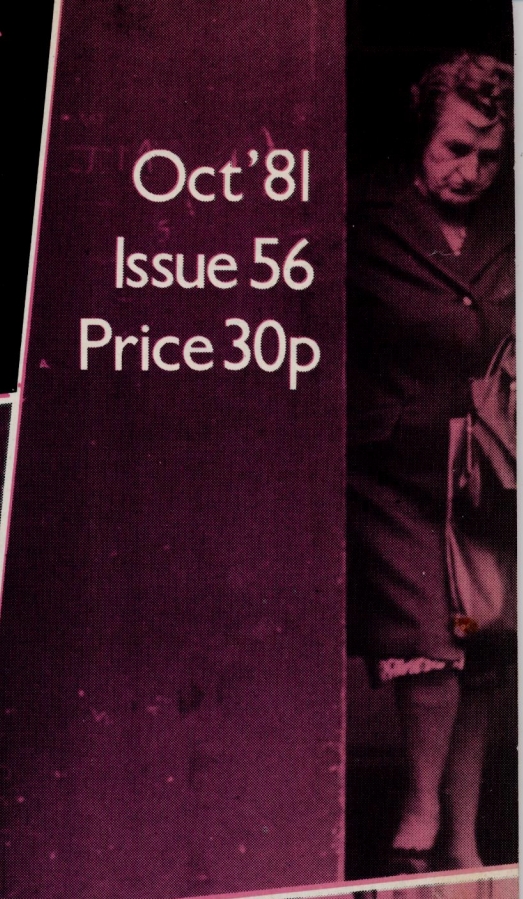


womens Voice

Womens magazine of the Socialist Workers Party

Oct '81
Issue 56
Price 30p



INSIDE: How we fight for the right to work
plus: women and running, the bomb, visiting workplaces
and lots more

ALL ABOUT WOMEN

In the last 10 years the number of women going out to work has increased by 13%—the number of men in employment has decreased by 5%. This has been matched by a big increase in women's trade union membership (much of it in white collar unions);



1970 — 8.4 million women at work, 2.7 in trade unions
 1979 — 9.5 million women at work, 3.8 million in trade unions
 An increase of 41.7% since 1970. Men's membership increased by 6.1%.



As more women go out to work so women are hit harder by unemployment. 1976: Women are 22% of the unemployed
 1981: Women are 29% of the unemployed.

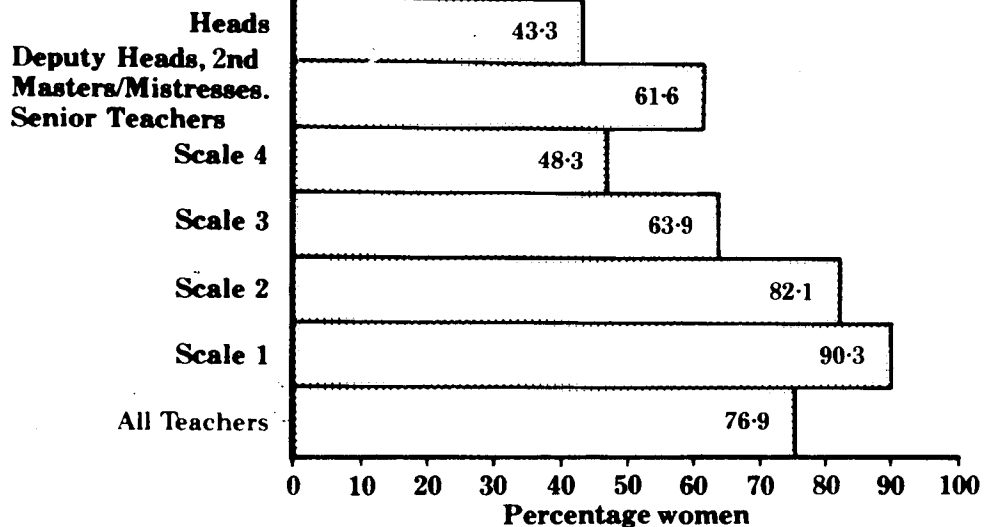


Women's hourly earnings for 1980 were 73.5% of men's—that's 0.1% up in the previous year. However, if this figure included overtime women's earnings would be 64.8% of men's.

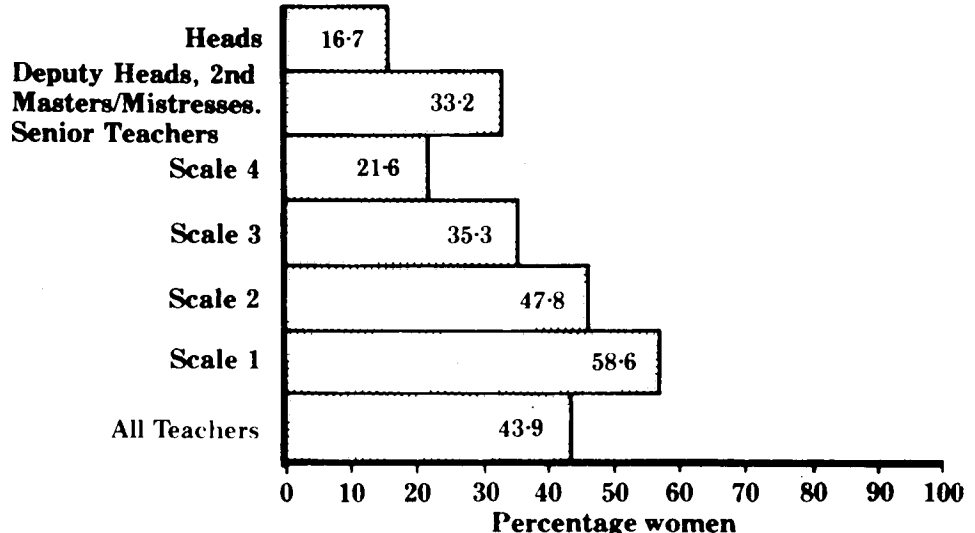
	1970	1976	1980
All men and women			
Public sector			
Men	29.7	76.7	128.7
Women	19.6	55.3	89.2
Differential	10.1	21.4	39.5
Women's earnings as a % of men's	65.9	72.1	69.3
Private sector			
Men	29.7	69.4	122.2
Women	14.3	39.4	70.7
Differential	15.4	30.0	51.5
Women's earnings as % of men's	48.1	56.8	57.8

Women as a percentage of full-time teachers by salary scale, England and Wales 31 March 1978.

PRIMARY



SECONDARY



It is not true that women earn low pay only because they are concentrated in low paid, women only, badly organised jobs. Women teachers have received equal pay since 1963, but most women teachers find themselves in low grade posts.

OUR POINT OF VIEW

4% keeps us poor

THE government has announced that it wants public sector wage increases in the next year held to four per cent. They claim this is the amount the 'country' can afford. It is always the public sector workers who are expected to bear the brunt of wage restraint. In 1971 the post office workers were forced to accept a low settlement. In the 'winter of discontent' in 1979, council manual workers and hospital workers had to take on the then Labour government over pay limits.

Public sector workers tend to be very low paid and many of the most low paid are women. Council cleaners, school meals workers, hospital ancillary workers take home a pittance. Four per cent of a pittance is hardly worth bothering about—and if you work part time, which many of those women do, such an increase would be negligible. Yet council rents and rates in most areas have doubled in the last two years. Food prices are rising by about 15 per cent. Four per cent to deal with them is a drop in the ocean.

