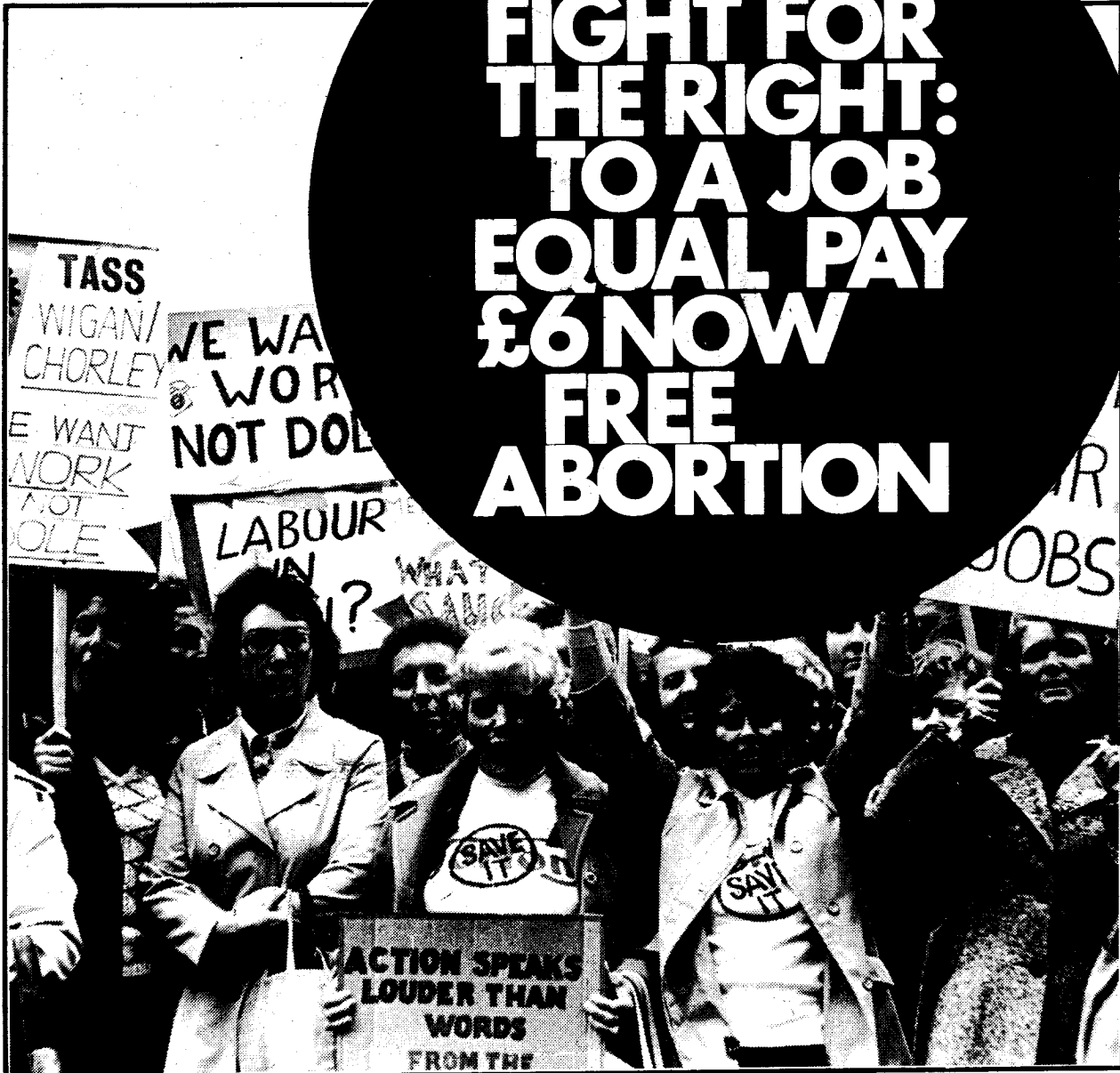


**FIGHT FOR  
THE RIGHT:  
TO A JOB  
EQUAL PAY  
£6 NOW  
FREE  
ABORTION**



# WOMENS VOICE RALLY

IT'S QUITE clear from what the Labour government is doing that they want to make us pay.

The cuts mean not only fewer nurseries and schools but also fewer jobs. The £6 freeze means less money and redundancies.

