

# Womens voice

WOMENS PAPER OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS

## RANK AND FILE WOMENS INDUSTRIAL CONFERENCE

The pressure on women is building up. Healey's budget means not only will wage packets not stretch as far, but many of us struggling women workers are likely to lose our jobs. We can't hang around any longer, just taking everything which is thrown at us. We've got to do something to change it. We need to fight. We've got to defend ourselves. But we will only be able to do that when we get organised. Where there's a will there's a way. But our will is not enough. That's why we must get along to this rank and file conference, called specially for women in industry to try and sort out the problems. We've got to start building the links we need to win. So try and get yourself delegated, or get yourself along as an observer. And get your men shop stewards and fellow trade unionists there as well. We've got to convince them that OUR fight is THEIR fight.

MANCHESTER, 21 JUNE.

### National Rank and File Industrial Women's Conference

'The shop floor—how to build strong organisation'

June 21st

University of Manchester, Institute of Science and Technology

Jointly sponsored by SEI Shop Stewards Cttee

ASTMS Leicester General Branch

South Manchester Hospitals Branch

NUPE United Manchester Hospitals Branch

After thirty years...

# THE BOMBING STOPS



THE Vietnamese people have won. The United States has been defeated. And the corrupt Saigon government is smashed.

Over the past weeks we've been subjected to a barrage of publicity on the sad plight of orphans in Vietnam.

*'Meet my Vietnamese orphan daughter. I'd almost forgotten what it's like to be a new mother. Now I'm loving it.'* Julie Andrews in May's TV Life.

Journalists who had nothing to say when Nixon was bombing hospitals in Hanoi in 1972 are now shedding floods of tears

over the plight of refugees and orphans.

The devastation and horror is immense. But the responsibility for this agony lies squarely with the American government, which ravaged Vietnam rather than see its own ability to dominate the world challenged. And the Saigon government representing a ruling class determined to hang on its wealth and privileges was prepared to continue the war regardless of the cost in blood and suffering.

For 70 years the people of Vietnam fought the French who had colonised their country. By 1954

the French had been defeated—and the Americans stepped in. In the next 20 years more than two million people were killed. One seventh of South Vietnam has been poisoned by defoliants and the land laid waste. The US Air Force dropped more bombs on Vietnam than were used in the Second World War.

And now, just at the point when the Vietnamese were on the verge of victory, the Americans try and blame their war of destruction on the people of Vietnam. The use of babies and children is a cynical attempt to distract our attention from their role in the war. President Ford gets himself photographed

playing with an orphan—after spending twenty years organising the murder of the babies' families. Any babies scarred by napalm or otherwise suffering from war injuries are not being flown to the USA for adoption.

We know the truth. When it comes to a question of power, President Ford, Harold Wilson, Margaret Thatcher and the rest don't let the lives of kids stand in their way.

The people of this small country took on the might of the most powerful state in the world. And won. Their victory is an inspiration to us all.



# 'Because we've won over too many issues...'

WALTERS AND DOBSON  
Stavely

'Robert Walters wants to get rid of the union so he can have a non-union shop in this place. But we won't wear it.' This is how one of the women on the picket line at Walters and Dobsons put the situation to Women's Voice. The official strike of 58 AUEW members started in March. Management agreed to pay the national engineering rise but took it out of the threshold payments they were already getting. Walters says he can't afford to pay, but he's been able to afford six weeks strike and all that lost production.'

The reason that the women think that Walters is trying to break the union organisation is that ever since they transferred from the GMWU to the AUEW seven years ago, their wages have steadily improved. They have got three stewards and there is a really good communal spirit in the place. For example, the women had different ideas about how to fight for the engineering rise. Some of them thought a work-to-rule would bleed management to death, others pushed for all-out strike. There was a mass meeting where the issue was discussed, a vote taken and everyone agreed to stick by the majority decision.

## Blacked

The women are picketing all day and sometimes during the evening to stop anything going in or out of the factory. The local AUEW official is also trying to get the firm's goods blacked. At a meeting of the AUEW district committee, to which a convenor plus one of the stewards from each of the engineering factories in the area was invited, the women hoped to get support for a one day stoppage. Unfortunately, they were sadly let down and only got promises of continued blacking and factory collections, instead of a levy on the membership organised by the AUEW district secretary.

## School

The women don't have any picketing problems with the kids because they all live on the estate surrounding the factory. The women turn up before their kids go to school for a couple of hours and

Women picketing at Walter and Dobsons  
Photo: John Sturrock  
(Report)



then go home to see them off to school. Picketing is clearly fitted into the housewife's 'duties'. Women with very small children don't need to turn up to the picket line because there are plenty of

other women to cover for them.

The women have also been gathering support from other AUEW members on the picket line and are still hoping that one engineering factory in the area will come out for a

day in support. Unfortunately, over the last couple of weeks some women have gone back to work. Great pressure has been put on individuals and in one case a girl was dragged back to work by her parents.

The local paper, the 'Derbyshire Times', ran an article a month after the strike had started, with the following head-line: **Strikers Are Marxist Pawns, claims Firm.** Because members of the local branch of the International Socialists have been up on the picket line, supporting the strike-management told the paper, the women were just being manipulated for political ends. The women's response to this piece of slander was: 'It's a load of rubbish. They just printed Walter's side of things. They didn't want to know what our convenor thought, He talks about us being political pawns when he's getting 'moral' support from the Engineering Employers Federation. Anyway, this strike isn't political it's just a straight disagreement about money. We want the money and he doesn't want to give it to us.'

## Finished

Apparently Robert Walters has applied to join the local Engineering Employers' Federation, but won't be allowed to do so until the strike has finished. The women also suspected that a condition of membership would be breaking the strike: 'because we've won over too many issues in the recent past. He refused to pay out the threshold until we sat in in the canteen. Then last May, when Hugh Scanlon called an all out stoppage to protect our union funds from the courts, Walters tried to lock us out. In the end he had to ask us to come back and he even paid us a £2 rise towards a bonus.'

## Determination

Carol Smith, the convenor, summed up the determination of the strikers like this: 'We're not giving way. He (Walters) would love us to leave. He'd set new women on then. We know things are tight and jobs are few, but that's no reason to work for nothing. It's no reason for us not to fight for the money. If we didn't they'd soon have us all working for nothing.'

# But this strike isn't political

'IT'S JUST a straight disagreement about money. We want the money and he doesn't want to give it to us', said one of the women at Walters and Dobson about their strike. A few days earlier the local paper had quoted the management saying the strikers were 'marxist pawns'.