But isn't it true, some people ask, that the country can't afford big wage rises, especially for the public sector, who aren't 'productive'? Firstly, the public sector has as much right to decent wages as private sector workers. Workers who run the hospitals, or look after kids in school are caring for existing and future workers—every bit as essential to the

system as producing machines. Every worker has the right to a living wage. And the country can afford it. Cuts in public spending are very selective. Wages of workers are held down, but cabinet ministers get £27,000 a year. Four per cent of that wouldn't be too bad. No new hospitals or schools are built, but councils are paying millions in interest to money lenders in the City of London—where new banks and office blocks are springing up every month. The money *is* there—but the government and industrialists who run the country make choices about how it is spent, and they want much less spent on wages.

Public sector workers are in many different industries—not just hospitals and schools, but in mines, railways and steelworks. If they all fight together they can impose a defeat on the government and refuse to accept cuts in their living standards. It has happened before, although all too often their union leaders would rather compromise than see all out militant action which might be out of their control—as with the civil servants dispute this year, and the selective action in 1979.

Today the union leaders are making noises, but also complaining that the government is forcing a confrontation with the unions to defend their members interests. If they won't do it, then it will be up to the rank and file to take action, and pull the union leaders behind them.

womens
Voice

Womens magazine of the
Socialist Workers Party

CONTENTS

FEATURES

Fighting for the Right to
Work pages 14 & 15
Women and the bomb page
11
Should NALGO affiliate to
the Labour Party? pages 12
& 13
Womens Voice groups — a
debate page 16
Women's history page 17
Women and sport page 18

NEWS pages 4 to 10

REGULARS

Health — dieting page 19
Reviews pages 20 & 21
Letters and Dirty Linen
pages 22 & 23
Sandra and Open Door page
24
Why I became a socialist
page 25
Do-it-yourself — visiting
workplaces page 27

From this month *Women's
Voice* will cost 30 pence.
This is because the cost of
producing it—typesetting
and printing—has
increased, and we've kept
the price of the magazine as
low as possible as long as
possible.

Last month we omitted to
credit Charlie Fellowes for
the cover picture. Sorry.

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SPARKING THE FIGHT

ANOTHER FACTORY is under occupation in Manchester. 250 workers at Barnes Flexible Packaging are sitting in to save their jobs. The unions NGA, SOGAT, AUEW and EEPTU have made it official.

The 50 women who work there have thrown themselves wholeheartedly behind the strike. Pauline Beddows said, 'It began as a fight for better redundancy pay but now we're convinced we have to fight for our jobs. I'm not working for "pin money"—I'm working to make a living. I need to work, it's not for holidays or extra.'

Dot Bradshaw, mother of one of the chapels (union rep) has been helping to organise delegations to other workplaces. She was just off to the Laurence Scott factory, also fighting redundancies.

'We're going to see how they organise things—they must be able to teach us a few tricks. I've got eight of my relatives working here and we're fighting to win.'

Pauline and Doris Beaumont stayed behind, making badges to sell. Doris said that her 17 year old daughter was the only person working in her house. 'Luckily she's got a decent job, not like some of these poor kids who've been conned onto the Government schemes as cheap labour', and Pauline added, 'These Government schemes are there to smash the unions. The unions shouldn't allow them'.

Pauline has always had a job. 'I've got a boy of 10 and a girl of seven. My husband didn't want me



John Smith

to go to work but I feel women should be able to. When you're working you can pay your way—you're independent. I don't want hand-outs. I feel that if we can win our fight it will give other people hope.'

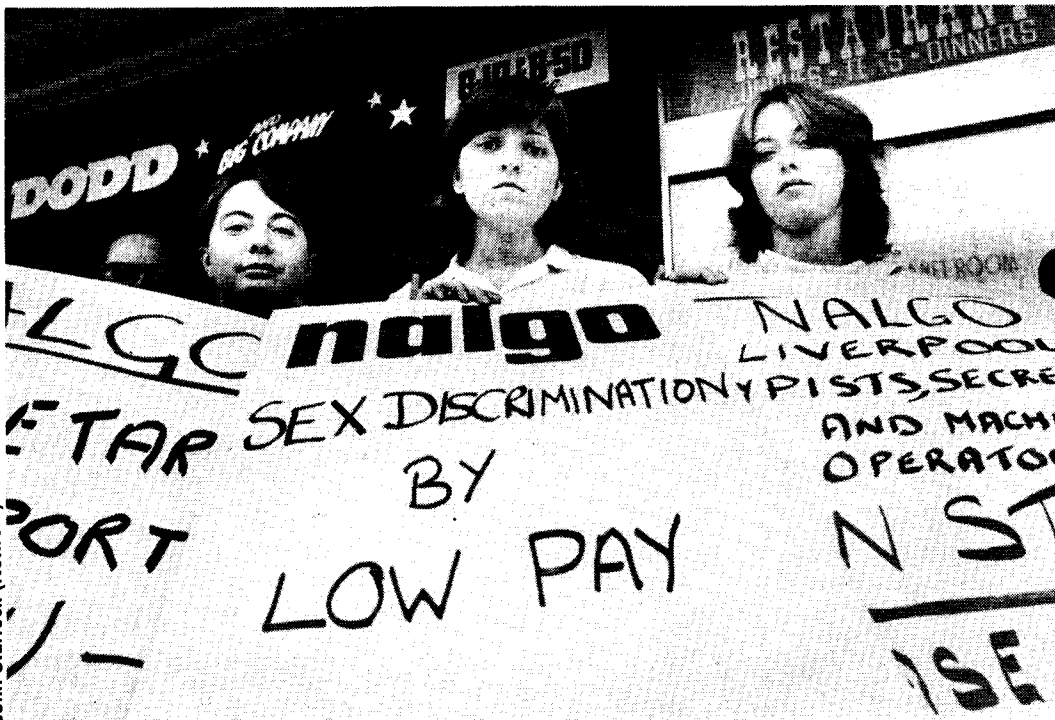
Spirits are high at Barnes Flexible. The workers see the need to keep it this way by involving everyone in the work that needs doing. When Pauline and Doris were making the badges they wouldn't even stop for a tea break, because they were working for the

occupation. As Pauline said:

'We'll go right down if we don't keep busy on delegations, making badges and other things. We have no alternative but to put up a fight. What's there to lose? Other people may not be fighting but they're looking at us. That's why it's so important to win.'

Mary Beaken

Messages of support and donations should be sent to Barnes Flexible Packaging Joint Union Rights Committee, c/o Len Hughes, 163 Argyll Street, Heywood, Lancs.



Typists: We will not go back with nothing

THE FIGHT against low pay by more than 300 typists, secretaries and machine operators at Liverpool City Council is sharpening up on both sides.

The Typists have been on all-out strike since the beginning of July over a re-grading claim, but City Council leader Sir Trevor Jones has refused even to negotiate after making one laughable offer. The average take-home wage of the women is just £48 a week.

ACAS, the arbitration service, was called in by national negotiators from both NALGO and the employers side, but Jones has refused to co-operate.

Now the council employers are going on the offensive. On 16 August, a council employee in the Council's legal department was suspended for refusing to scab on the typists. He was asked to handle material which was typed by an outside agency and to write letters by hand. He rightly refused to undermine the typists' action. Within an hour of his suspension 1500 NALGO members, not including the 300 typists already on strike, came out on strike for half a day, furious at the Council's action.

A few days before this, every

striker received a letter from the chairman of the council's personnel committee, Ernie Stevenson. He said that he *knew* that some typists would like to return to work, but are frightened that if they are expelled from the union, they would also be dismissed from the council if a closed shop was introduced. The letter said:

'You have no need to worry if you return to work and lose your membership of NALGO. I would ask you therefore not to be taken in by any threats to the contrary ... Clearly the industrial action must come to an end and at some juncture the Council may be left with no alternative but to consider very reluctantly its position on disciplinary action.'

