories that have been occupied or are being run under workers' control.

Women have played a leading role in struggles all over Portugal.

In the French owned Sogantal factory, the 48 women workers occupied to stop the management from closing the plant. They continued to make the tracksuits the company made and sold them themselves wherever they could. A mass meeting elected a workers' commission and a sales group. The workers produced a strike bulletin—the Sogantal Newsletter—which was used to organise support for their strike locally. In the

first issue of their newsletter the women wrote:

'We are fighting for our rights and no-one can censure us for this. The closure of Sogantal is entirely the fault of the management. We want work and we will not accept the closure of this factory because the French bosses can no longer exploit us as much as they did in the past.'

Misery

'We workers at Sogantal will not tolerate this situation. We will not be made redundant and thrown into misery because some French capitalists do not want to fulfill our just demands. We have declared our determination to fight to the end and we will not hesitate to use whatever means of struggle best serve our interests—the interests of workers.'

For hundreds of foreign companies, eg Plessey, ITT, GEC' the end of fascism meant the end of super-exploitation of cheap labour. Many of them are trying to lay off workers and close down factories rather than take a cut in profits. Some 300,000 workers have already lost their jobs. In Portugal where there is no welfare state, social security, or dole—this means virtual starvation.

But Portuguese workers men and women are fighting back and taking over factories and land in the fight for the right to work.

The struggle has generalised into a classwide battle in which the working class could emerge victorious.

In 1923 Clara Zetkin said 'Fascism is the price the proletariat has to pay for not winning the revolution. This is what faces the Portuguese working class now—either Russia 1917 or Chile 1973.

Joanna Rollo

Advertisement

REMEMBER THE SHREWSBURY TWO!

Des Warren, serving three years in Lincoln Prison.
Ricky Tomlinson, two years in Leicester Prison.

The Rank and File Organising Committee has asked that socialists and trade unionists show the two jailed building workers that they have not been forgotten. Send messages of support direct to them at the prisons.

The families are facing severe pressures and hardships. Financial support is therefore urgently needed. Send to Shrewsbury Dependents Fund, c/o Roger Cox, Secretary, Rank and File Organising Committee, 214 Roundwood Road, London NW10. Receipts will be issued promptly for all money sent.



Don't be taken in

'Higher family allowances, more support for poor families and unmarried mothers, an end to the stigma of illegitimacy and discrimination against the handicapped—we stand for all these things. We OPPOSE the exploitative sharks who amass vast fortunes from the abortion business'

(From a SPUC—Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child—leaflet).

MOST WOMEN and socialists would agree with this. What do SPUC propose to do about it. They talk about 'social problems', housing and opposing the sharks, but they put their efforts into deluging MP's with letters telling them to vote for James White's bill to restrict abortion.

Their concern for life does not seem to extend to women who will be driven to back street abortion and self-abortion. They can show horrific pictures of aborted foetuses—but ignore the women who bled to death or die from infection through illegal abortions.

The 'exploitative sharks' will not go away if the law is changed, they will just put up their prices because the business is riskier.

More worrying than SPUC, is the recently formed 'Women for Life'. They claim to have no connection

with SPUC, but one of their founder members, Marie-Therese Wallich-Clifford, is on the executive of SPUC. 'Women for Life' say in their declaration, 'We are all supporters of the world-wide movement for womens' rights'.

'Women's Rights' apparently does not include the right for women to choose whether to have a child. Contraception is not yet so widely available or foolproof that any woman can be certain of never becoming pregnant unwillingly. It is no use having a good job and a good chance of promotion if you have to give it all up because you have no choice about childbearing.

Women must not be taken in by these organisations. However attractive their slogans about social problems and equality are, their basic aim is to make abortion impossible for the majority of women. That is an attack on all women, but it is working class women who will suffer the most.

Despite the mouthings of SPUC and Women for Life about the need for better housing, nurseries and a decent standard of living for every family, it will be up to us to take up the fight on these issues. Neither Women for Life nor SPUC will be anywhere to be seen on these issues.

Gerry Byrne

book review

'Babies for Burning' is a book written by two members of the anti-abortion lobby. The authors Michael Lichfield and Susan Kentish claim to have made an objective study of abortion in the private sector...

'When entering this world, one is instantly engulfed by its unsavoury odour and mental and intellectual uncleanness. The whole trade smacks of the abattoir. Everyone seems bathed in blood.'

If you recognise the style of that piece of objective prose, you will not be surprised to learn that both authors are News of the World Journalists. Their aim is to portray all abortion as evil and to call for a repeal of the 1967 Abortion Act.