It's also clear from today that women have the confidence and willingness to fight. But we're vulnerable. Because of family responsibilities, we often work in small isolated workplaces. We don't know the way the trade union movement works, we often don't have the same expectations as men because we don't feel at home in the trade union movement.



Because women are so vulnerable, we have to learn the lessons of the working class movement and pass them on.

The small workplaces like Yarnolds and Progressive Metals, out on strike

earlier this year, were isolated and lost. They deserve to win just as much as the dockers and miners. We have to make sure such struggles are raised in the centre of the movement.

We have to learn the lesson of Imperial Typewriters and Ladbroke's, where trade union officials sold out. Trade union officials do sell out. It's no good when women come out on strike just to say 'You're great'. We can't afford to be namby pamby with women, we can't afford to repeat the same mistakes. That is why rank and file organisation is so important for women, if we're going to make the trade unions fight for us.

At the moment it looks as if the Labour government is having an easy time of it. Even on issues like abortion, they're so bloody soft they're giving way.

We have to be the people who raise it, make sure we don't let Barbara Castle get away with it. She rats on the issue of abortion just like she rats on every other issue facing the working class movement.

By  
Sheila McGregor

But there's another issue we've got to take up. Unemployment rose by 48 per cent amongst men in the last six months and 112 per cent amongst women. It's absolutely disgusting. What the ruling class is saying when they make us redundant, is that we have no right to a life, no right to our independence.

We've got to lead the fight for a woman's right to a job.

We've missed a lot of things already. Ladbroke's, who recently sacked 260 workers, organise the betting on the Miss World competition. We should have broken it up, we should have said they couldn't make money out of Miss World whilst workers in Glasgow go without jobs. Over the post office

women in Birmingham who are being made redundant to save men's jobs. We should have picketed every post office in Britain.

Tom Jackson too, head of the post office union. He's always eating mussels and shrimps, talking about equality. Next time we should stuff them down his throat.

We've got to be the people who take up the issues every time they occur. Take Chrysler. Housewives, isolated within the four walls of the home are bombarded with propaganda about how it's their husbands' fault Chrysler is being closed. We should organise a group of wives to go down with their children to the personnel manager's office. We should go in there and say: 'They're your responsibility. We can't buy them Christmas dinner because you sacked our husbands. You took the decision not us.'

Now you can look after the kids. If you don't like it, hand over to us and we'll take control'.

Above all women need to be clear about the need for the socialist

revolution. We need to make sure that women are in the lead. If having children is ever going to be a joy not a burden, we need control. We need the nurseries and schools, not Concordes and bombs.

If we're going to get as far as the revolution, we've got to start fighting now where the Labour government is weakest. Over jobs. We've got to organise where the power is—in the workplace.

Housewives, unemployed workers, should find out where redundancies are being announced and argue with the women at work to fight for the jobs. We should tell them: 'That's my job you're selling.'

You've got to fight for it. You've got the power.'

We've got to build a fighting leadership in the working class. We don't just want to be a voice in the movement, we have to have a presence in it. If we are central to the movement now, we can be central to the socialist revolution.

## WE'RE WOMEN BUT WE'VE GOT POLITICS TOO

'ISN'T IT FANTASTIC!' It's hard to describe the feelings of enthusiasm, of new confidence, of solidarity, that pervaded Saturday's Womens Voice Rally. 600 people, almost all women packed Belle Vue. In an atmosphere where women who'd never spoken before, could and did, the problems we face were dealt with clearly and sharply and often with great imagination.

There was no mistaking the anger at the attacks on womens rights, the right to abortion, to nurseries, to a job—to control our own lives.

There was no mistaking the militancy, the readiness to fight back despite the betrayals of the Labour Government and countless trade union officials.

We need to organise—we can't rely on anyone else. This point came out again in different ways.

'When you organise women, you don't organise them in the traditional way. Women are not prepared to go through the whole procedure—we have different traditions. You've got to demonstrate your power on the shop floor. And struggles over small issues build confidence for the big issues like equal pay.

We're women, not only that but we've got politics too, and we've got to inject this into the trade union movement.'



THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT has broken all its promises to women—and it is up to us to fight back, said MARGARET RENN of Socialist Worker, introducing the first session of the conference.

The worst disaster area was jobs. Unemployment, up 48 per cent for men in the last year, had risen 121 per cent for women. But there was no fight from trade union leaders.