Helen Morgan of the typists' strike committee told *Womens Voice*, 'it's not true that NALGO have made any threats of this kind to the strikers. The city council are accusing us of making threats, but in the same letter they're saying that if we don't return to work we'll be sacked.'

'A few of the women have been intimidated by this and have returned to work, but most of us are even more determined to win. Lots of the women say that their husbands are really angry about the letter and are much more supportive now than before.'

As *Womens Voice* went to press the NALGO branch at Liverpool City Council was due to consider a motion about the typists' action at a special union meeting. The motion pledges wholehearted support to the strike, condemns the council for refusing to negotiate and calls on NALGO nationally to increase the typists' strike pay.

But, more importantly, an amendment to the motion calls for an escalation of the action to involve NALGO members in other departments by refusing to collect rents, rates, service charges and fines on a selective basis without notice.

'The women on strike will not go back with nothing', said Helen Morgan. 'But we need to win this amendment in the branch, to force the council's hand. We've got lots of optimism and determination, and

after the lad in the legal department was suspended it's obvious that it's not just a fight for the typists but a fight for everyone. The whole branch is involved now—I'm sure the council won't stop with one suspension.'

The manual workers employed by the City Council are due to vote on one day strike action in support of the typists' claim.

The typists are very short of money. They are getting £20 a week strike pay from NALGO nationally and another £5 from the local levy, but many of them are single mothers, or the only breadwinners in a family. Branch representatives have been to NALGO's emergency committee again and again to ask for more money for the strikers, but each time they've been turned down. But money is coming in from other workers.

'Two of the typists went down to London to visit other workplaces and collected more than £400 in four days', said Helen, 'and another went to Newcastle and got £250 in three days with the promise of more to be sent on. We went on a mass meeting of the Liverpool dockers the other day and held a collection. Not one of them walked past the bucket without putting something in. One of the stewards told us to come back on pay day when the men would have more money in their pockets. The support of workers everywhere has been fantastic.'

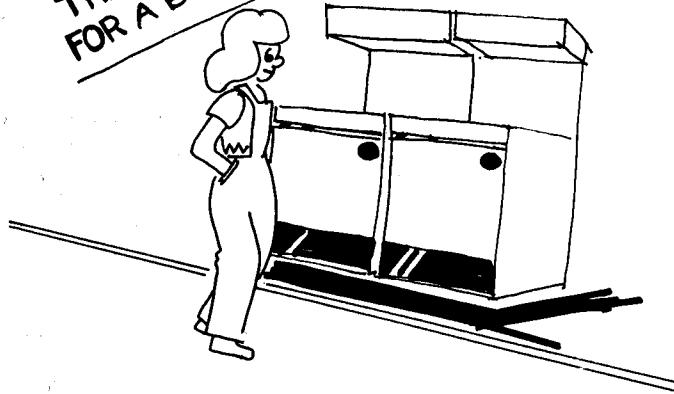
The striking typists have a rota for picket duty so that there are always about sixty people on the picket line from early morning until late afternoon. The city council has been forced into a desperate situation, but may be able to hold out unless the action is spread. That's why it is crucial that the NALGO branch gives more than just verbal and financial support to the women. Other NALGO members in the branch must realise that the typists' strike is not just about their wages, but about decent living wages for everyone.

Harriet Sherwood

Send money and messages of support to Liverpool Typists Action Group, c/o Branch Office, Duchy Chambers, 24 Sir Thomas Street, Liverpool 1. If you want a typist to speak at your union meeting phone 051 236 1944. Collection sheets available from Right to Work Campaign, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 or phone 01 986 5491.

Gas

★ **STAR OFFER**
TRADE-IN YOUR OLD JOB
FOR A BRAND NEW DOLE CARD



NEEDED: HI-SPEED ACTION

40,000 JOBS will go if the Tories pass legislation to close gas showrooms. That's about one in three of the workforce.

The workers in showrooms, publicity and marketing are the first in line but the chain reaction of sackings is staggering. All the workers who order appliances and their spare parts, store, transport, install and maintain them, take telephone enquiries and cover the emergency service will also be sacked.

The Monopolies Commission report recommended curbing the British Gas

monopoly on selling gas cookers and fires etc. However the Tories have decided to slash the whole service. British Gas are being told to stop selling anything but pure gas, so everything on the customers' side has to go private. This move is supposed to create competition in selling gas appliances and so reduce prices.

There is no restriction on appliance sales at present, you can buy them from cut price warehouses or department stores anyway. Their owners are moaning because they want a bigger slice of the cake. The reason is simple. A major buyer like British Gas is bound to get privileges over smaller buyers. The British Gas Corporation (BGC) can more or less dictate price and delivery in a similar way to the hold that Marks and Spencers have over clothing sweat shops. BGC can also offer advertising and subsidise special offers on appliances selling badly. Many gas appliance manufacturers fear closure if British Gas withdraws its orders, so increasing the number of jobs lost.

Will we benefit if gas goes private?

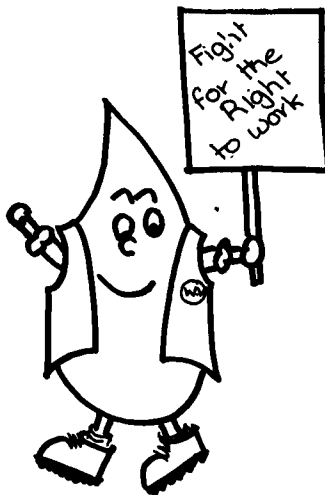
It is not the case that for every gas showroom closed a private

shop will spring up and take its place. This is an argument often used to appease women workers in showrooms about the threat to their jobs. The stores and warehouses will extend their ranges, but they'll only pick the current best sellers, so in reality the Tories precious freedom of choice for the customer will be reduced.

The actual fitting and maintenance will go to private contractors. With the anticipated fierce competition, this will open the door to shoddy work and cheap faulty materials.

Gas is like any other source of energy—it's OK as long as it is handled safely with no pressures to cut corners.

No one could, or should, defend the gas industry as such—working for them is just like working for anyone else. The complaints we all have about gas, the high bills and bad service should not be blamed on the workers. Gas prices are fixed by the government and kept deliberately high. This is to stop us all switching to gas as a cheaper fuel. That is why you are not encouraged to install new central heating and why most of the special offers involve trading in your old gas cooker for a new one. They can't cope with many new customers.



The BGC makes a terrific profit, most of this is creamed off by the government to spend as they see fit. The Tories argue the workers who do not make profits have to lose their jobs. Yet workers in the profitable gas industry are to lose their jobs too!

What action will gas workers take?

The initial reaction to the Tories announcement from

workers on my section was anger. The support for the one day stoppage was 100%. No one even bothered to turn up to our place to go to work—with the exception of the higher management (most of whom are NALGO members!)

Since the Royal Wedding has turned the issue cold, we are now working to bring the idea of an all out strike to reality. No doubt the union will try and find a way to avoid militant action and look for a compromise. However the position of the rank and file workers is very strong. We know gas is a crucial service and will become lethal in the hands of scabs sent in to handle it. We know about the big profits.

If rank and file workers are prepared to act on their own initiative rather than waiting upon the union bureaucracy—the Tories can be defeated. This is a dispute where victory is there for the taking—it is up to the workers to take it.

Penny Hicks

DEFEND EVERY JOB

WORKERS at St Stephens hospital in west London walked out on 11 September after a black hospital porter was assaulted by a member of the hospital's senior management. After being assaulted the porter was given an official warning. The unions at St Stephens are demanding a fair hearing by an independent panel.