The women weren't anybody's pawns. They took a decision themselves to fight for the engineering rise their boss was trying to cheat them out of. But on the picket line they were accused of being little Hitlers and fascists. Their boss clearly saw their strike as political, even if they didn't. He was able to use the local press in order to try and scare the women into going back to work. He is trying to join the Engineering Employers' Federation. And he's arguing that the women's wage claim goes against the interests of the country and quotes Dennis Healey's arguments about wages causing inflation.

The reason that Robert Walters is fighting so hard to break the strike, is because of the crisis. Although he owns only a very small firm, he knows and the EEF knows that

if one group of workers, however small, succeeds in winning concessions from the boss, this gives encouragement to workers everywhere. In this case, engineering employers all over the world are determined to take the second part of the engineering rise out of the threshold payments workers already get. If a handful of women at Walters and Dobsons can defeat their boss on this, imagine the impact on bigger, mainly male factories in the area. They'll all be demanding the boss pays out in no time.

The man Walters knows what the crisis means to him—he's not making enough profits. It's either lower profits or lower wages. The same goes for the government and the bosses. That's why their solution, 'the social contract' means keeping down our wages, scrapping our jobs, charging higher prices for food and household goods.

They aren't prepared to sacrifice anything. The crisis is a result of their system. They own the factories, they control the profits, but when everything runs into chaos and we are faced with a crisis their only

response is to try and make us pay for it. Every strike for more money challenges the bosses' ability to make us scapegoats. What they are really afraid of, is that not only will we all refuse to make the sacrifices, but that we will realise that they are the cause of the crisis and that we might just tell them to move over and let us run the whole works.

We're all familiar with the saying 'money makes the world go round'. It's not really money that makes the world go round, but workers every-

where making everything from guns to butter, who make the world go round. The only problem is that the working class neither here nor anywhere else has any control over what is produced, how, or what happens to it, where it goes, who gets it. The people who decide that are the bosses and the government. And they understand how important it is to stick together and act as a class—the ruling class. They know that strikes are political because, each one, however small, challenges their right to decide about our wages, jobs, price etc. We in the International Socialists say they don't

have any right to decide. We argue that people involved in producing everything are the only ones who have the right.

As one of the women at Walters and Dobsons put it, pointing at the Union Jack, which Walters aimed a point of flying over his factory. 'If he really believes in democracy, then he should accept our democratic decision to come out on strike and demand our money.'

In fact Walters doesn't believe in democracy, anymore than any other boss does. He believes that workers have the right to vote every five years, just as long as parliament does not alter his right to decide and workers think 'politics' are about elections. As soon as people realise that politics are really about the right to decide about your job, how you should work and the hundred and one things he normally controls, then 'democracy' goes right out the window. Then all he's interested in is keeping his position as boss. And that is why he uses the press, drags people back to work and is out to break the union. That's why strikes ARE political.

Sheila McGregor

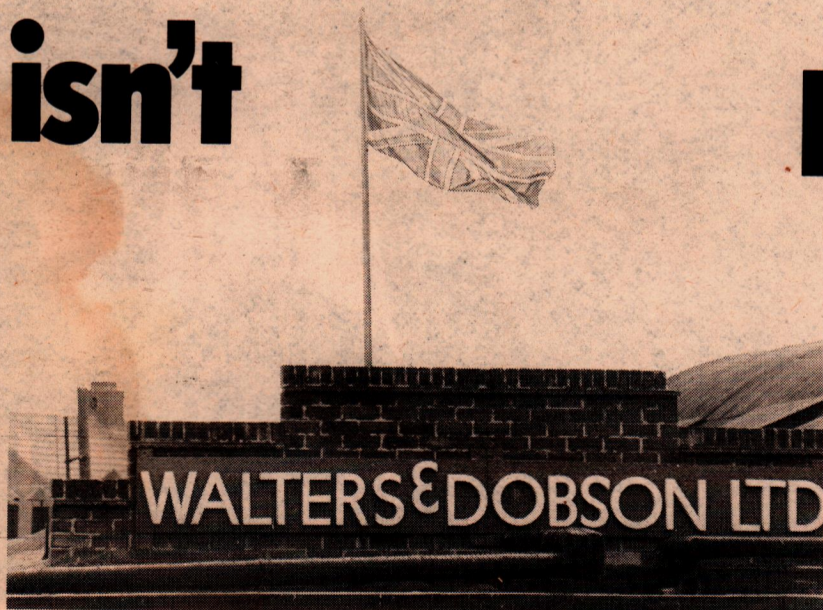


Photo: John Sturrock  
(Report)



# If we stick together

HAMPTON Stampings in Birmingham is typical of many small firms up and down the country. The management have never recognised a union and for years have got away with very low wages and bad working conditions. Wage rates vary from week to week and worker to worker. But the average wage is £15 for 30 hours and £17 for 40 hours for power press operators. The workers, mainly women, get no 'waiting time': if a machine breaks down, they get no pay.

Several weeks ago, sisters within the factory began to secretly organise membership of the AUEW. As soon as management found out that this

# WE CAN WIN

was going on, they sacked one sister and made another nine 'redundant'! On 31 March, 22 AUEW members came out on strike to demand the reinstatement of their fellow workers.

The action was made official by the West District Committee of the

AUEW and the strikers got strike pay. The sackings were clearly an attempt to break the new trade union organisation. This was shown the very next day when Hampton's management applied to the Labour exchange for more labour. Wendy Shields, AUEW shop ste-

ward, told a Women's Voice meeting in Birmingham that they finally felt strong enough to join the union when it dawned on them that there was little chance of them getting equal pay if they did not. Wendy told the meeting that although the non-union staff were

crossing the picket line and they suspected the staff of working the power presses, the women were determined to stay out until they got satisfaction. Two of the setters were out on strike with the women.

Another of the strikers, Peggy Higgins, who has worked for the firm for eleven years, told us that they considered the picketing to have been successful so far. One Monday and Friday workers from other factories in Birmingham joined in the picket and succeeded for the first time in stopping the one scab lorry driver from moving material. Particularly impressive was a strong delegation from the Rover factory in the area, which joined the picket. Although the West District Committee of the AUEW appeared to be dragging their feet in getting support for the strike, local militants took their own initiatives to get the strikers round the factories to factory gate meetings, winning both financial and moral support for their struggle. This led to more local trade unionists turning out in support on the picket line and eventually to victory. After six weeks the women won union recognition and reinstatement of the nine women made 'redundant'. Unfortunately, they failed to get the first woman reinstated who was sacked allegedly for 'bad time-keeping'. Management have agreed to pay her four weeks wages plus her tax, but refused to budge on reinstatement. The reason the women took the decision to return on these terms, was that they were afraid that to stay out would mean a split in the ranks and a break in the unity of the strikers. So rather than risk losing their hard won confidence, they're going back to carry on the fight inside. As one of the stewards put it 'We've got a job on when we get back—to fight over conditions, get non-union labour either into the union or out of the factory.'