They claim that tougher legislation will cut down the number of abortions. But last year the Lane Committee showed that legislation does not affect the number of abortions. Profiteers will fulfil the demand if the NHS won't. The authors of this book claim that they met a doctor who sell foetuses for soap, another who kept the babies of women too long pregnant and sold

them for thousands of pounds. They say they met a doctor who will arrange for a call girl to carry a man's baby for him if his wife can't have babies and doctors who trick women into unwanted pregnancies.

I don't know how much of this is true, but I do know huge profits are being made out of human misery. Their conclusion is to appeal to every prejudice in their attempt to prove that abortion is always ugly and wrong. My conclusion is that we should put an end to the racketeering by making abortion available free on the national health.

The authors of the book say that anyone making love must be prepared to have a baby. But what do they expect us to do? ... 'Sorry love, not tonight, nor for the next few years because you lost your job last week and there's no more in this area ...' ... 'Still if you can't find another job P'raps we'll get to do it in heaven ...'

The whole book is really a collection of unsubstantiated highly emotive opposition to all attempts by women to control their own lives. Kathy Tait

I would like to know more about the International Socialists

Name _____

Address _____

Please post to:
Womens Voice
8 Cottons Gardens
London E2

Get this Resolution p

THE WOMENS SUB-COMMITTEE of IS has discussed the anti-working class nature of the proposed amendments to the Abortion Law. Speakers' notes have been produced which are available at 2p each from IS at 8, Cottons Gardens, E2. A printed fact sheet is in production which will be available for sale in workplaces and trade union branches. The sub-committee urged that all socialists campaign in the trade union movement for the following resolution (amend where necessary for the particular local circumstances).

'The amendment to the Abortion Act comes at a time when the NHS and social services are already subject to severe cuts. The amendment will restrict further the working class women's access to the service without preventing abuse (profiteering). Working class women will suffer as a result. Abortions should not be made available on a 'first come first served' basis. They must be made freely available on the basis of need. We support the call by the National Abortion Campaign for a demonstration at Parliament in June.'

ABORTION ON DEMAND



assed

time when the cuts in expendi- We call on the National Executive of the Union to actively cam-
 gs of the Act paign on the issue.
 s women in par- We call on the National Executive to organise pressure on the
 e more difficult union's parliamentary group to oppose amendment.
 NHS.

ampaign for a This resolution should be given as much publicity as possible
 locally and sent to local papers, TV etc.

ABORTION DEMAND

'IT'S OUR RIGHT'

THE PROPOSERS of the amend-
 ment to the Abortion Act say that
 it is aimed at eliminating abuse. But
 if successful it will not penalise the
 abusers and the racketeers. It will
 affect working class women most.

The amendment narrows the
 grounds on which it is legal to have
 an abortion. It also increases the
 paper work and red tape involved.
 The young busy GPs in working class
 districts are the ones most likely to
 be dissuaded from dealing with
 abortions.

Also the amendment would mean
 that anyone accused of involvement
 in an illegal abortion would have
 to prove innocence rather than de-
 feating the accusations of guilt. This
 will pressurise gynaecologists not to
 perform abortions and will also ex-
 pose nurses and ancillary staff to
 the risk of prosecution.

Any pregnant woman for whom
 having a baby would be a disaster
 will be left with two options—the
 private clinic or the back street
 abortion.

Private clinics already make a
 great deal of money out of abortion.
 A tightening in the law would make
 the risks greater—but would mean
 only that costs would go up.

In effect this would put private
 clinics right out of the reach of
 working class women but would
 hardly affect the rich women for
 whom they were opened in the
 first place.

Working class women would once
 again have to resort to the back
 street abortionist. Many back
 street methods are ineffective and
 harm the mother but not the foetus.
 Also they are usually extremely
 painful as they often involve the
 insertion of sharp objects like
 knitting needles into the womb. And
 the risk of dangerous complications
 is enormous.

All casualty workers are familiar
 with the bloody sight of women
 haemorrhaging or who have poisoned
 themselves or are suffering
 septacemia as the result of a back
 street abortion. The numbers of
 these casualties will increase if the
 amendment is successful.

Abortion is not an alternative to
 contraception. NHS workers want
 an expansion in the number of con-
 traceptive clinics offering advice and
 in the facilities which would make
 having a child a pleasure and not a
 disaster for working class women.
 But we are completely opposed to
 the hardships and the effects that
 this bill would impose.

A Hospital Doctor



London—Protest at the Italian Embassy
 against Italian women being medically
 examined about past abortions

Picture: Angela Phillips (IFL)

Abortion clinic staff arrested

IN ITALY ABORTION IS A CRIME. Yet every year more than three million women have an abortion usually in shocking back street conditions. Mussolini's anti-abortion law of 1930 was seen as a way of increasing the population that would fight for a greater imperial Italy! It is this law that stands in the way of those fighting for the right of abortion.