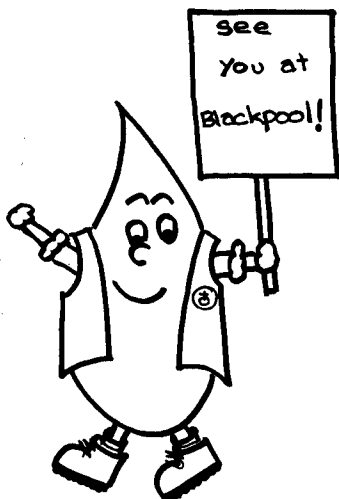
A mass meeting was held of all the unions the first working day after the walk-out, and the meeting decided to continue the strike action by 138 votes to 8. A few days later other hospitals in the Westminster area—St Mary Abbots and Westminster hospital—held mass meetings and decided to take sympathetic strike action.

The action involves members of NUPE, UCATT, TGWU and COHSE. The atmosphere on the picket line has been very determined, and much of the support is coming from West Indian women.

This is a fight not for money but for common decency and the rights of workers.

Please send messages of support and donations to 'The Picket Line', St Stephens Hospital, Fulham Road, London SW10.

Sue Large
 Westminster Hospital



Knit one-picket one!



FIFTEEN WOMEN are picketing Glencroft Knitwear, a sweatshop on the first floor of a victorian building the centre of Glasgow. It's not just the building—the firm is victorian too!

At the start of August, the manager announced a supervisor's redundancy. He refused to explain the position to the women as a group—24 out of the 60 workers walked out on the Friday, nine returned on the Monday. The other 15 joined the National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers (NUHKW) that day. The next day they were

summoned individually to Glencroft. The manager still refused to speak to them together or a union official. So they didn't start work. He told them that they were dismissed.

Since then they have been picketing the factory—the strike has been made official.

The 15 women have been working in Glencroft for between four months and 11 and a half years. They are picketing from 7.00am until the factory shuts at 4.30pm on a rota of six women a day. Womens Voice spoke to the Tuesday shift, after a lunchtime mass picket in mid-

September.

The picket had had some effect. 'We're really annoying him. He's having to fetch his own stuff and he's not getting deliveries. It means extra work' said Rosemary Tombs. But it's a difficult dispute. Not only are 45 workers still inside the factory and crossing the picket line four times a day, but the factory employs about 100 homeworkers. And also 'We're not the same as Lee Jeans. We're outside the factory, not inside. This makes it all the more important for us to get support,' Kathy McKay

explained, and Rosemary added, 'We're asking for support on the picket line and for donations. It was slow at first. Now it's growing quickly.'

At lunchtime there had been a mass picket. About 80 trade unionists and unemployed turned up.

Betty Greenaway has been visiting local factories—Weirs, Yarrows, Albion ... asking for, and getting, support. 'They've been very helpful—we got large donations. The Right to Work Campaign are taking us round, they've been very good.'

Maximum pressure has been put on Glencroft. The NUHKW is approaching other unions to get Glencroft goods blacked—which is vital if they are to win their dispute. All the women are getting is low strike pay. But they are determined to stay out until they get their jobs back and until they win the right to be represented by their union. 'We're staying out until we win' said Rosemary.

Everyone should support this dispute—and active support is urgently needed. If you live, or work in Glasgow why not pop down to the picket line—and take a collection with you!

Donations and messages of support to: Glencroft Strikers c/o NUHKW, 44 Kelvingrove Street, Glasgow G3.

Jennifer Ross

BREAK DOWN THE BARRIERS

At the beginning of August, in the middle of the holidays, 850 University workers attended a mass meeting in Strathclyde University in Glasgow. It was the first mass meeting of its kind in a British university and passed a resolution condemning the cuts demanded by the UGC, the University Grants Council.

Frances Buchanan, a NALGO member, and Bill Johnston, an AUT member, both from the University library, explained what the cuts would mean. Over the years standards have steadily gone down. In 1979 the government took back £9 million from the universities. When Womens Voice spoke to Frances and Bill, Strathclyde had not announced how they will make this cut. But redundancies are being discussed, including 'voluntary early retirement'. Student numbers will go down, by 250 (200 of them in Arts).

'This is a very backward step,' said Bill. 'The government is attacking working class living standards. This may not be an obvious one, but it's a cut in potential living standards. We should be extending community involvement in the University. The University shouldn't be so elitist. It should go out and open up to working class people. What the Tories are doing is contracting the whole system, and making it more elitist.'

Over the years, Strathclyde University has built up its union organisation. In four years of steady plodding, and active campaigning (including picketing the Tory Conference in 1980) they've built up a joint committee of the four unions with negotiating rights. This is a major reason why they've been one of the first to start talking about action now.

Many of the 850 (out of a

total of two and a half thousand) who turned up to August's mass meeting had never been at a union meeting before. Many of these were women. Frances explained 'A lot of women in the west of Scotland are the only wage earners in their house. Especially since Singers and Chryslers closed down. Strathclyde University is the tenth biggest employer in Strathclyde. In my family, one daughter's gone to work in Jersey, my son's had to go to Coventry to finish his apprenticeship, my other daughter's unemployed. My husband works in the chemical industry and that's not secure just now. This makes a lot of women more militant. But it also makes a lot of them frightened for their jobs.'

When Strathclyde announce the cuts, the committee intends to call another mass meeting to consider what action to take.

The joint organisation does stop workers becoming divided. But it's important to link up with other universities as well. 'We mustn't be divided,' said Frances. 'Some universities are pleased they're doing well at the others' expense.' And it's not just to the university sector that they look for support. Bill argues: 'We need to break down the barriers between education and the private sector. All workers should be involved in fighting for jobs and education.'

When Strathclyde management announce the cuts at the end of September, the crunch will come. If the university workers are to defend their jobs and education in Strathclyde, they'll have to follow the example of Lee Jeans just twenty miles away and take action!

Jennifer Ross

Paper Promises

Since the 1975 Equal Pay Act it has been illegal for an employer to pay a woman less than a man—but employers still do use women workers as cheap labour. Louise Trewavas told *Womens Voice* about her fight for equal pay in a non-unionised factory in Wokingham, Berkshire.

'At the moment I am being paid to stay away from work because the management considered me dangerously subversive. What this means is that I was talking to other women about my Equal Pay Case and about joining a union.

'I used to work in a factory where printed circuit boards were manufactured. I was taken on in July last year as a laboratory technician, one of the questions on the application form was 'are you a member of a union?'. Being a school leaver, I wasn't. I later found out that anyone who answers yes, doesn't get the job.

'Tectonic Electronics Ltd is a non-unionised company.

'In September 1980, another laboratory technician was taken on, at a higher starting rate than me, although I only discovered this by asking him later. When after subsequent pay rises our pay did not become equal, I began to feel annoyed. By this time however, I knew that I would be leaving in September 1981 to go to University and I had told Tectonics.

'When I asked why the male Laboratory Assistant was paid more than me, they said he was older and had experience (he had only worked as a shop assistant). I pointed out that I was better qualified and mentioned the Equal Pay Act. They laughed.

'I contacted the Equal Opportunities Commission who advised me that I had a reasonable case, and told me the sort of evidence I would need. I also contacted the National Council for Civil Liberties, who were anxious to help.

'I waited until I had full protection from Unfair Dismissal and then filled in the relevant forms. Tectonics were outraged. They treated me as if I was an ungrateful and greedy child, and did their best to intimidate me into withdrawing. I stood firm. I was warned that they would not be prepared to settle, they

would see it through to the tribunal. I was not moved.