This victory should be an inspiration to all of us. The lesson is clear. We can win if we all stick together. If a strike is solid and determined, and workers from other factories take up the case and give their support, then victory is possible.

Please send messages of congratulations and money to:-  
Hampton Stampings Strike Committee,  
c/o Wendy Shields, 25 Benfield Close, Stirchley, Birmingham 29.

Support like this made their victory possible  
Photo: John Sturrock (Report)



THE official strike of 40 Asian women and white women at Yarnolds, Wolverhampton has ended in defeat after 20 weeks. Yarnolds is a small family firm, non-union and therefore able to get away with appalling wages and conditions. The women decided that they could only change this by organisation. But as soon as they joined the Transport and General Workers Union their two shop stewards were sacked and the strike began. It was a strike for union organisation, re-instatement of their sacked shop stewards and finally for all their jobs.

Despite its importance as a strike for basic trade union rights for women and as a struggle involving black and white workers, this dispute was lost. But the women might not have suffered such a heavy defeat had they not been faced by such a stubborn and efficient management. Management used non-union company owned transport to maintain deliveries despite pickets on the gates.

The women also faced many fellow workers who did not support them, bad weather, family commitments and heavy picket duties. There was also a language problem between Asian and white strikers. The strikers' biggest problem however, was their own lack of trade union experience faced with a bureaucratic union leadership which failed to teach them how to organise and win their own dispute. Local,

more experienced trade unionists also failed to fill this gap.

Union officials tend to see strikes by women and blacks as peripheral to the movement and ignore the fact that these disputes need as much support as possible. The Transport and General Workers Union official in Wolverhampton proved both lazy and bureaucratic. He himself failed to gain support among his own union members, never mind trying to spread support among other unions. He relied on Labour MPs and government ministers, and bodies like the Industrial Tribunal.

For the strikers this meant a long and unrewarding battle and no involvement in the running of their own dispute. There was no effective

strike committee, not enough meetings, and an over-dependence on the two shop stewards, one of whom lost interest in the strike after she had received compensation for unfair dismissal from the Industrial Tribunal.

The women really needed guidance on how to picket, how to get goods blacked, how to raise money and get support for the strike from local factories. They needed encouragement to raise their dispute at factory and union meetings. They needed much more than the sporadic local rank and file support they got. Because they did not get this support, they fell back on the union official who just made more vague promises

of support. They waited, hoped and lost—lost not only trade union recognition and their own re-instatement, but also any confidence they might have had in the trade union movement. Their solidarity was smashed.

Women are increasingly coming to the fore in struggles for pay, union recognition and over other issues. And in so many cases particularly where the strikes only involve small numbers, the disputes end in defeat.

Women in struggle face many obstacles, not least of which are their domestic commitments. Society generally regards a woman's main area of work as being in the home, providing the employers with a free servicing of their labour force and producing the future generation of workers. As it becomes more and more necessary for women to go out to work to supplement their family's income, their double commitment as wives and mothers as well as workers has forced them into either part-time or out-work, or work in small industries which are relatively isolated, with little or no industrial power and often poor union organisation. As a result women from small factories, when they do come out on strike often lack even basic trade union know-how.

The trade union movement cannot afford to ignore such disputes. Women are too often slugged as passive tools of management, refusing to be broken, it is crucial that such disputes are supported and every effort made by local rank and file militants to make sure they are won.

Mary Larkin

# Time we learnt the lessons

## Birmingham IS women on the move

by Jen Carter

OUR WORK in the past has been very low key. Recently, with so many redundancies affecting women, short time working, and 'Equal Pay Year', a whole number of issues have arisen which have really got us moving. We have held one public meeting on Lay offs and Redundancies. 20 women turned up, two from Hampton Stampings, who we had invited along to tell us about their dispute. At the meeting, we decided to continue our work round women in industry by holding our next public meeting on Equal Pay. We have also produced a questionnaire on the unionisation of women, hours of work, wages, maternity leave, steps towards equal pay etc, and are now circulating it to selected factories in the area. The aim of the questionnaire is to gather enough information to write a pamphlet on women's conditions in industry for local trade unionists. Our most successful work so far has undoubtedly been round the Hampton Stampings strike in terms of raising money, getting support for the picket line.

At the meeting we also agreed to send several delegates to a meeting of a group of Birmingham which is attempting to organise a local campaign against the James White Amendment to the abortion bill.







# year

out of the housekeeping as well. It's a fine *social con*. And all tell us to accept it, how often do we, trying to make ends meet? Make a part-time job or twilight for the kids? How many of them are ill?

the bosses, the union leaders, they're all getting thousands a year, living off expense accounts. Come to bring up the kids. They're to make our lives easier. It's going to live up to anything, to start the fight. *That means* able to deal with the arguments of going to pay for the bosses' mess.

And we've got to start fighting back. The best place to start is at work with all our mates. We've got to start using our bargaining power. We're always being told that unions are there to protect workers' interests. It's about time we made sure they protect ours. We women are workers as well and we're not invisible.

We've got to make the men at work sit up and listen. Explain our problems and make them fight for us instead of always leaving us behind. If we lose our jobs it's our kids that suffer.

It's up to us, the 'average' women at work, the rank and file, to get moving. We've got to learn how the unions work, how to be shop stewards. We've got to link up with other workers in the same union and in the same industry. The more of us that fight, the stronger we'll be.

That's what building a national rank and file organisation is all about. Linking us all up so we can make some of our dreams about International Women's Year a reality.



Beautiful People

## FIRST IN NORTHEAST

notices had come from the firm. No, it was left to a television broadcaster to announce the closure, and the loss of 300 jobs.

This tragedy has happened, is happening elsewhere, and will continue to happen to workers throughout the world as long as profits are more important than people. But the women of Pex Holdings, Brandon, Brandon, have learnt lessons recently that will make them less easy game for the bosses in future.

Firstly, they have learnt that women workers can give their all to private industry, and shortly afterwards find themselves on the scrapheap when the bosses make a mess of things.