At the beginning of this year the radical doctors and nurses running non-profit making abortion clinics were exposed by the fascists. Doctors, nurses and patients at a clinic in Florence were arrested. Suddenly the abortion issue was thrust into the centre of political life.

Despite the claims of the upper classes that abortion is morally inexcusable, many upper class women can be found in the discreetly concealed luxury clinics in the expensive residential areas. And someone is making a fortune out of the operations. An estimated 200,000 million lira (over 100 million pounds) changes hands every year. It really is a big business clandestine industry. Lack of social services, full time play groups and schools, fear of husbands being out of work, high cost of living—all these things drive women to abortion.

The contraceptive pill is still illegal, thus encouraging abortion.

The economic crisis finds one more way of making workers pay—the crisis stimulates illegal abortions as working class women search frantically for ways of cutting costs. In the South where poverty and lack of education go together illegal abortion is even more common. Some women have as many as seven abortions. One of them was asked recently why she didn't take the pill. She replied that her doctor who has performed and has been paid for the abortions told her that the pill produced handicapped children.

Now six political parties are considering ways of reforming the law. The Communist Party has been very conservative—afraid of upsetting 'the Catholic masses'. The leaders of the radical party (equivalent to Labour's right-wing) are in prison for supporting the Florence Clinic. The revolutionary groups and the women's liberation movement are trying to respond to the changing mood in the towns and cities. The trades union leaders, however, have been very backward.

The hypocrisy and cruelty of the system is underlined by the number of 'white abortions'. Research into Voxson (radio manufacturers) showed that the number of white

or natural abortions ie miscarriages were encouraged by factory conditions to the extent that statistically they compared to other industrial diseases and accidents, but there is one difference, they are not included in the categories of industrial diseases and accidents. Even though the root cause of industrial diseases and natural abortions are the same eg speed of production, temperature etc and the case of natural abortions at Voxson has been linked with lead traced in the urine. In these conditions maternity is no longer a right but a privilege.

Italian society jails working class women who have illegal abortions but doesn't notice the unwanted abortions caused by the violence of the productive system based on profit.

Demands are growing for a referendum on abortion like the referendum on divorce last year, the establishment is going to be shaken at the growing movement to throw off the oppressive hang-ups of the past. Already all over Italy women and working-class women in particular, are calling for free abortions (both in terms of law and of money) medical consultancies, sexual education and use of contraceptive pills.

Renata Carlos



Rome—Radical banners in favour of abortion, displayed during the Pope's speech at Christmas. Police immediately stopped demonstration

National Abortion Campaign

MANY left-wing and womens groups got together to launch the National Abortion Campaign to fight against this James White Bill. It will be co-ordinating and initiating action around this issue, such as Trade Union support, demonstrations, and literature with the facts and arguments against the Bill. The following dates have already been planned:

- 15 April Meeting at the House of Commons with sympathetic women Labour Party MPs.
- 14 June National Demonstration from Hyde Park.

For information and suggestions for local and national action contact:
 National Abortion Campaign,
 80 Railton Road,
 London SE24
 (Tel: 01-274 8498)

Letters

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

EQUAL PAY

I AM A hospital ancillary worker and in February this year I received my first 'equal' pay packet. Aren't we women hospital workers lucky? No. The whole thing has been a con from start to finish.

As in most industries ancillary workers are graded according to the kind of work done, and of course 99 per cent of women workers are on the lowest grades. This includes domestics, cleaners, kitchen and linen room staff and waitresses.

Management promised us a review of the grading system. We got it. And the difference it has made to the lowest graded staff is 60p a week before tax.

Equal pay and regrading has given us less than £2 a week take home pay. A high proportion of women workers in the NHS are single parent families and many more who once worked for pin money are now finding their wage packets a necessity not a luxury. With inflation and redundancy we are losing not gaining.

If your union is negotiating equal pay do not let them con you as they did us.

In the economic crises of the past, women were used as cheap labour. Don't let them do it again. Fight for real equal pay.

Bridget Harbour,
NUPE
Leicester

BURNLEY

A WOMEN'S MEETING was held in Burnley in February. It was attended by 23 women workers mainly from Lucas Engineering and Great Universal Stores.

Kate McCabe spoke about the need for women to fight for equal pay and for jobs of equal status. She also emphasised the need for unions to send representatives to factories which aren't unionised.