There was no fight from Labour—and no fight from union leaders. But there was fight from working women, as strike after strike from Yarnolds to Ladbrokes showed. 'These struggles are our strength' she said. 'And every one of us has something more to contribute to it.' Women on their own wouldn't change society; nor would men on their own. 'The only way we can win is to fight shoulder to shoulder with working men, but we need strength and confidence to do it'.

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Margaret said that we all owed a debt to the Women's Liberation Movement who had given women a feeling of confidence in their own identity. But 'identity is not enough unless you know which way you're going.

'we know what we want. We want a decent house, job, school—we want to be able to control our own lives.

'But if we want that control we're going to have to take it from the people who run our lives for profit.'

The struggle to put a stop to more restrictive laws on abortion featured prominently in the morning session. ELAINE ROSE from Pontefract told how she had been refused an abortion six years ago. 'They told me that if I spent three weeks in a mental institute I could get one on mental grounds.'

MAUREEN JOINER, a post office worker, described her ex-

perience before and after the 1967 Abortion Act.

A self-imposed abortion before the Act had led to 'massive haemorrhaging'; a Health Service abortion after the Act had been safe.

'People who don't agree with abortion reform', she said, 'should look at it from the simple, human point of view.

'Look at who's made the decision, and make up your mind whether you want her to go back to the back streets, or have a safe operation'.

JEAN LEWIS, a doctor from Pontefract, and GERRY NORRIS, a type-setter from North London, said that the agitation around the National Abortion campaign had given whole numbers of women confidence to take part in political activity.

LINDA GORDON works in British Home Stores in Hull. Their women's group approached the dockers' union for support in the abortion campaign. Their women's group got a sympathetic response from the dockers' union in the abortion campaign. They got the dockers' banner on the abortion march. Next time they'll press to get a large contingent of dockers too.

JILL BROWNBILL from South East London gave a number of examples of direct action.

'When a local church put up a notice saying; Abortion is Murder, Think Twice, Think Christian', we picketed the Sunday services for three weeks, lobbied the bishop and had it taken down.

'When Mother Magazine published a lot of lies on abortion, we picketed the magazine, and forced them to publish a retraction and a statement of our case'.

### NURSERY EDUCATION

SHIRLEY NICHOLSON, a housewife, had found it easy to get signatures from working class women on abortion—but difficult to get anything more.

'The issue of nursery education might be able to involve women where abortion doesn't,' she said.

IRENE BRUEGEL, an ASTMS member from North London lambasted the government's hypocrisy in bringing in the Sex Discrimination Act, and, in the same breath, announcing massive cuts in nursery

education.'

*In Camden, it cost £2 a day to leave a child in a nursery.*

In Islington, there was a strong fight back against these cuts. The NALGO action group had managed by strike action to stop them.

JANET BROWN said she was 'terrified' of speaking—and then went on to give a brilliant account of the difficulties of organising playgroup workers in Manchester. 'When we got together and compared notes' she said, 'We realised how dirt cheap we were.' The playgroup workers had formed a branch of NUPE, but had been systematically sold out by the union officials whenever they tried to do anything. They'd been forced to depend more and more on their own rank and file organisation.

### HEALTH CUTS

SHEILA PARKIN, an auxiliary nurse from Leeds, said 40 nurses in her hospital who had just qualified were not being kept on. In Liverpool, qualified nurses were being asked to stay on—as student nurses.

'If this goes on another 12 months', she said, 'there won't be a health service'.