'ACAS came in and informed Tectonics that their chances of winning were rather slight. Tectonics wanted to settle. By this time, the NCCL had offered me a free barrister to help fight my case. They consider that if Tectonics win, it will make a total mockery of the Equal Pay Act, because employers will be able to argue that age is a material difference. Even if a man and a woman do exactly the same job, if one is older than the other, this justifies paying them differently—sounds stupid, but that's what would happen.

'I talked to several of the women at Tectonics about my Equal Pay case and they were amazed (that such a thing could be done) and were interested in whether they could do the same. Women workers at Tectonics are badly paid, but are not in a job where they can easily compare their work to a man's. I know, from my experiences of the Equal Pay Act, that it is totally inadequate in almost every respect. The only way that women will ever get Equal Pay is by union action. Therefore I recommend that they join a union.

'On 24 August, I had to give in my notice in order to leave the next month to start University. At 4.55pm I was taken down to the Works Managers Office where I was given my pay up until the day I was going to leave and told to stay away from work. I was refused the choice of coming in to work, and told quite clearly that I would not be allowed onto the company premises.

'I have added a victimisation clause to my Equal Pay case because of this. I had been in contact with the GMWU and was meeting a representative the very evening of the day that I was thrown out. The workers are frightened for their jobs and the management is very anti-union. The only inspiration they will have is if I succeed. And they will only learn about it if I can get sufficient publicity.'



TUC: BLOATED AND BORING

WOMEN have never fared well at the TUC Congress, and this year in Blackpool was no exception.

It all began on the first day, when Alan Fisher, TUC President, made a presentation to the 'fraternal delegate' from the AFL/CIO—the American equivalent of the TUC.

The bloated and boring official got a hefty book token for his ten minute speech, his wife got a handbag and some gratuitous comments about 'feminine things' from Fisher.

There was outrage among most of the women delegates (about ten per cent of the total) and they decided to get their own back. Next day, Ivy Cameron a national officer of the Banking, Insurance and Finance Union presented Fisher with a shocking pink shopping bag 'to put his manly things in ...'

The whole TUC guffawed, Fisher had been put in his place. It was, according to regular delegates a sign of progress—something that wouldn't have happened five years ago.

There were other 'signs of progress'. This year the TUC reserved three more General Council places on the General Council for Women to make a total of five.

Marie Patterson, a National Officer of the T&G, TUC General Council member and chairperson of the TUC Womens Advisory Committee said it was all part of 'putting our own house in order.'

But is there much point in having five women sitting on the TUC General Council among the union General Secretaries and bureaucrats, just because they are women? The real problem was vividly illustrated by looking at the composition of the unions sponsoring a motion on womens unemployment. The shop workers union USDAW proposed the motion (38 delega-

tes, 5 women) BIFU the bank workers union seconded, (20 delegates, 5 women) and they were supported by the General and Municipal Workers (74 delegates, 4 women).

There was very little time spent discussing the specific problems of women in the unions. The report of the TUC Equal Rights Committee and the motion on womens unemployment were squeezed for time. However the delegates voted unanimously for a 'nationwide campaign to recruit women into the movement', to encourage affiliated unions and to campaign to protect the right to work for women workers, 'including part timers.

It was all very abstract, women who have fought for their right to work and won—like the Lee Jeans women—received scant attention, and then only after one determined delegate had forced his way to the rostrum to propose a vote of congratulations!

That one incident summed up the problem of the womens debate, and the whole TUC. There was plenty of rhetoric, but little discussion of how to fight back.

The problem occurred again with the Liverpool typists. They lobbied the TUC on the first day and were well received by the NALGO delegation. Unfortunately not one NALGO delegate thought their strike important enough to raise in the congress.

All in all, there were few answers at the TUC this year.

Mike Simmons

RENTS UP AGAIN

THE government is planning a massive increase in council house rents, so that it can use the profits to reduce rates for businesses.

Last year the Tories introduced legislation which made it legal for local authorities to make profits from council house rents. Now they plan to cut government subsidies to those authorities which run their housing at a loss, thereby forcing them to put up rents.

The profits made from rents will not even be ploughed back into housing, instead they will go straight into the coffers of the government, who will take them back in the form of

reduced grants to local authorities. Each council will be told how much profit it 'ought' to make (if it sticks to government policies on council house sales and rent increases), and this amount will be deducted from its grant from central government.

The Tories are so worried about the reaction to this plan that they have tried to keep it secret by refusing to divulge details of their plans for housing expenditure. If councils do not fight this scheme it will mean both huge rent increases and the sale of hundreds of thousands of council houses.

Ann Rogers

TRIBUTE TO A FIGHTER

MANJIT Kaur was born in a village in the Jullundur district of Punjab. She attended primary school for a few years and later married Avtar Jouhl before coming to England in 1960. On a visit to India in 1981 she tragically died of a heart attack at the age of 43 in the same village in which she was born. As well as being a wife and mother she was an active worker in the Indian Workers Association, an industrial worker and a trade unionist.

Manjit Kaur was present on many of the early demonstrations against immigration controls in the 1960's together with the many women that she had mobilised. She played a vital role in encouraging women to use their vote in the 1964 General Election in Smethwick when Peter Griffiths campaigned on an overtly racist platform. Manjit Kaur never allowed herself to be intimidated by threats of racialists against her husband and family and always insisted that no matter what the personal costs and strains that the work should continue.

Manjit Kaur continued to play a role in the mobilisation of women in the campaigns, demonstrations and meetings against the growth of institutionalised racialism

and the growing racial violence which the black population in Britain is experiencing. The last two demonstrations which she attended were against the Nationality Bill and to protest at the killing of an Indian student in Coventry.

While active in Britain, she never forgot her roots in India. Recognising the very important role of language in keeping an oppressed peoples culture alive she insisted that Punjabi was spoken in the home and that her children learnt their own language. But Manjit Kaur who was a worker and a trade unionist also recognised the importance of playing a part in the wider working class movement. She therefore ensured that the children not only respected and valued their Indian cultural heritage but were fully prepared for playing their role in the struggle of the wider working class movement in Britain.

Avtar Jouhl and his children have lost a beloved wife and mother. The Indian Workers Association has lost a valued and hard working member. We have all lost a greatly respected comrade and friend. Her life and work were an inspiration and example to us all.



ANGOLA

Angola in South West Africa hit the news last month when the persistent border attacks from South Africa turned into full scale invasion. Until 1975, mineral-rich Angola was a colony of Portugal, along with Mozambique and Guinea Bissau. It became independent following a war in which the national liberation movement, MPLA, was victorious. South Africa invaded because of the bases which SWAPO, the Namibian liberation movement, has in Angola.

- Area: 1,246,700 sq. km.
- Population: 6,761,000
- Economically active population: 1,839,000
- Engaged in agriculture: 1,084,000
- Main Towns:
 - Luanda (capital) 480,613
 - Huambo 61,885
 - Lobito 59,258
 - Benguela 40,996
- Average annual birth rate 1970-75 47.2 per 1000
- Average annual death rate 1970-75 24.5 per 1000
- Income per head (1976) £270
- UK income per head (1976) £2215
- Primary school teachers 25,000
- Primary school pupils 1026291

'Riot Teacher': the truth

BRIDGET PARSONS, who is a teacher at George Dixon Comprehensive school in Birmingham, is serving a six month prison sentence for alleged involvement in the Handsworth riots.