We intend to have further meetings and invite outside speakers. We know that the only way we will get equal pay is to organise and fight for it. Although this is Equal Pay Year we all know from personal experience that a simple act of legislation is not enough to change employers' attitudes to women. Nor does it alter the situation where women are forced into lesser skilled and least satisfying jobs.

The women who attended the meeting have ordered 50 copies of the next issue of Women's Voice. Please send them to me as soon as the paper is published.

Jan Ali,
Burnley, Lancs.

SIXTEEN YEARS LATER...

PARENTS AND TEACHERS at Highbury Quadrant Primary School, Islington, organised a moving picket—morning and afternoon—to block a dangerous road opposite the school. There had been a long history of accidents at that spot and campaigns to get a crossing since 1958. Last November a boy was knocked down there and suffered a fractured skull. When another boy was hit in January, they decided to take action.

The police threatened to arrest the leader of the picket. The legal precedent was set last November in a High Court decision against a picket outside Prebbles, an Islington estate

agent with a notorious reputation for harassing protected tenants. This ruling if interpreted strictly removes the right to picket in non-industrial disputes. In the event, the people decided to continue picketing the rest of the week; and no arrests were made.

As a result of their picket, they now have a lollypop lady for that dangerous crossing. One week's picketing achieved what sixteen years of campaigns 'through proper channels' never did. Need I say more?

Jenny Jackson
11.3.75

DISAPPOINTED

WE HAVE just received the latest copy of Womens Voice and are most disappointed with the change of contents and style. We feel that instead of swinging completely toward working women a better balance could have been achieved. We agree that working women have more power and potential than housewives. But we feel that housewives are an important part of any socialist organisation—we run the families and

are a central pillar in upholding capitalist society. Also a man may vote with his mates at a strike meeting but then he has to get his wife and family behind him—a dangerous loophole which can lead to the Cowley type of situation.

It is important that housewives are offered socialist understanding—an understanding beyond that found in magazines and on the telly.

We feel sure that there must be other groups in our situation and we would like to hear what other women feel.

Chris Rainger
March Womens
Voice Readers
Group, Cambs.

RUTHLESS CUTTING

HOW PLEASED I was to see my letter printed and then how disappointed to find it ruthlessly cut so as to alter its whole point and meaning. Although it was long to me it seemed that another woman who had suffered the same treatment as me would identify with it and be encouraged to fight back.

The questions I asked and the answers I received helped to build up a vision of how inhuman the state is. Your editing shows how little you must understand the situation.

I note Womens Voice becoming

As soon as I could speak—I was told to listen
As soon as I could play—they taught me to work
As soon as I found a job—I married
As soon as I married—came the children
As soon as I understood them—they left me
As soon as I had learned to live—life was gone
by Debbie Carnegie,
Basement Writers, Town Hall, Cable Street, E.1.



Womens' Voice readers and International Socialists were among the 5000 strong demonstration which marched through London's East End.

more political and giving mainly news of strikes. But do not forgo being the voice of the housewives as well—or we will once more be left without a media to express our views.

Eunice Wormwald
Darlington,
Co. Durham.

ABORTION

WHILST feeling deeply sympathetic to any woman driven in desperation to abortion, personally I find it totally abhorrent, and could not imagine myself going through with it.

I have no wish to campaign against those who choose this solution, but I feel that your paper is rather dogmatic, and tries to make me feel I am being socially irresponsible.

There are many working class women who share my attitude. We all disagree with your article in feeling that the presence of life in the womb should be inviolable. This is a woman's personal decision.

I feel that there should be financial and social provision so that the unmarried mother, or the mother with a large family and low income can keep her baby if she wants and live with dignity. I also feel that contraceptives should be widely publicised and readily available to any woman who needs them. Couldn't we fight for this alongside the fight for abortion on demand, so that all categories of opinion were catered for in this highly personal and emotional issue? Or are we all masochists, giving in and asking for our children to be destroyed by a state which has no concern for their economic survival?

Chris Chave
Coventry

WFL

THIS MONTH'S issue of Womens Voice refers to the Women for Life Conference. Womens Voice seeks to maintain that Women For Life is a front organisation for SPUC is a front for the Vatican. But women who march against abortion are not necessarily in favour of SPUC. In future women who dislike SPUC's tactics and oppose abortion have no need to ally with them. WFL is already as strong as the bored looking few hundred who mobilised opposition for James White's bill last month.

Significantly a number of women join WFL who previously held a pro abortion position. Some are nurses who resent the government's mockery of its own 'conscience clause' and oblige them to destroy lives they would rather save. Some are unhappy health workers and social workers who object to the rules that say only 'socially adequate' women are licensed to breed. Some are simply part of the 77 per cent of women in this country who oppose abortion on demand.