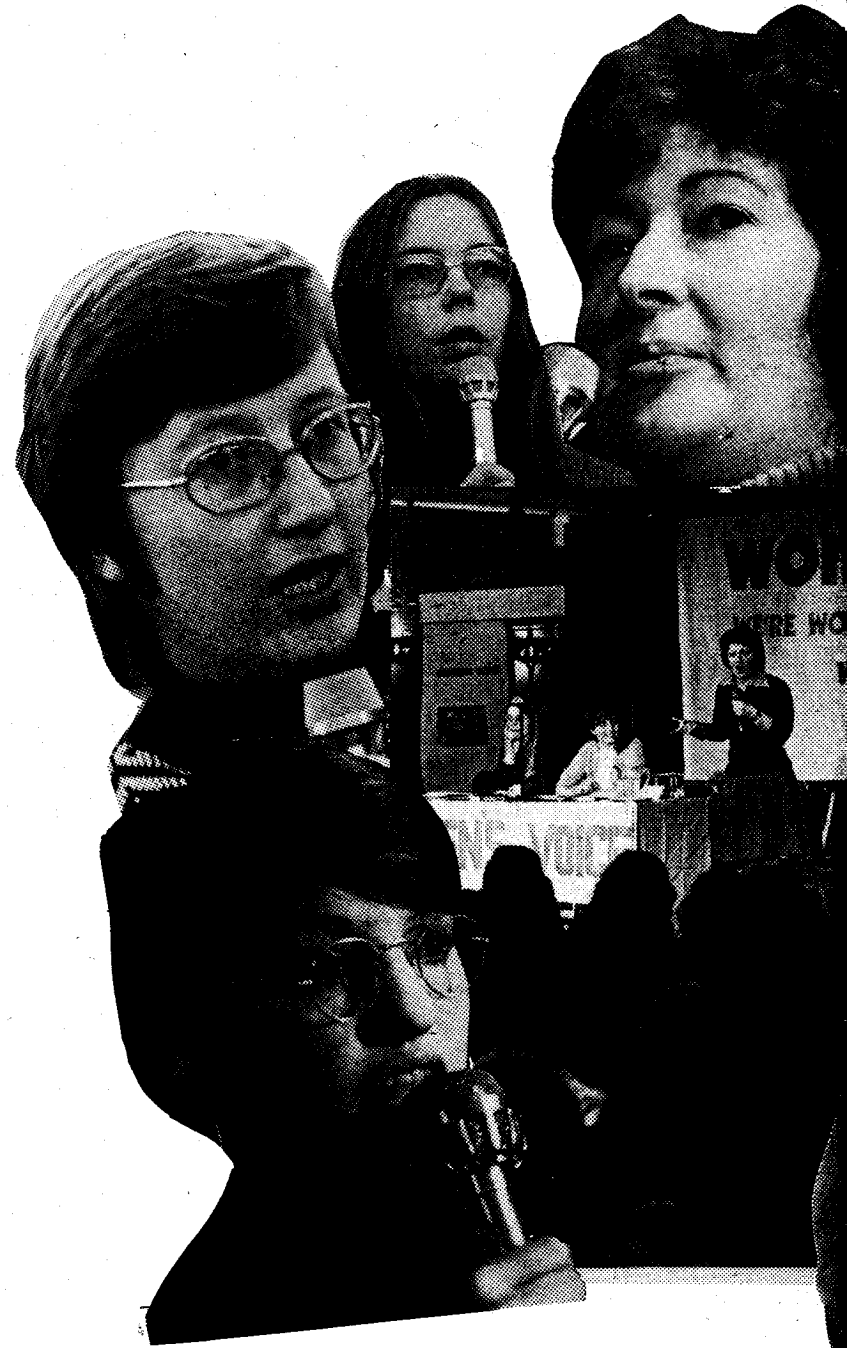
The most important thing was unity. Management was always trying to split auxiliary nurses from staff nurses, porters from domestics and so on. 'It's our health service, and we've got to fight for it.'