She is suspended without pay pending a decision of a disciplinary hearing to decide her fate. If she is dismissed by the Birmingham Education Authority it will be virtually impossible for her to obtain a teaching job elsewhere and Birmingham will have lost one of their best anti-racist teachers.

During the past couple of years the local and national press, as a result of Bridget's convictions arising out of her anti-racist activity, has conducted a constant campaign of vilification, distortions and lies against Bridget. She has been dubbed as a 'professional agitator', caricatured as a 'riot teacher' and a 'ring leader' of the summer riots and is therefore 'unfit' to be teaching impressionable children.

Jill Knight MP made a vicious attack upon Bridget in Parliament. To those of us who know the real Bridget it is time that the true story has a hearing.

Bridget started her teaching career in 1972 with two years voluntary service overseas in Kenya. On return she did a period of supply teaching in London. However she wanted to return to Africa and in 1976 she got a job as a teacher at St Davids secondary school in Rhodesia—as it then was. While she was out there the guerilla war—which was subsequently shown to have the support of the mass of the population—was at its height.

Bridget witnessed the effects of a society based on racial supremacy and this strengthened her determination to oppose racism in the future. It was her opposition to the illegal Smith regime which led to her expulsion from the country in 1977.

Even more aware of the degradation and humiliation of racism, Bridget returned to Britain in 1977 and settled in Birmingham where she joined, and became an active member of, the Socialist Workers Party.

The Britain that Bridget returned to was one in which racist ideas were common. The

National Front were getting increasing support and sizeable votes in local elections, and were holding provocative marches all over Britain. Thatcher called black people 'aliens' and as a teacher Bridget observed at first hand the disadvantages that ethnic minorities experienced in education. With a strengthened commitment to fight racism in a positive manner Bridget gave her full support to the newly formed ANL.

In September 1978 she worked hard to ensure a good turnout of Birmingham teachers at the successful Teachers Against the Nazis conference in London.

Bridget's involvement in the campaign against racism in Birmingham nightclubs in early 1979 led to her first conviction and the subsequent witch-hunt against her in the press. She was arrested for obstruction while taking part in a peaceful picket of Pollyanna's nightclub which, despite an order from the Commission for Racial Equality, had continued to operate a colour bar. A further charge of assault was made after an incident in the police station about which, conveniently for the police, she was unable to call any witnesses. It was alleged that she cracked two ribs of a woman police constable, despite the fact that no medical evidence was produced at the trial and the WPC had no time off work. This dubious allegation has been continually mentioned in the press to blacken Bridget's character.

Last year Bridget was invited by Didymus Mutawa, a member of the new government, to attend the independence celebrations in Zimbabwe. The education authorities were quite happy for Bridget to attend and stated that it was a great honour that one of their teachers had been invited. This proved that they will use Bridget's anti-racist work to reflect credit on themselves when they see fit, and yet condemn her for acting on the same principles on other occasions.

But after Bridget's conviction for threatening words arising out of an anti-NF demo in Corby in May 1980 there were further cries for her dismissal. This time she was given a final warning. So after her latest 'offence' it is very likely that she will be sacked. She will not only have spent six

months in prison but will also have lost her job.

We must not stand by and let this happen. Bridget was regarded as an excellent teacher by the chairperson of the governors. She was popular with her school students and their parents. If she is sacked it will be because she is an active trade

unionist and a militant anti-racist, not due to 'criminal tendencies'. Her dismissal would be a great loss to many people including pupils, parents, fellow teachers and all active trade unionists and anti-racists.

Friends of Bridget Parsons Committee



**National demonstration called by CND
SATURDAY 24 OCTOBER**

**Assemble 10.30am onwards at Victoria Embankment, London SW1.
March moves off at 11.00am to Hyde Park.
Festival in Hyde Park from midday
Rally in Hyde Park at 4.00pm.**

FIGHTING THE BOMB

ONE hundred thousand women and men took to the streets last October to protest at the war madness of the Reagans and Brezhnevs of this world, and the decision of Thatcher and the British ruling class to site Cruise missiles in Britain.

But things didn't stop there. The demonstration was a spur to the establishment of CND groups in every town and city in the country. Showings of the film *The War Game* have attracted audiences of hundreds. Of major importance also is the number of women—both young and old—who are now taking an active role in the growing CND movement. Some of these are from the womens movement who now see that the campaign against war madness offers them a role as activists. Many of the new women are students, teachers, white collar professional women, who for the first time are coming into contact with ideas and activities which challenge the mad and destructive world we live in.

From our activity a growing debate is emerging. How we see ourselves in the movement very much depends on what we see as the political propeller of the build up of the arms race and drive towards a new cold war.

Many women in CND are arguing that the drive towards war is just an extension of male power in society. You hear people saying that the strands that make up nuclear weapons—aggression, militarism, science and engineering, world politics—are controlled by men almost exclusively. More than that, they're 'masculine' as defined by little boys of all ages' (Ruth Wallsgrove, A Feminist View of the Disarmament Movement in *Sanity*).

This analysis sees *male* power as the real problem. If only we had women in positions of power and running the world, violence on the scale we see today

would naturally disappear. It also follows from this that just as men are the natural aggressors, women are the gentle carers. In order to gain real democracy inside the movement the role of women as pacifiers must be emphasised.

These ideas are more established in the United States, where women have been organising on this basis for some years. Mother and Baby marches against the bomb have been organised in many cities and one group wove strands of wool round the White House as an expression of female concern at passive resistance.

But is male aggression responsible for the latest nuclear build up?

Nuclear war is the ultimate madness of capitalism, not male aggression. In the competitive capitalist world each power bloc fights to maintain its political and economic domination. War is not the exception, but the rule.

To wage a war against the competitors abroad, the rulers have to wage a war against workers at home—to cut wages and make redundancies for higher productivity and higher profits—to cut social services and reduce our standard of living all in the effort to keep their profits as high as those anywhere else in the world. All workers suffer, those in East or West, both the employed and the unemployed, men and women. The aim of the capitalist class is to hit workers—and they will do it in any way possible, to divide black and white—men and women—white collar and manual, old and young.

So it's not male aggression that makes the Tories decide to dole out billions of pounds of nuclear bombs and missiles while the public services are dismantled because of so-called lack of funds.

The ruling class are responsible for the war drive



and our problem is how to build a mass movement which involves the millions of ordinary women and men where they work. Because it is the organised working class in the offices and factories that have the power to kick out the Tories and change the world from one that works and protects the interests of the few, to one that works for the interests of the many.

In reality nuclear war cannot be seen as an isolated one-issue campaign but as a logical progression of the drive to control and preserve capital's profits. In practice this means that our main orientation is not changing the structures within CND but in the wider battles against job losses, against cuts in services, and for

decent living standards.

The women in the Lee Jeans occupation who spoke at packed meetings of male trade unionists and won levies and solidarity are part of the battle against the war drive, because they inflicted a defeat, no matter how minor, on their boss, Thatcher and her class. We have to take the slogan 'Jobs Not Bombs' and apply it to these battles that take on the bosses.

It is not enough to preach to men inside the movement about the moral horrors of sexism: we have to show that where women are fighting back, they are fighting not only for their interests as women, but for the liberation of the whole of the working class from the power of the bosses.

Jan Nelsen

Becoming



The local government white collar workers' union, NALGO, made two surprising decisions at its annual conference last June. One was to affiliate to CND, and the other was to ballot its membership on whether NALGO should take steps to affiliate to the Labour Party and create a political fund.

The affiliation question comes at a time when there is a push for more left-wing politics and a campaign around Benn within the Labour Party, and yet 'left' Labour councils, such as Lothian, are capitulating to Tory attacks, and implementing cuts and redundancies.