Secondly, they have learnt that many of the union officials, out of touch with the shopfloor, are more interested in keeping the peace with the bosses than fighting with women to save the women's jobs. For instance, when the union's North Eastern divisional official visited the area after Easter he stated that there was 'nothing to be done' about the situation. As far as he was concerned, the bosses had announced their decision and he was perfectly happy to accept it—while making the right noises of regret at the same time, of course. He was not concerned with the women's right to work.

Thirdly, the women have realised that, not only are the Regional Officials not particularly interested

in saving women's jobs, but little help and support has been forthcoming from the small number of men workers at the factory (Julie Barton, another Pex worker, said 'the men don't seem to care'). The fight for jobs will not be won unless both women and men fight together.

They, the bosses, rely on the all-too frequent lack of comradeship between women and men workers, to divide the workforce, and thereby to rule it. All too often this state of affairs has the backing of the union leadership, when it 'steps-down' on issues relating to equal pay—and exerts itself more when a dispute involves men.

Joyce McNally  
Durham branch

# BUDGET ROBBERY

## We pay for bosses crisis

WHEN Dennis Healey drew up the Labour government's budget the Tories called it a courageous move. Yes it was very courageous to hit out at the very people who put the Labour government into power . . . the working class. The budget was aimed specifically at the people who produce the vast wealth of this country but who do not profit from it. We are being asked to pay for the bosses' crisis.

The effects of this budget will be felt hardest of all by working-class women. In this society we do the shopping, the cooking, the washing, look after the children and the old and sick. It is these very areas which the budget is attacking.

Subsidies have been removed from bread and milk. Electricity, coal, gas, telephone and postal charges are all going up. VAT of 25 per cent is going on all domestic appliances.

Public expenditure is being cut back which means less nurseries, schools, hospitals, social amenities

Healey's Budget will not hit the wives of the top bosses, or the top actresses or the Margaret Thatchers and Queen Elizabeths of this world. They will still have their mink coats (VAT 8 per cent).

Healey's Budget is also there to guarantee higher unemployment. If working class people cannot afford to buy fridges and washing machines, there will be redundancies in Hoovers,

Fridgidaire etc. If there is a rundown in the public expenditure there will be less typists, teachers, cleaners and nurses as well as less health and welfare.

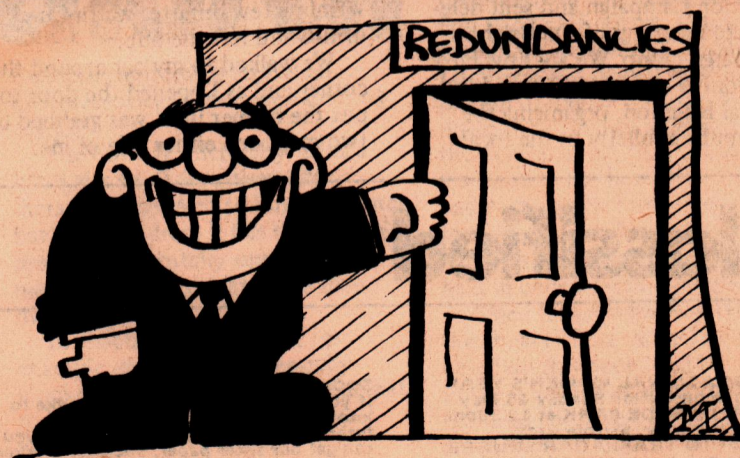
When Healey raised the price of fags he did not raise the wages of the thousands of women who work for Wills, Gallachers, Embassy or any of the subsidiaries of Imperial Tobacco Co.

Nor when he raised the price of whiskey and beer did he give rises to the hundreds of women who bottle and pack these goods. If there is a cutback in consumption of these goods it will be the women who suffer.

We will have to argue with our mates at work and on the estates that however bad this budget may be, a return to Tory rule is no alternative. In fact it would be positively worse. As long as this system exists there will be inflation, redundancies, crisis and the oppression of women.

The best way to answer Healey's Budget is to mount a united working class fight against the Social Contract and the budget. If the price rises, redundancies and cutbacks can only be met by a fight for higher wages now. It's the bosses' crisis. We will not pay.

As long as there are millionaires living off our backs from our hard work and as long as we go on trying to make a pound of cheap mince look like prime steak there can be no unity 'in the interest of the nation'.



LADIES FIRST, OF COURSE

**Against racialism and discrimination in the workplace, the union and the community.**

The Rank and File Conference Organising Committee invites all trade unionists to a conference on racialism.  
**Saturday 14 June, Digbeth Civic Hall, Birmingham.**

Credentials and details from Roger Cox, Secretary, Rank and File Organising Committee, 214 Roundwood Road, London, NW10.



# LETTERS

Dear 'Women's Voice',  
 Being unemployed my boyfriend went to claim supplementary benefit at the DHSS. When he was asked how much rent he paid he stated truthfully that he paid half the rent for our house. This led on to questions about whom he shared it with etc to which he answered truthfully that it was me and that I was in fact employed at the time.  
 They immediately assumed that we were co-habiting (whatever that implies!) and we would therefore be treated as a married couple and our income assessed jointly. They sent me a form asking for details of my place of work, salary etc which I did not complete. I wrote a letter explaining that the form was nothing to do with me as my boyfriend had claimed supplementary benefit for himself only, and I stated that although it was true we inhabited the same house we were financially independent, and neither of us expected, nor would accept financial support from the other. My boyfriend wrote a similar letter, also threatening legal action. Obviously not wishing to go to court over the matter the DHSS submitted, and my boyfriend received supplementary benefit assessed as for a single person, throughout the time he was unemployed.