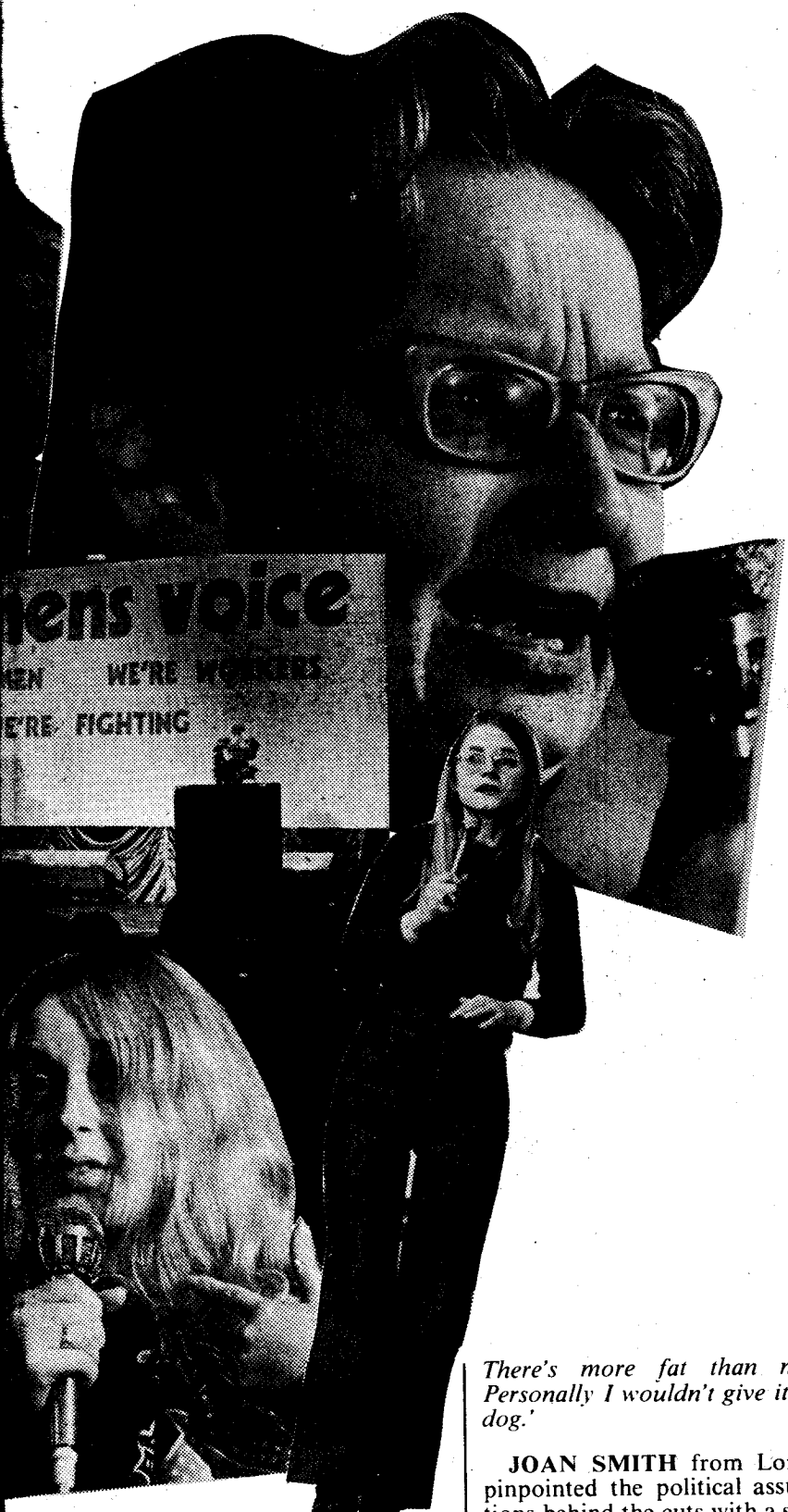
IRENE HEHER from Liverpool emphasised the point. She had spent some time as a patient in Walton hospital. The problem was not overcrowding. Half the wards were empty—but the nurses were working ten-hour days.

The junior hospital doctors often only got two and a half hours' sleep out of 24. These doctors were health workers just like any others—and should be supported.

### EDUCATION CUTS

'Women's struggles are not marginal. They are absolutely central, because they are about the two biggest issues facing us—unemployment and the cuts in public sector spending,' JENNIFER ROSS, a glasgow teacher, told the rally.





## WOMEN MUST BE ACTIVE INSIDE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

CAROL DOURAS, convenor in a Liverpool printing firm, introduced the session on jobs and redundancies. A lot of women hold trade union cards, but that means very little. It's important for women to become active inside the trade union movement. We have to convince them that they are discriminated against, that they can fight back.

We have to overcome the arguments—'Well, it's a man's world. The men are the ones that know how to speak at a branch meeting, they know all the unions ins and outs.'

When you organise women, you don't organise in the traditional way. Women are not prepared to go through all the machinery. You've got to demonstrate your power on the shop floor.

At my plant they set up a telephone booth next to the supervisor's office. It was an attempt to encroach on our privacy. We could see that, and we fought it. From a small issue like that you get confidence built up. You can go on to bigger issues.

Trade union officials—even left wing ones—are accepting the idea of redundancy for part-time workers. It's a let out for them.

It's not until a woman gets up and says, 'Look! I'm a part-time worker. I'm a part-time worker because I have to be, with kids. My family can't survive on one man's wage. If you throw me out, it means my family suffers.'