If you are really concerned with the majority of women you would not represent them with being in favour of pro abortionist views that they don't hold nor trivialise the experience of women who have unwillingly witnessed the destruction of a foetus. I not only read but have also sold Womens Voice. I will be interested to see how far beyond party lines you are willing to publish.

Amanda Binns
Women For Life
Leamington Spa
Warwickshire

(See what we think in the centre pages)

Classified Ads

NATIONAL WOMENS LIBERATION CONFERENCE 1975
To be held in Manchester April 5/6, Abram Moss Centre in Manchester. Registration £2.50. All Correspondence to 218 Upper Brook Street, Manchester 13. Please say whether you are bringing children, how many and what ages. Cheques to be made payable to National Womens Liberation Conference 1975.

OUR COMMON STRUGGLE IN PORTUGAL—a monthly bulletin

about workers' struggles in Portugal published by the Portuguese Workers Co-ordinating Committee. £1.00 for 10 issues from PWCC, 18 Fleet Road, London NW3.

NATIONAL RANK AND FILE CONFERENCE. 'The Shop Floor Fight For Equal Pay And Against Redundancy'. Open to women shopfloor workers. Jointly sponsored by SEI Shop Stewards' Committee, ASTMS Central Branch, Leicester, NUPE

Withington Hospital, NUPE United Hospitals, Manchester. 26th April 1975 in Manchester. Write for letter of invitation and delegates' credentials to Roger Cox (Secretary), 214 Roundwood Road, London NW10.

THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION IS NOT ONLY IN THE WORK-PLACE. The politics of housing, social security, community facilities, local government are also part of the class struggle. North Southwark group

using photography, radio, community paper and footwork, needs more part-time/full-time helpers. Blackfriars Community Action Team, 44 Nelson Square, London SE1. Tel: 928 9521.

HELP. Womens Voice Business Manager is being forced to take a job that pays. Is there an IS member in the London area who would be willing to work one day per week (unpaid) on the distribution side of Womens Voice? Write to 8 Cottons

Gardens, E2 or phone 739 2639 for details.

RISING FREE BOOKSHOP, 197 Kings Cross Road, WC1. for left wing and radical books, pamphlets and periodicals. Send SAE for free booklist.

IS SPEAKERS NOTES on abortion are available from IS Education Sub-Committee. Send 2p plus postage for each copy to Pete Marsden, 8 Cottons Gardens, London E2.

NEWS

IT SEEMS that even that bulwark of the Establishment The Times newspaper is getting into International Womens Year and writing about discrimination. Great stuff you might think. Until you find out just what kind of discrimination it is that they worry about. Did you know for instance that only 2 per cent of the total membership of the Institute of Directors are women? Poor lambs . . . makes our problems like HP and not being able to get apprenticeships really pale into insignificance, doesn't it?

NEWS

TRADITIONALISTS will also be horrified to hear that this year's Queen Charlotte's Ball—the high spot of the season for your switched on debutante—may well be the last. Even the filthy rich are feeling the pinch it seems and this year's bright young things are making do with cocktail parties instead of balls to mark their coming out. And even those who are having balls are limiting them to 'small' family affairs with only 100/150 guests. What hardships we all have to suffer when the squeeze is on . . .

NEWS

THE RAILWAY REVIEW—the newspaper of the National Union of Railwaymen showed its deep commitment to women's rights in a recent issue. On February 14th they published details of the new wages structures that have been negotiated for catering staff. Following the TUC commitment to Equal Pay the union have just signed a deal which gives female catering assistants a basic wage of £20.50 and male catering assistants a basic wage of £23.00—a difference of £2.50 for the same work. The same differential applies to senior catering assistants and catering supervisors. As if that wasn't enough to make your blood boil—you turn over the page and see an article headed BIG YEAR FOR WOMEN which states that this year trades unionists will be well to the fore in activities to promote the success of International Women's Year in Britain. Womens Voice is prepared to forgive the developing cynicism of Railway Review Readers . . . is the NUR serious in its commitment to fight for equality for women workers, we wonder?

NEWS

BUT IN THE AUEW things are looking up. Three resolutions to the Rules Revision Conference propose that Women's Section in the union should at last be eliminated and women members should take their place alongside their brothers in the union. Some of the proposers are undoubtedly anxious that the union should not be in contravention of the Government's new anti-discrimination legislation. But the first resolution that proposes that women should be able to go into section 5 (unskilled workers) and section one (skilled workers) is a step in the right direction. AUEW members should voice their preference for the first resolution so that national delegates vote the right way when the time comes.