The point was that we did not deny, as have couples in the past, that we were 'co-habiting', it would be pretty useless anyway seeing as they can 'prove' whatever they want by spying on the house, talking to the neighbours etc. No... we admitted living together but made clear our financial independence.  
 I would urge all couples in this situation to fight back as we did, against the authorities, who manipulated the laws to their own financial advantage and against those who challenge the norms of capitalist society.  
 Yours in sisterhood  
 Laura A Schwitzer, Norwich

IF James White's Abortion (amendment) Bill becomes law it will not be for lack of effort from BRIGHTON.  
 The IS Branch here passed a resolution supporting the National Abortion Campaign and sent delegates to meetings of the Brighton Campaign group. We are now busy petitioning on the estates and in central Brighton, organising the maximum publicity in the local

press, radio and TV, and have arranged a public meeting for the end of the month. We are also collecting evidence of women's abortion experiences to send to the select committee and raising the question at TU meetings and Trades Council's meetings to get resolutions of support.  
 All groups nationally will have to work hard and fast to defeat the forces behind this bill—SPUC (alias the Catholic Church) are a large well organised group, anyone who's been on demonstrations knows that, and the array of anti-abortion male MP's on the select committee is frightening. James White should have spent some time with me on night duty as a staff nurse in Casualty in East London for three years, to see what women will do to themselves when they are desperate.  
 It is the fundamental right of women to have the right to choose. Abortion is not an alternative to contraception but until contraceptives are safe and acceptable to all women we must have the right to safe abortion.  
**Jean Spray SRN**  
 (Health Visitor, Student)

Press release by a member of the Executive Committee of Islington NALGO  
 On Thursday, 27 March 1975, the National Front held a meeting, the second in three days, in Islington. There was a picket of the meeting expressing opposition to the National Front presence in Islington. The picket was entirely peaceful and dispersed after a short meeting in a near-by car park.  
 I was one of four women members of NALGO subsequently assaulted by four male National Front supporters. Having dispersed with the other pickets, the four of us stopped in the local pub to warm up and have a quick drink. We had with us the rolled-up banner of the Islington NALGO Action Group, which had been prominently displayed during the picket. Several men, whom we recognised as having been part of the gathering outside the National Front meeting place, entered the pub. Within a few minutes we finished our drinks and left the pub.  
 We walked to my car around the corner and as I opened the door to put the banner in, it was grabbed by two men, one either side of me.

Hanging on to the banner, I said, 'Don't be stupid'. One answered, 'Give us the banner, we're collecting these.' Two other women were grabbed from behind and the fourth made for the nearest phone to ring the police. After a bit of a tussle, the four men made off with the banner. One of the women shouted after them, 'Fascists!' A man replied, 'Yes, we are fascists.' The three of us proceeded immediately to the police station on Hornsey Road to report the incident.  
 For the four of us it was our first ever experience of assault on the streets. This illustrates that despite the National Front's protestations about 'free speech' and 'law and order', what they are really about is violence against all those who oppose their views. Twice in one week these Fascists have used the streets of Islington to preach racial hatred and political repression. We as women and trade unionists now have direct experience of the tactics of the National Front. It is vital that we all unite to keep Islington free of the thuggery and violence which is the true face of the National Front.  
 We understand a photo of the missing banner taken during the picket is available from 'Report', 493 7507.

We want to produce a paper that you can use. That you can use to get revolutionary socialist ideas across to your friends and fellow workers. We can't do this unless you send us your comments and criticisms in the form of letters and articles. We're waiting to hear from you.  
 Write to:  
**The Editor,**  
**Women's Voice,**  
**8 Cottons Gardens,**  
**London E2 8DN.**  
**Production Team**  
 Sheila McGregor **Editor**  
 Elana Dallas **Co-editor**  
 Liz Mackie **Cartoons**

# The family: one link in our chains

WHEN THE anti-abortionists speak out against abortion they claim to be against it because of the grim nature of the operation and also because they think abortion is immoral. They back their arguments with bloody tales of the abortion industry and with pious pronouncements about the sanctity of human life.

## Morality

In reality what the anti abortionists object to is not suffering but the whole morality that allows women to choose whether to have children or not. That is nothing to do with objections to individual suffering—that has far more to do with the way that the anti abortionists, the catholic church, the Tories, and the self styled defenders of the public morality see the world. Central to their view of the world is the need for family units which bind people together and keep the world the way it is.

## Traditional

Women want abortions for many different reasons, emotional, and financial. But every time a woman refuses to bear a child simply because she happens to be pregnant she is in effect saying 'I don't believe women have to accept bearing children if they don't want to. I don't want to be a mother. I am choosing to live a different way from the traditional idea of the natural wife and mother'.

## Grouping

Although for most of us the family is apparently such a 'natural' grouping that we never think about it, the family as we know it, performs many vital functions for the state in capitalist society. Firstly the family is the place where the workers of tomorrow are born and reared. Be-

cause women accept their role as child bearers and child minders this is done with no cost to the state at all. Imagine how much it would cost to feed clothe and teach children to speak and behave according to the rules of society if the family did not do all these things for nothing.

## Discipline

The family also acts as a discipline on its members. It forces people to work regularly because of their responsibilities, and supports non-wage earners at very little cost to the state. In addition to this the family acts in opposition to the communal experience at the workplace. Each family is in competition with the next for possessions, homes, holidays. Worker is pitched against worker in the scuffle for three piece suites and washing machines. This may be rotten for us—but for capitalism it's ideal. In every tower block there are a hundred television sets, a hundred washing machines, a hundred vacuum cleaners. There could be less and things shared. But that would mean less profits for those who make tellies and washing machines. As long as the family consumes these goods then profits go on and so does capitalism.

## Preserve

With all that going for it it is hardly surprising that people who agree with capitalism are anxious to preserve the family as it is. That does mean resisting attempts by women to lead lives other than their traditional role in the family. It does mean saying that abortions are immoral—they are against the morality that allows human relationships to be exploited by a profit hungry state. And we can't have people challenging that notion can we? They might get to thinking about socialism or something dreadful like that.  
 Anna Paczuska

# Classified

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR**  
 TUC Demonstration Sunday 25 May  
**RALLY IN HYDE PARK** at 12.30pm,  
 Speakers' Corner, Marble Arch.  
**MARCH TO TRAFALGAR SQUARE.**  
 All Women's Voice supporters and members of the International Socialists must support this demonstration. Raise it in your trade union branch, trades council and try to get your banner down. If you aren't at work, just come yourself and bring your friends. There will be a big Women's Voice banner there on the day.  
**LEICESTER NAC**  
 Public Meeting  
 June 7th, 2.30pm  
 AUEW Vaughan Way  
 Leicester  
**DARLINGTON INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS.** Abortion: A woman's right to choose. Public meeting, Saturday 10 May, 2.30pm, Public Library, Crown Street, Darlington. (Gallery entrance). Creche facilities available, 2 Blackwell Lane. Phone: 56728  
**WOMEN'S CONFERENCE ON IRELAND.**  
 Speakers from Ireland, video, workshops, creche/nursery. Saturday 10 May. 10am-5pm, North London Poly, Holloway Road, N7. Women only.