We fought the idea of voluntary redundancy at my factory. We said, 'If you accept that redundancy, it may not hurt you. But you're selling those jobs out of the labour movement forever. Your kids coming out of school next year won't get a job. Because you've sold it.'

We convinced everyone on it, because we were sensitive to them. We put it in a way that they could see. You must organise from the shop floor.

Don't make the mistake of

being dragged along by trade union movement. Don't snuggle up to the people in the union you think will help you. Even the left-wing. The moment you make them give up their moderate positions, they shit all over you. I'm sorry to be so crude, but that's just what they do. They've had it so cushy, they won't fight.

Another place where it's important to fight is on the trades councils.

At the beginning of the year, I asked Simon Fraser on the Liverpool Trades Council to arrange something because it's International Women's year.

Nothing happened, so I reminded him. He said he had it all in hand, not to worry.

A few months later he says he's applied to the GPO for a special stamp!

But that's not all, the answer he got from the GPO was, 'You've got the Queen's head on the stamp, what more do you want?'

We've got to say, 'Listen pal, I don't want no stamp'. And tell them what we do want.

We have to put over the feminist policies. We're not hysterical women. We have to fight women's oppression. Don't sit there and think, 'Will I or won't I bring up the question of abortion?' We have to do it.

PENNY PARKES, a local government worker from Manchester, emphasised the point. When she put a motion about abortion to her union branch, it wasn't even discussed. The union executive decided it 'wasn't a trade union issue'.

This issue is now being taken up by the local NALGO Action Group, the rank and file organisation of local government workers.

MAGGIE DUNN is a school student in North London. She took part in the occupation of a jobs centre. 'We showed that we are prepared to fight for jobs. I'm going to try to get all my friends to join the Right to Work Campaign. When I leave school next year, I want a job!'

PAULINE LUMB from Sheffield spoke about her job on the market. 'My boss is so nice. He lets me work between 10 and 3, while

the kids are at school. But I have to stand there and listen to him going on about his snotty-nosed daughter and her new clothes and his £20,000 house.'

'It's my feet that get cold, not his. It's my lungs that are sore, not his. And when I get home, it's my back that hurts, not his.'

SOONU ENGINEER spoke of the particular problems faced by black women. Just as you can't talk about the emancipation of the working class if you forget 50 per cent of them are women, so also you can't talk about the emancipation of women if you forget there's a black sister working down the line from you.

ANGELA McHUGH from Glasgow talked about being in the Engineering Union, 'supposedly the most democratic union there is'.

Her shop steward spent all afternoon at a meeting. When she asked what had happened, he said it didn't concern her. She continued, 'The next day you find out it does concern you, you're out the door!'

'One of the troubles with the Broad Left is that they never involved people. We never knew what was going on. You have to explain the issue to the women, so they know what they're fighting about. When we were in dispute, I had a meeting every day. And those women walked out every day smiling.'

'The AUEW is supposed to be against the £6 limit. But they're trying to shove it down our throats. Well, we'll take the £6 now. But we'll be back in March for £10!'

'We have to get involved in the Engineers Charter. Women have to fight for themselves.'

JUDITH CONDON, who chaired the entire rally, ended it on a note that summed up the feeling by the end of the day—'Let's go on and make 1976 a fighting year!'

*There's more fat than meat. Personally I wouldn't give it to a dog.'*

JOAN SMITH from London pinpointed the political assumptions behind the cuts with a sharp attack on the concept of 'community care'.

Cuts in housing and hospitals for the elderly, she said, meant an added burden on 'the welfare state that is the family.' Women in the home had to look after the children and old people turned out of nurseries and hospitals because of the cuts. 'The twilight shift spreads throughout women's lives'.

It cost local councils some £80 a week to keep a child in care—while families kept children on £20 a week. The family therefore became a great welfare state in itself, and women's right to choose was cut down all along the line. 'We are going back to the days when an old person who gets desperately ill is put in an ambulance and taken to the nearest daughter, niece, or other woman relative they can find.'

JENNY BROOK, an unemployed teacher from Bradford, told how she had filled in 'countless applications, gone to countless interviews.'

'And even though I know the real reason I can't get a job is because of the education cuts, demoralisation sets in. You get to feel it is your fault, you're not much good.'

JILL HALL told how school cooks in Nottingham had got equal pay. Their money went from 72p an hour up to a magnificent 75p an hour!