NEWS

A TELLING COMMENT about the way society operates came from a woman whose story was published in the press recently. She told the Commons Select Committee on violence that her husband had beaten her for 16 years before her children had begged her to leave. Three times she had gone to the local social services department for help. She and her children were put in a local bed and breakfast accommodation for a week at a time. But she would find her husband in the social services department because they brought him in. She said 'they will not help. They are concerned with one thing, and that is to keep the family together.'

LAST AUGUST Joanne Little defended herself against a rapist. The man was her jailer and she killed him with his own weapon—an ice pick. Today she is kept in solitary confinement under \$100,000 bail. She is charged with first degree murder and the state is asking for the death penalty.

She is held in North Carolina jail. It has no facilities for women prisoners and all the jailers are male. Her lawyer said that the jail has reputations for sexual assaults by guards on women prisoners.

Joanne's attacker was jailer Clarence Allingood. He entered her cell with the ice pick in his hand wearing only a shirt, undershirt and socks. He brandished the ice pick and demanded she submit to rape. They struggled. Joanne snatched the ice pick and stabbed Allingood until he fell away from her. Then she fled.

A week later she gave herself up to the authorities.

Lawyers have argued that it is impossible for Little to get a fair trial. When the medical examiners report noted Allingood's body was found without trousers on—the judge

American justice with its trousers down...

struck the doctor's name from the list of grand jury witnesses. But an Allingood relative was on the jury that indicted her.

Joanne Little faces an almost impossible battle in the courts. She is young, poor and black. The prejudice that she has to fight is immense.

Contributions are desperately needed and should be sent to the Joanne Little Defence Fund, PO Box 1003 Durham, North Carolina 27702.

This article was taken from Workers Power a revolutionary socialist paper from USA. It is available in Britain from Joyce Rosser, 6 Statham Grove, London N16.

WORKERS' Power

Coverage of
labor movement
women's liberation
youth struggles
black struggles
economy
national politics
social politics
international news
revolutionary politics

Picture: Andrew Ward (REPORT)



TUC Women's Conference vote on an amendment

CONFERENCE NOT EASILY LED

SUE STRUTT, Bradford Trades Council delegate to the Women's TUC conference writes about the conference.

MEN WANTED - IN CHINA

RECENTLY 'The Times' summarised a report from a Chinese Medical Journal which described how as part of a campaign to limit family size, parents in China are being helped to 'choose the sex of their children'. This is done by carrying out a test in the seventh or eighth week of pregnancy to determine the sex of the foetus. Then the parents are offered an abortion if it isn't the sex they want.

In one group of pregnancies tested in this way there were 53 male

foetuses and 46 female. When the parents were told the results of the tests only one abortion was requested but 29 abortion of female foetuses were requested and carried out. Thus 63 per cent of the female foetuses were aborted.

The first reaction to this report is probably to condemn these abortions. Yet this situation can only be understood and changed through seeing the different values put on male and female children. In the world today, especially in rural areas, boys are seen as an economic asset and girls a liability. What is surprising about this report from China is that the hospital was in an industrial area.

The different attitudes to male and female children that exist even in industrialised countries are due to the lack of opportunities available for girls and the consequent low social value given to them.

Only when women have equal opportunities and power will this situation cease to occur and then all children will be valued as human beings.
Joyce Rosser

'This year's Womens TUC Conference was attended by 181 delegates from 51 trade unions, and 80 delegates from Trades Councils. Equal Pay was one of the items discussed, but there was understandably far more interest in the resolution about low paid women workers, which recognised that the Act would only apply to a minority of working women anyway, and we should be stressing the £30 minimum wage for all full-time women workers. (At the moment 89 per cent of all women workers earn less than £30 per week, and a large percentage earn less than £25 per week, and 800,000 are on less than £18 per week.)

'The platform—Womens Advisory Committee to the TUC—sought to lead conference along the lines of general TUC policy, not always successfully. A call for 18 weeks fully paid maternity leave and guaranteed reinstatement up to 12 months after the birth for either parent was passed despite opposition from the platform. The glaring omission of any mention of contraception or abortion in the TUC Charter for Working Women, drawn up by the

Womens Advisory Committee was explained by the Secretary Ethel Chipchase, who said that the Charter only covers matters which unions already have policies on. Later we discussed abortion and supported an amendment calling for better contraceptive facilities and abortion on demand, available to all women on the NHS.

Isolation

'All these topics were not seen in isolation from each other. Contraception, abortion, paid maternity leave, free council nurseries, equal education and training facilities and pay and job opportunities were all debated.

'But Conference debate was not limited to issues affecting only women workers—several delegates opposed the Social Contract. Delegates also opposed Britain's entry to the Common Market.