**SOCIALIST WORKER**  
 If you like this paper and would like to know more about the rest of the International Socialist organisation, you can get our sister paper, Socialist Worker, 7p weekly which gives news and analysis of working class struggles all over Britain and abroad.  
 In the June issue of Women's Voice there will be a major article on the situation in Portugal, with interviews from women workers in the forefront of the struggle. By Joanna Rollo. So don't miss it.  
**THE CRISIS**  
 Everyone is talking about it. And it particularly affects working class women, trying to bring up families with less money and higher prices.  
**WHY ARE WE FACING THE CRISIS NOW, WHAT IS HAPPENING AND WHY? WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT.**  
**READ WHAT INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE CRISIS IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF WOMEN'S VOICE!**

# STOP PRESS

**FIVE law lords decided by 3-2 on April 30th that women no longer have the right to decide whether they want sex or not. So if you were thinking of bringing a charge of rape against some man in the near future—forget it. Because the man now has the right to decide whether you really wanted it or not. Who said women aren't just 'Objects of men's pleasure?'**

I would like to know more about the International Socialists

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please post to:  
 Womens Voice  
 8 Cottons Gardens  
 London E2



THE CAMPAIGN to defeat the Abortion (Amendment) Bill needs a real push. It was set up to organise nationally against James White's amendment. A lot has happened already: in early April, a working conference was held in London for women involved in the campaign to work out the arguments and to get practice in putting them across. The following week a massive meeting was held in the House of Commons—a separate room had to be used for the overflow. More than 700 people were there, and yet there was not a word in any of the national press!

The next most important event is the national demonstration in London on Saturday 21, June. It is vitally important that Women's Voice readers mobilise as many people to support this demonstration as possible. If you go to work and get the chance, raise it in your union, discuss it with your fellow workers, and get them down on the demonstration. If you don't work, try and sell Women's Voice to people who live round about, discuss the matter with them and try and get them out as well.

Readers of the paper should try and set up local National Abortion Campaign groups in their own towns if one does not already exist. Call a meeting, invite everyone you know who might be interested, and then write to NAC Headquarters, 20 Railton Road, London, SE24 to get yourself on the national mailing list. Find out, how your local MP voted at the first and second readings of the Bill going through parliament, and if he/she wasn't there or voted for the amendment, organise a picket of their surgery or home. You could also try organising a local demonstration. Definitely hold a local public meeting. Use leaflets and posters to get the message across to other workers in your area.

Women trade unionists in particular should move fast. A lot of the MPs who voted for the bill are trade union sponsored. We must put pressure on them before the next reading. Try moving a resolution supporting free abortion on demand and condemning labour party MPs who support the amendment through your union branch. Send it to the local Trades Council and try to get them to organise a public meeting and campaign on the issue. Try writing articles and letters to the local paper and to your union journal.

Hold big Women's Voice meetings in your area. Send us all details and let us know how you are getting on. Information should also go to Socialist Worker.

For any help or speakers for meetings, contact Women's Voice.

Women's Right to Choose meeting in Central Hall Westminster during the White Amendment Bill in Parliament  
Photo: Angela Phillips (IFL)



#### WHAT THE AMENDMENT BILL WILL MEAN . . .

- 1 At the moment doctors can authorise an abortion if there is 'risk' to the health of the woman or of her existing children. The amendment would change 'risk' to 'grave risk', greatly restricting the grounds on which you can get an abortion.
- 2 The doctor would have to *prove* that he had kept within the law. Guilty until proven innocent.
- 3 The two doctors who have to agree to an abortion would have to come from different practices—slowing the whole process down and making it even harder.
- 4 Reduction of the time limit for abortions from 28 weeks to 20 weeks.
- 5 Preventing abortions for foreign women by putting a five months' residential clause.

# ABORTION CAMPAIGN

## Build it

## LITCHFIELD LIAR

JAMES WHITE MP, who has a bill currently going through parliament to make abortions more difficult to obtain, named as a major source of his information the book 'Babies For Burning'. The book was claimed to expose the serious abuses of the present Abortion Act, such abuses as:

Pregnancy testing agencies giving false positive results so that they could refer women for abortions.

Abortions being carried out in pregnancy and that the foetuses were viable—that legally it was murder.

Aborted foetuses being sold to be made into soap.

It now turns out, after an investigation by Sunday Times journalists, that the most sensational allegations in the book are far from the whole truth.

The author, Michael Litchfield's claim that his own urine was sent in the presence of reliable witnesses to seven pregnancy testing agencies and the results returned as positive (pregnant) by six of them, begins to look mysterious. It is true that the urine was sent and the results returned to 'Duffy' (Litchfield's assumed name) were positive. The mystery is that the witnesses saw the urine being sent on 16 February, and the pregnancy testing agencies received their samples from 'Duffy' on the 13th, three days earlier.

The second mystery concerns Dr Malcolm Ridley of Boston. In the book, Dr Ridley confessed to doing abortions very late in pregnancy and even keeping alive aborted babies for use in experiments. The problem is that the American Medical Association have no record of a Dr Malcolm Ridley. Nor have any of the other countries—Australia, Ireland, South Africa—where this widely-travelled doctor is supposed to have been.

Most sickening of all is the case of the doctor who was willing to sell aborted foetuses to be made into soap and who said that foetuses were left 'crying their heads off' because he 'didn't have time to kill them'. The doctor is not named in the book, but Litchfield did name him to several people. When visited the doctor said he had spoken to Litchfield but denied that any suggestion of babies for soap had been made. What makes it easier to believe the doctor rather than Litchfield is his claim in the book that the doctor had Nazi sympathies, when in fact his wife and son had died in Auschwitz and he himself had been held in concentration camps.

Since James White's evidence for the abuses of the Abortion Act are based on this book, and the claims in the book are either unsubstantiated or sheer lies, his Abortion Act amendment should be withdrawn immediately. And all those in the anti-abortion lobby who want to impose their morality on us, might stop for a bit since their morality seems not to exclude lying, and making a lot of money out of it.

Gerry Byrnes

DEMONSTRATE FOR ABORTION  
OUR RIGHT TO CHOOSE

Saturday 21 June, 2pm, Charing Cross Embankment, and a rally in Hyde Park at 4 o'clock. Organise coaches from your area now. Sponsored by: International Socialists, Communist Party, International Marxist Group, Labour Party Young Socialists, National Union of Students, Brent Trades Council.