'Equal pay! Equal to what? There aren't any men school cooks. So they put us in the same category as the old men who get jobs as school caretakers.'

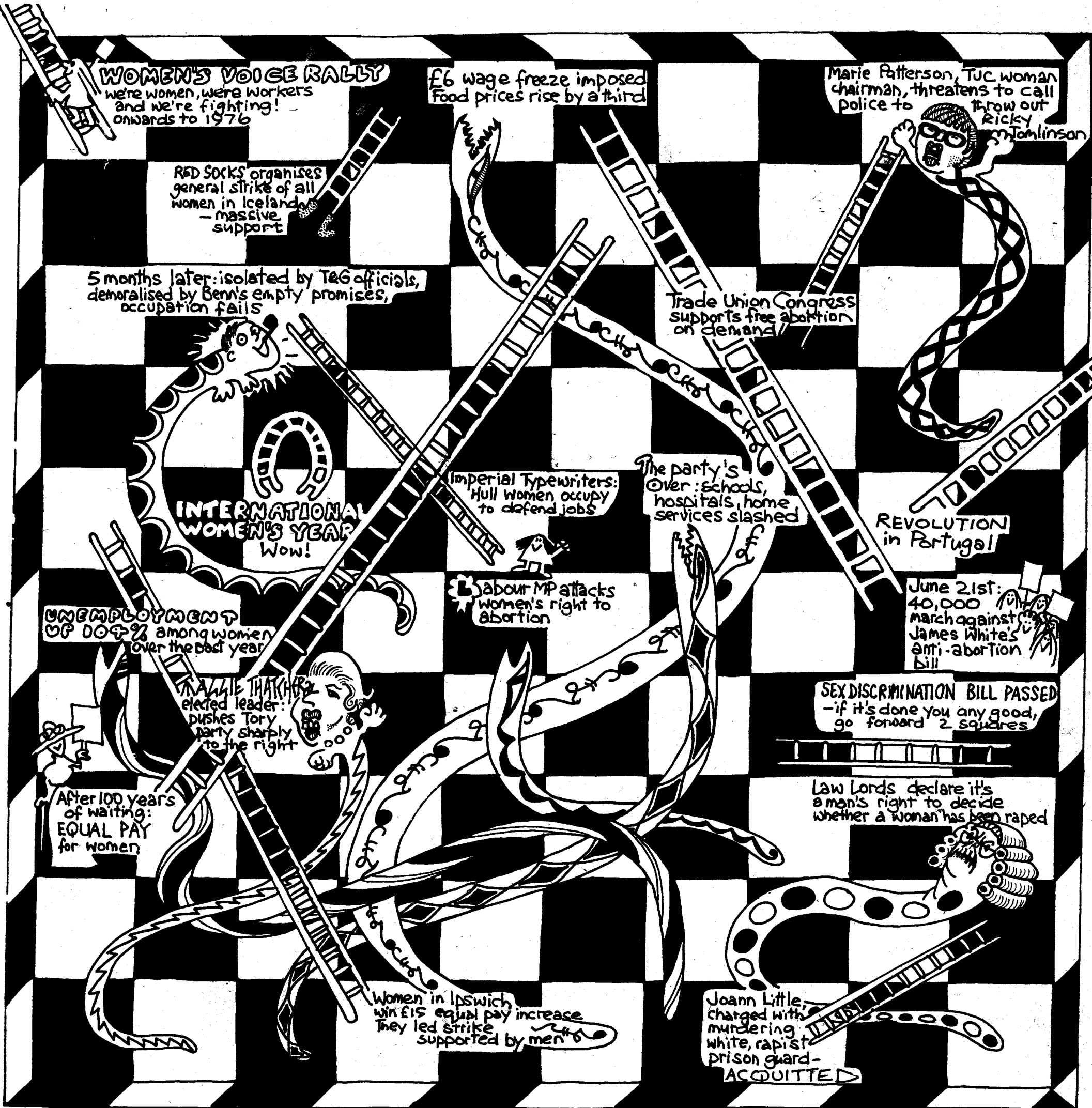
'We got the £6 a week rise, which pushed up county council expenditure. The adviser says there will be no cuts in staffing. What he means is there will be cuts.'

'They try to blackmail us by saying if we demand more money they will have to make cuts in the quality of school dinners.'

*'You should see them now!'*







# INTERNATIONAL WOMENS YEAR SNAKES AND LADDERS