'The usefulness of the Womens TUC can only be gauged by what effect it has on general trade union policies, and what use delegates make of resolutions, when they get back to their workplaces.'

'WE CAN'T AFFORD IT' ...

Hammer on the town hall doors!

IN SYLVIA'S FOOT- STEPS

I WORK in a community nursery in Hackney and I am fed up seeing people come in every day desperately trying to get a place. I know they have little chance of getting a place as we have already got 140 on our waiting list.

I would like them all to go hammering at the door of the Town Hall demanding more nurseries. We took one step towards this when we all got together and went on the womens march in East London. Although it was pouring down we had about 40 people from Hackney including nursery workers, playgroup workers, childminders and mothers.

Our leaflet said that it was time women who worked with small children were given decent wages and not treated like substitute mothers. Women's role in the home has been exploited long enough. I don't see why we should be taken for granted when we work in the community.

Many playgroup workers in Hackney have joined NUPE and have formed their own branch. They are trying to get all nursery workers in London to join so they can negotiate higher wages. They get a maximum of £2.50 per 3½ hour session—if they have been on two training courses. They can earn as little as £1 per session.

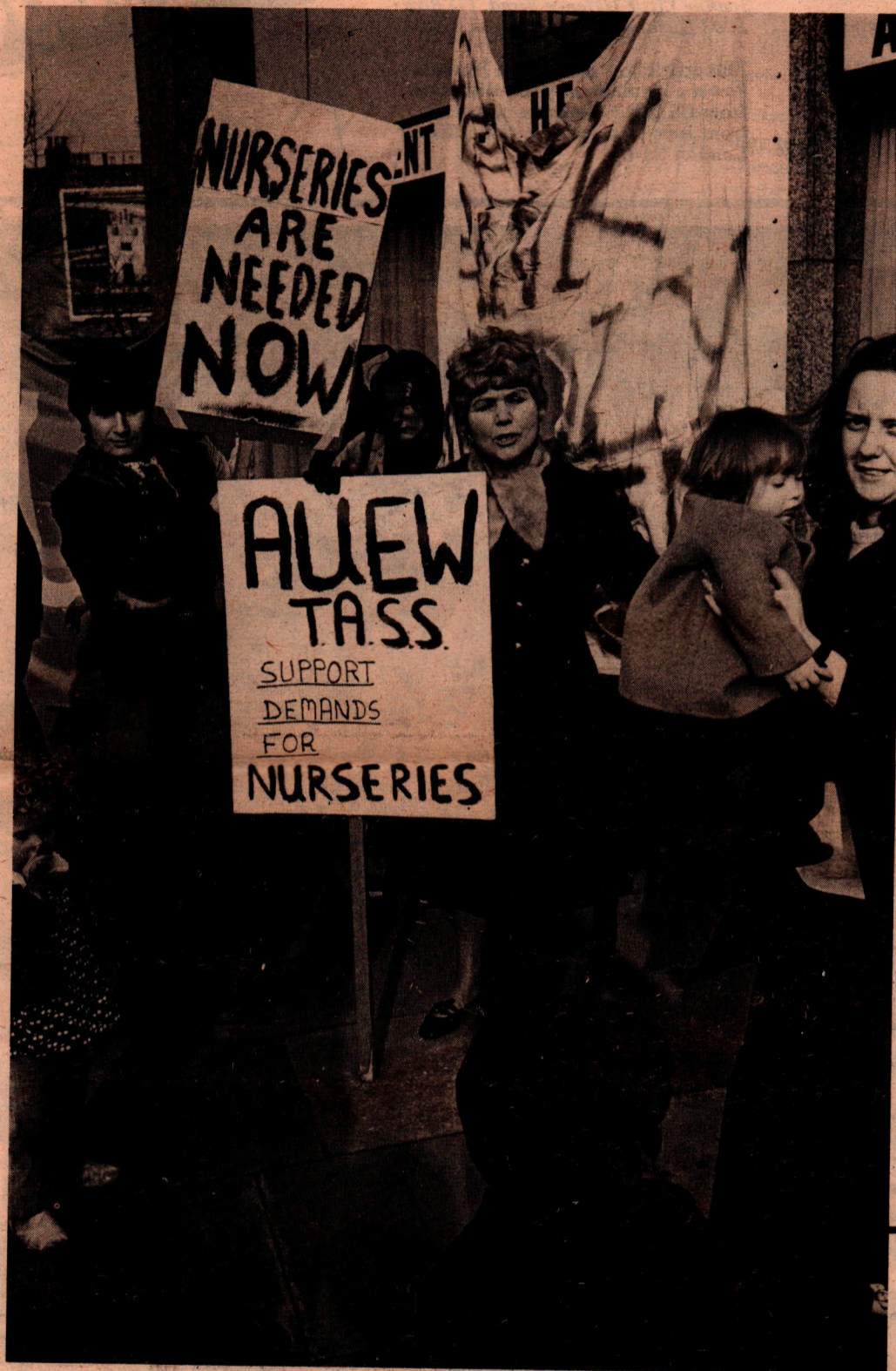
There is a nursery action group in London which is planning to hold a conference in April to discuss the problems of nursery workers.