Kath Ennis

## Why we support free abortion on demand

- 1 It's the woman's right to decide whether she wants to have a child or not.
- 2 We are against one law for the rich and another for the poor. Making legal abortions harder to get will simply drive working class women to backstreet abortionists. Rich women in their private nursing homes will not be affected. Keep it legal—keep it safe. For everyone.
- 3 We support all struggles for greater control over our own lives, whether at work or at home.
- 4 We are against allowing doctors, judges and church—the state—any more power over us.

# The role of the church

WHY are the SPUC demonstrations against abortion so large and well organised? One of the main reasons is the backing the churches give to SPUC—particularly the Catholic Church.

Many of us think of religion as a thing of the past, something which isn't really important in our society anymore. But go into any Catholic Church on a Sunday morning and you'll find it packed out.

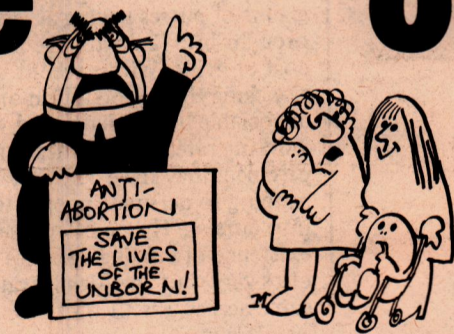
Every Catholic is bound to attend Mass under pain of mortal sin. Many Churches have ten or more masses on a Sunday with congregations at each running into hundreds.

Over the past few years the Church has run regular campaigns against abortion—making full use of the captive Sunday audiences.

Bishops send out letters to be read out at all masses. Priests reinforce the message with sermons from the pulpit. Signatures for petitions to MPs are collected from everyone on their way out of mass. Coaches are laid on for SPUC demonstrations.

The main argument the Catholic Church uses against abortion is that it is murder. But there is a good deal more to its position than this. We only have to remember that it is also anti-divorce, anti-contraception, and, in fact, fundamentally anti-worker.

Only men are allowed to become priests. And they have to take a vow of celibacy—celibacy being regarded as a higher state of life than marriage.



Only boys are allowed to serve mass and only men can lead the prayers and take collections.

All the way through history the Catholic Church has acted to keep women in their inferior position.

Popes in the 19th and early 20th centuries fought the growing movement for women's emancipation tooth and nail. In modern times they have opposed married women going out to work and condemned co-education as a 'levelling promiscuity and equality'. They were among the last to moderate their position on these questions.

Until recent years the Catholic Church used to argue that the primary purpose of marriage was procreation. Women's main function in life was 'to bear fruit and multiply'. If she didn't she was going against her basic nature.

Today preventing the birth of children through contraception or abortion is still held to be against the natural law.

In Catholic countries the Church

has fought to keep divorce, contraception and abortion illegal. It refuses to accept that people should have the right to choose for themselves, particularly if they are not even Catholics.

Yet everyone knows that no divorce simply means one standard for the woman and another for the man who can more easily turn to affairs and prostitution. It is no accident that prostitution flourishes in Catholic countries.

Occasionally, the hypocrisy of the double standard erupts into a major public scandal. As in France, for example, where this year a 57-year-old bishop was found dead in the hallway of a Paris brothel. And last year a Cardinal died of a heart attack in a night club dancer's flat.

Similarly, the ban on abortion doesn't mean that women don't have them. In Italy every year over a million Catholic women turn to the backstreet abortionists. Ten die every day. Thousands have their health permanently damaged. At the same time, the Vatican actually has

financial interests in an Italian pharmaceutical firm manufacturing the pill.

The Catholic hierarchy turns a blind eye to all the misery it dictates cause. And so long as women have the children, it has shown itself prepared to brutally oppose any measures which might make their lives easier.

In Ireland, in the 1950s, for example, the Catholic hierarchy blocked attempts by the government to introduce a mother and baby health care service, arguing that it smacked of communism.

All over the world the Church has supported fascist regimes and right wing parties. Regimes which have kept a small few in luxury and the masses in poverty—a poverty which is made worse by being forced to have large families.

Many Catholics oppose abortion because they genuinely see it as murder. But the Catholic hierarchy is not against killing people. It condones Catholics of different countries slaughtering one another in war time.

Behind the bishops' theological arguments about foetuses lies the instinctive feeling that any move towards greater independence for women threatens society as it exists.

They are right. And for us the fight for abortion is part and parcel of the fight to build a socialist society.



# Why we must vote

ON JUNE 5TH we're all being asked to vote in a referendum on the Common Market. At the moment half a million tons of beef are rotting in the European beef mountains—meat taken out of the shops to keep prices artificially high. When was the last time your family had a steak for tea?

Inside the Common Market the price of beef is £21-£24 per cwt. They sell it outside for £8-£10. In Britain at the moment the price is still only £16. Once the special arrangements we've had while joining run out, our beef will cost half as much again.

Food prices rose by 40 per cent during our first two years in the Common Market—largely because of the EEC's price policies. Has your house keeping gone up by 40 per cent over the last two years?

Harold Wilson, Margaret Thatcher and the rest are telling us to vote YES. The multi-nationals are spending £5 million to persuade us to vote YES.

**WHY?**

In plain language the EEC stands for European Employers' Confederation. Like all employers' federations its aim is to defend profit from the workers who produce them.

What the crisis really means is that profits are being squeezed. The bosses are forced to take more from the working class to keep the system running. They will hold wages back wherever they can. They will put up taxes, slash education, Health and social services, and pour that money into private industry. £1000 million was handed over to the oil giants by the Labour government last March, when they changed the provisions of the Petroleum Revenue Tax. This is enough money to secure the job of every car worker in the country and leave enough over to nationalise Imperial Type-writers.

# NO to the Common Market

If the votes goes YES it will be a victory for all those who are trying to make us pay. It will be a defeat for all those fighting to defend our living standards. THAT IS WHY WE MUST VOTE NO. It's not enough to grumble any more about prices and longer queues at the hospital. GET OUT AND VOTE NO. And get everyone else you know to vote

NO too. Organise your friends at work and on the estates. JUNE 5TH. VOTE NO.

If you'd like to hold a meeting round the Common Market and discuss the issues with your friends and would like a speaker, get in touch with us at Women's Voice, 8 Cottons Gardens, London E2 8DN.

# NURSING ON THE LUMP

By nurse from N Ireland

These Easter holidays I spent my college vacation working for the National Health Service as an Agency Nurse. Having been away from nursing for some seven years it was an eye-opening experience. The agency I went to was more than anxious to find me a job and was not at all deterred by my professed lack of recent experience—but as they were taking 14 per cent of my wages, plus another percentage from the hospital it was not really surprising. Not only did they not seem bothered about experiences, but I had to force them to look at my certificates. I think they would have been quite prepared to take my word for any qualification I claimed.