Harriet Sherwood spoke to three NALGO members about why they think NALGO should affiliate to the Labour Party.

IRENE BUXTON—Knowsley (Labour Party)

THE LABOUR PARTY is the political arm of the trade union movement, and the trade unions set up the Labour Party to act on behalf of the interests of working people.

It's ridiculous that the fourth largest trade union in this country should *not* be affiliated, it's really detrimental to NALGO.

If NALGO was affiliated the union would have more influence on the decisions taken by Labour groups on local councils. So in a situation where perhaps redundancies were being threatened, NALGO members could put pressure on the Labour group through the local constituency party to oppose the cuts.

I think there's a big groundswell in the Labour movement, and it's of a left nature. The campaign around Benn is at its strongest at grass-roots level, it's an attack on the recent Labour Party leadership. The same thing is happening within trade unions—rank and file members don't have any confidence in the leadership to save jobs or increase living standards, so they're forced to use their own muscle. Trade union

members do want to fight—look at the action of the women at Lee Jeans or the Liverpool typists.

CNALP in the north west has organised meetings for NALGO members with Labour MPs and councillors, and the response from the audiences has been excellent. There's been lots of discussion—people are showing a real interest in what's happening in the Labour Party and the arguments for affiliation.

HELEN MORGAN—Liverpool (Typists' Strike Committee)

IT'S ABOUT time that NALGO decided to become a proper trade union—it's been pussy-footing around for long enough. Affiliation to the Labour Party would do the world of good.

In Liverpool we've got a Joint Shop Stewards' Committee, but the other unions see NALGO as being the 'sweet shop' of trade unions. If NALGO members are out on strike then members of our own union are prepared to strike-break. The members who hold management positions are very conservative—if NALGO was affiliated to the Labour Party, those members would have to identify more with the labour movement.



a real Trade Union

I think that NALGO should be involved in the discussions that are going on inside the Labour Party at the moment—and learn something from those decisions. For example, the reselection of MPs—union officials should be elected and re-elected. Lots of them at the moment don't really know what's going on. They've not really worked hard over our strike, they won't give us any more strike pay than we're getting at the moment, yet we need more money to be able to win. If we elected the full-time officials then we'd vote in people who are sympathetic to the rank and file of the labour movement.

I've never really been politically involved, but I've always voted Labour. But since we came out on strike I've become more aware of the politics involved in taking action. I've just generally become more politically aware, and that's why I think NALGO must affiliate to the Labour Party in order to be seen as a real trade union.

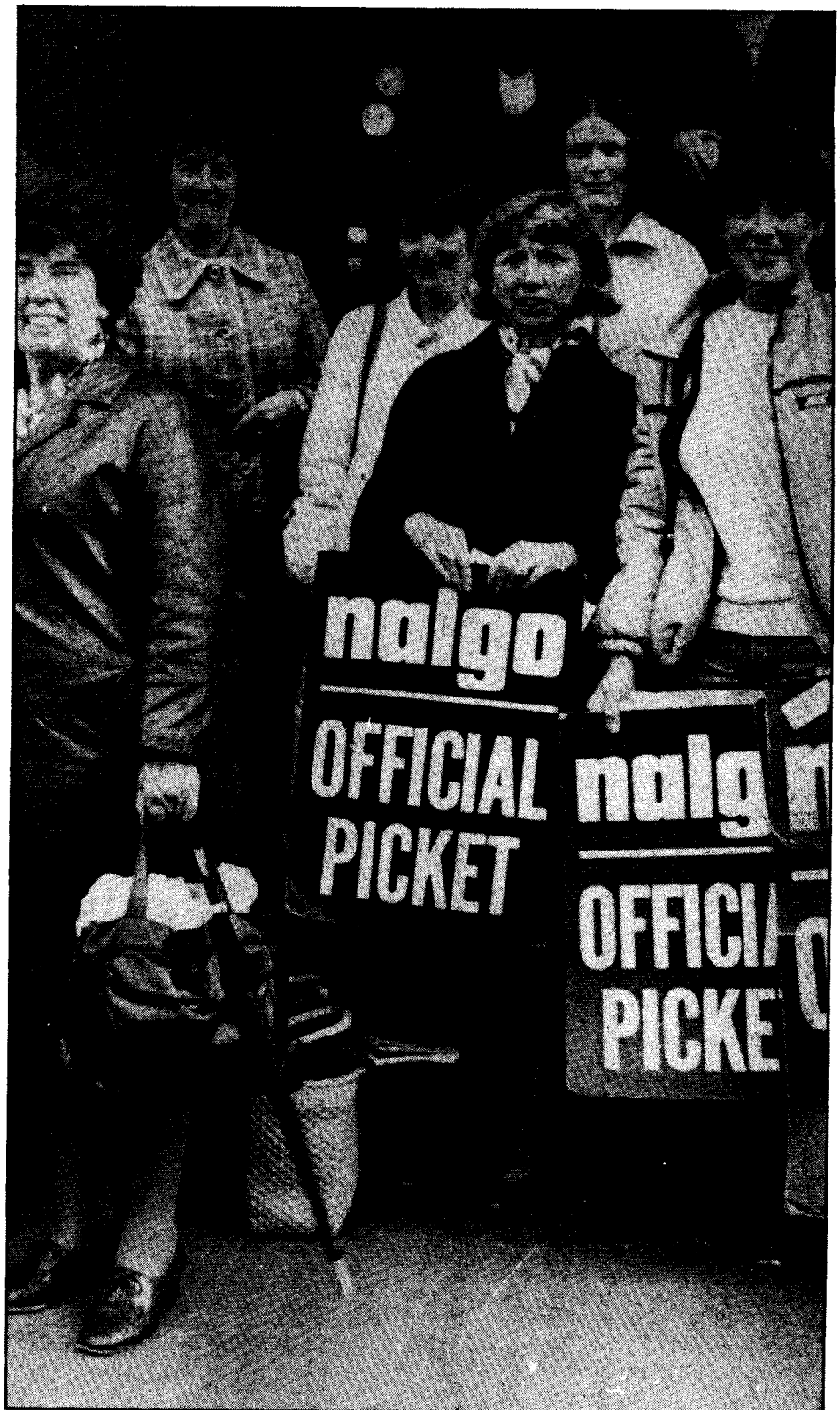
**MAUREEN WATSON—
Edinburgh (Socialist Workers
Party)**

I'M IN FAVOUR of affiliation because such a move is a recognition of ourselves as a trade union. Within NALGO's framework it would be a shift to a *political* position, away from its image as a professional association. It's important that we identify ourselves with the bulk of the trade union movement and the labour movement and that we get involved in political processes.

Here in Lothian it's an interesting question, because we've learnt that there's no point in looking to the Labour group on the council or the Labour Party itself for any lead on fighting cuts and redundancies. The battle against the Tories will only be won through trade union militancy, not Labour Party politics—and that goes for any situation.

The campaign around affiliation must not be allowed to dominate what's going on in NALGO. For example, NALGO's Scottish district council recently said that affiliation was the most important issue facing NALGO—at a time when we've been sold out on jobs and services. The last CNALP (Campaign for NALGO Affiliation to the Labour Party) meeting was at the same time as the Campaign against Cuts meeting. I know which one I think is more important.

There's an illusion that the Labour Party is linked into trade union muscle, and that the grass-roots of the Labour Party has influence in the trade union movement.



That illusion has to be smashed—the experience of Lothian shows that it isn't true.

The myth of 'left-wing' Labour councils also has to be exposed. Lots of the employers of NALGO members are 'left-wing Labour'—and there might be a problem when it comes to taking action if the union is affiliated to the employers!