There are also two small groups of childminders who are trying to improve conditions, one in Hackney and one in Sutton.

On Saturday we shouted and marched and if it hadn't been a lousy day, we could have worked out a follow-up activity to keep us all together and do something about conditions in Hackney. But we all ran off to have a hot bath instead.

Groups of people in Hackney meet and discuss what to do about the under-fives, but I am feeling very frustrated at the moment, because I really think what we ought to do is to get all the mothers who need nursery places to start shouting and hammering on doors so that the Council are not allowed to say—'We can't afford it' anymore. They afford it when they have to—we just have to fight for it, that's all.

Anna Pritchard



Some of the women who attended the demonstration at the Dept. of Health and Social Services about the lack of nursery facilities for students. Picture: Peter Harrap (Report)

Council meeting stormed by Spanish mums

THE WORKING CLASS of Spain is going through a rapid series of developments these days. In a country where trade unions are illegal—and where to strike is to break the law, many working people are refusing to accept the role that the regime would like to see them maintain. Not only industrial workers, but also housewives are asserting themselves.

Recently in a village outside Madrid—Alcobendas, the Council meeting had to be suspended in order to listen to demands put by a group of seventy women who had invaded the town hall. They were demanding a free state pre-school centre. In a country such as Spain where women are most definitely expected to be mother and wife to the exclusion of anything else, this is quite a significant step. It is incidentally, one that we can learn from. In this country we too are suffering from a serious lack of nurseries ...

Maggie Newell

WALKOUT

TWO WEEKS AGO in Heinz food factory in North West London there was an incident of some significance for women workers in particular. At the end of a working day in the Bottle Goods department—the women were queuing waiting for clocking-out time. One of the girls went to the washroom—giving her card to a fellow worker in case she wasn't back in time to clock out.

Technically this practice is not allowed but obviously it is open to elastic interpretation ... The chargehand noticed what happened—and the following day both girls involved were taken into the office. The one who had left her card was given a formal warning—and the other girl was suspended for two days!

There are over 100 workers in Bottle Goods department, and 80 per cent of them are women. For a long time this has meant that working conditions have been worse in that department and that discipline has been top heavy. Management seemed to have

the idea that its easier to push the women around. The men wouldn't stand for half of their antics ...

This latest incident however, has provoked a change in attitude which has affected most of the department's staff. When news of the suspension got around, people felt incensed at the unfairness. For giving someone a helping hand, this girl was expected to lose two days pay! Quickly then, the department with their shop stewards met with the convenor and everyone decided to walk out at 2pm. As a result the company lost £3000 in production. Rapidly, management had a change of heart. The suspension was waived and the girl received her money. On returning to work, there was a marked sense of achievement amongst the workers in Bottle Goods. In future, I would guess that management will be a little more cautious in its handling of personnel there ...

This is the kind of action which builds up confidence amongst workers and which strengthens them for any future confrontation.

DESPITE pouring rain, 5000 women and men demonstrated on March 8th to celebrate International Women's Day—a day of solidarity between women workers of all countries. They went through the East End of London following the same route that traditionally was taken by Sylvia Pankhurst's East London Suffragettes during the 1914-18 war who worked in the East End, campaigning for higher wages, decent housing and social benefits for working-class women.

East End

The fact that this year's march went through the East End is important. It shows that many people within the women's movement recognise that the most important force in the struggle for women's liberation are women workers. Much of the reception to the march was hostile—especially from the men. Obscene invitations were made to the women and some of the men were called fairies. Even so many women who watched the march were sympathetic. Many different organisations were represented on the march and the slogans were varied—ranging from slogans of 'equal pay, equal rights' and 'women workers unite and fight' to 'wages for housework'.

Disappointing

It was disappointing to arrive at the end of the march and find that there was no meeting—it is impossible to put politics across just by having a demonstration, and not explaining why. There is potential for organising working women in areas like the East End—but this can't be done just by descending on the place once a year. It takes consistent, regular, campaigning, with leaflets, meetings, around issues which concern working women like equal pay and abortion.

This is the sort of work that IS and the women's movement should be doing.

Linsey German

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