I arrived at one hospital to be confronted by a dour nursing officer who didn't even bother to ask my name, but handed me a totally inapplicable form to complete along with the keys to the drug cupboard and sent me off with instructions to take charge of the surgical ward. I saw neither her, nor anyone else in authority for three days. This example, and the fact that in spite of my confessed inexperience I was landed on another occasion in a children's ward, were just a few of the many aspects of nursing today which have caused many people to start screaming about the decline of the National Health Service.

No one can write an article on agency nursing, without mentioning the only reason for their existence—MONEY. There is always going to be a chronic shortage of nurses when, after three or four years training, and numerous years of experience, a staff nurse still takes-home a mere £135 per month. Some of the nurses I worked with were earning as little as this. All this after government claims of nurses having at last been brought into line with the increased cost of living. With a recent wage rise came the introduction of the unsociable hours clause and weekend working rates. But as these are a pittance, they have certainly done nothing to persuade people to come into nursing. Hence of course the existence of nursing agencies where rates vary, but the highest rate I came across was £1.65 an hour for a staff nurse, which amounts to £66 for a five day week exactly double the salary after tax of the NHS nurses mentioned above.

In fact many nurses already working for the National Health Service work for nursing agencies during their days off—so much for government claims that they pay them a living wage. Another reason for the existence of agencies is that up until this April they asked for no insurance cards, and the nurse is loosely classed as self-employed. So, as in lump labour in the building industry, most agency staff belong to no trade union. Consequently there is always a source of labour to break union activity.

While the weekly rates of pay for agency staff are higher than for those working for the NHS direct the long term benefits obviously are not so great. There are no paid holidays, maternity leave, or sickness benefits. So the agencies provide a constantly changing workforce. As many hospitals, especially those without their own training school, rely on agency staff to keep going, there is rarely any continuity of nursing care for the sick. In one hospital I worked in the wards were staffed solely by agency nurses on many occasions. The dependency on agency staff is much more apparent at night.

This situation has a very obvious solution: to increase the pay of nurses, and put the agencies out of business. This can only be done by rank and file trade union activity. The nurses must force the trade unions to push their demands for a living wage and refuse to work with non-unionised labour. It is only by seeing themselves as active trade unionists, rather than as the ill-used, 'angels-of-mercy' that it suits the media and the establishment generally to portray, that they will begin to succeed in their fight. As a trade union body the nurses must demand the active support of other unions in their struggle. Without that support it is all too easy for the media to portray nurses as evil money-grabbers holding the ill and dying up to ransom.

It is only by fighting for, and winning these demands that the present crisis in the health service can be overcome. For, as everybody knows, we only get what we pay for, and a health service, relying on an underpaid and overstretched nursing force cannot be surprised at allegations of cruelty and neglect. In fact the only surprise is that it does not happen more frequently. We must fight for a better health service for its decline is yet another attack on the living standards of the working class.

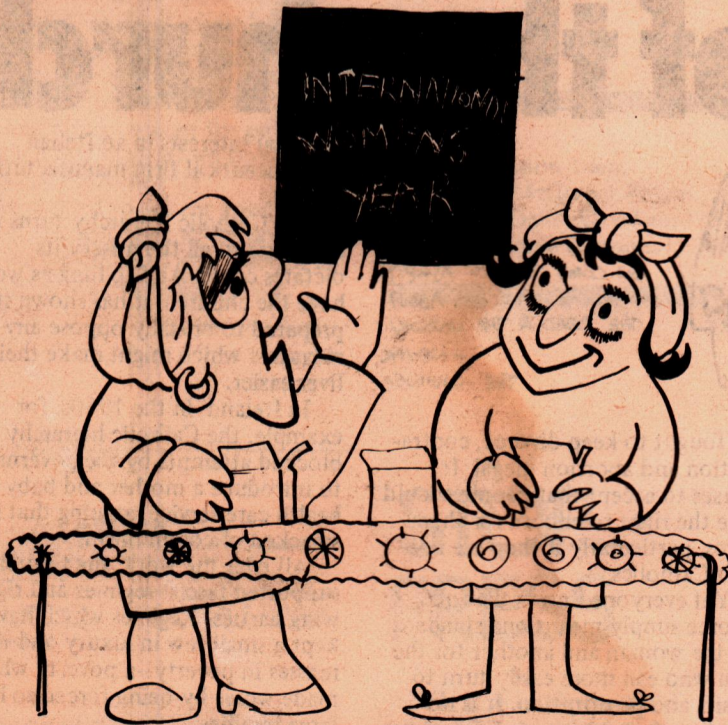
# WE'VE NEVER LOST YET

THE 400 women at Levi Strauss of Whitburn are now in their 5th week of strike action to win the reinstatement of a victimised shop steward, Flora Flynn. Flora had previously been the Factory Convenor during a period since the factory opened six years ago when earnings rose to be among the highest in the area.

A dispute over shoddy work culminated over a month ago in a management threat to sack six girls. On Monday 7 April there was a sit-in in the factory for one day by the women, members of the National Union of Tailor and Garment Workers. The sit-in demonstrated the support of the whole factory for the six girls. The next day however, when the women reported for work as usual, the management was still unmoveable. They produced a ballot box and insisted that the workers should take a vote—on management worded ballot papers and under management supervision.

When a supervisor, a management plant, insisted on voting, Flora Flynn removed the ballot box. A scuffle developed, Flora was asked to go upstairs where, lo and behold, her books and wages were already made up, plus a form for her to sign—agreeing to go. The whole workforce struck at this clear case of victimisation and are still out almost five weeks later.

Always changing the decorations instead of the conditions!



During the whole time only about three or four women have crossed the picket lines—and those were in management cars driven at dangerously high speeds. During this time also the flying picket has been used to some effect. Nothing has been going in at the Whitburn factory and two busloads of pickets to Glasgow and a busload to Dundee turned away several lorries.

This strike is beginning to hurt the management. It is an example of their backwardness that they have even offered a donation to the strike

fund if the pickets were removed.

Flora Flynn said, 'This is a frame-up from start to finish, but we are determined to win. We have not lost any dispute here in the past and we won't lose this one.'

Motions of support and cash are however urgently needed since this strike is unofficial and no support has been received from the union although support from local trade unionists has been quite good. Send to: Mary Porter, 132 Fallas Place, Fauldhouse, West Lothian.

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