If we do affiliate, we have to be clear that

the union must be independent of the employers, and we must be prepared to *act* independently, without the support of Labour councils if necessary, in order to defend our jobs and services.

NALGO should affiliate on the basis of identifying with Labour against the Tories, but affiliation is the least of our problems at the moment—and the Labour Party can't fight for our jobs for us.

MEANS TEST & MARCHES

More and more women are becoming involved in the fight against unemployment. *Womens Voice* looks at past unemployment struggles, when women joined the marches of the 1930s, and at how the campaign can be built today.

*R stands for REGO, who don't know what they're worth
E stands for Everything, they want the blooming earth,
G stands for Glory, when workers will be free,
O stands for what we Owe to Solidarity.*

IN 1928 a dispute broke out at the new Edmonton, North London, plant of Rego clothiers. A woman worker refused to join the union, and the other women at the plant—mostly young workers—went out on unofficial strike. They raised other grievances as well as the demand for the closed shop—the cost of lunches, the high cost of fares to work and the 15% reduction in earnings that had been caused by the introduction of new machinery.

Rank and file workers lent support to the Rego women. The London Trades Councils raised £4000 for them. The women marched enthusiastically to a rally in Trafalgar Square singing strike songs and carrying banners with their strike slogan

'Stick It'. The band of the National Unemployed Workers Movement led the demonstration. After 12 weeks the strike was won.

As a women's strike it was remarkable, but any strike was remarkable during this period. 1927 and 1928 saw the lowest number of strikes during the twenties. The defeat of the General Strike in 1926 had led to demoralisation, and a trade union leadership which collaborated openly with employers and prohibited all direct action by the rank and file.

Unemployment and lack of leadership in the unions had a profound effect on women workers during this period. By 1939 only half a million women



Women's contingent from Burnley to London, 1932.

belonged to trade unions affiliated to the TUC—less than half the 1918 figure. This despite the fact that women workers increased as a percentage of the workforce some 3% between 1923 and 1930.

Increasing unemployment brought extreme pressures to women workers—and also increased tension between men and women workers. In some towns men were particularly resentful when women continued to be employed while men's jobs in traditional industries disappeared. In Dundee the men who had worked in the shipyards had to remain home while women continued working in the jute industry. The men became widely known as 'kettle boilers'. A similar situation in Derry caused the city to become known as 'petticoat city'.

But the fact that during the twenties and thirties women's labour increased overall in

trades like light engineering, the electrical industry, food and clothing, did not mean that women were not suffering from the effects of unemployment.

The exact figures for women's unemployment are not known. Only one in eight women worked in insured jobs—the rest did not register. Many married women did not qualify for unemployment benefit. In 1931 the Anomalies Act deprived almost all married women of benefit. So drastic was the effect of the Act that by the end of the year following 134,000 women had been disallowed benefit.

DESPERATION

Pregnant women too were unable to get benefit, because all applicants for benefit had to go before a court and prove that they were available for work.

The desperation of women faced with unemployment meant that many women carried on working right throughout their pregnancies. The pressures on them, overwork combined with poor diets showed themselves in the high mortality figures for mothers and infants in childbirth. In depressed areas such death rates reached twice the national average.

This was not surprising in view of the situation in which women gave birth. An official of the Jute and Flax workers union has recorded how women were so desperate to keep their jobs that 'women were to be seen at childbirth at their frames, or were taken into lavatories to have their children.'

Another union official from a Weavers union has told how women left work at 3pm, gave birth during the night, and were



Women marchers by the roadside, 1934.



(top) An arrest!

back at their looms in the morning, fearful that an absence of even a day meant that their looms would be reallocated to other women in the queue for jobs.

Such conditions were used by employers to introduce new work methods which cut back still further on labour costs. Time and motion study was the basis of the infamous Bedeaux system which was introduced during this period. Conveyor belts were also introduced into the clothing trade then.

The new work practises were not completely unopposed. Non union women led the fight at Wolsleys in Leicester in 1931, their struggle leading them to join the Hosiery Union. In 1932 unionised women workers at Lucas in Birmingham also went out on strike against the same system.

HUNGER

But the main area of fight back for women, as for all workers, was not in the workplace. The government Means Tests which cut benefit to all those families where any member was employed, caused great hardship and suffering for working class families. And it was primarily against the effect of these, detested means test that the Hunger Marches were directed, under the demand of work or full pay.

In 1931 women marched for the first time on the Hunger Marches — as a separate contingent. The marchers came mainly from the derelict textile areas of Lancashire and Yorkshire, and were led by

Maud Brown from Liverpool.

In 1932 a women's contingent marched from Barnsley with representatives from all over the country. They marched for over three weeks, and like the male Hunger marchers had to fight the regulations of the town councils on the route. When they entered Burton on Trent they discovered that the letter from the National March Council which had been addressed to the Trades Council and Labour Party, asking them to arrange a reception for the women marchers, had been simply handed on to the police, who had been informed that the trade union and labour movement of the town would not be associated in any way with the march.

The authorities thought that the marchers were isolated from rank and file workers, and tried to impose 'casual conditions' on the women before putting them up in the local workhouse. This meant that the marchers would have had to work in return for their board.

DRAMATIC

The women demonstrated through the town and organised massive open air meetings in protest at the attempt to impose the regulations. At eleven o'clock at night thousands of workers marched with the women to demand that regulations be waived. The workhouse authorities were adamant. But by one o'clock they climbed down, and the women marchers stayed in the workhouse with all the regulations withdrawn.

Some of the most dramatic protests against the government schemes for payments to the unemployed came from Welsh women. In 1935 the government introduced new (lower) scales for the unemployed. In South Wales 300,000 workers marched against the scales on the following Sunday. Welsh women marched to the Unemployed Assistance Board (UAB) offices from all part of the Merthyr Valley. Many of them carrying babies in their arms and others pushing small children in perambulators. They rushed the offices and smashed the windows and doors. The police made several arrests, but the women fought back with such determination that they compelled the police to release every one of those under arrest. Only with great difficulty were the police able to protect the UAB officials from the assault of the women.'

Anna Paczuska

The Right to Work Campaign is organising a march of unemployed people from Liverpool to Blackpool, where the marchers and trade unionists from all over the country will join in a picket of the Tory Party conference.

The march sets off from Liverpool on 8 October and arrives in Blackpool eight days later. If you are unemployed, and you want to fight back at a government which is increasing the dole queues by thousands every day, come on the march. Food and accommodation will be provided for marchers, and if you have to sign on between 8 and 16 October arrangements will be made with your DHSS office for your giro to be paid. All you need to bring is a good pair of walking shoes, something waterproof to wear, a change of clothing and a sleeping bag or blankets. Marchers' possessions will be safely carried in a van while you are on the roads.

If you want to come, write quickly to the Right to Work Campaign, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4, or phone 01 986 5491.

If you've got a job, take a collection at work for the march, get our shop stewards committee or trade union branch to sponsor the march, and make sure you're in Blackpool on Friday 16 October to show the Tories what we think of them.

MAKE BLACKPOOL ROCK—SUPPORT THE RIGHT TO WORK MARCH!



John Sturrock (Network)

Cathy Christison left Dundee in 1977 to come to London to look for work. 'Even under the Labour Government unemployment was high in Dundee.' That year she went on the Right to Work march to Blackpool TUC. 'Workers look to their trade union leaders, for solidarity and fightback, we have to show them that they are not doing enough and that we will fight unemployment either with them or without them.'

Since leaving school Cathy has been unemployed for a total of three years. Her last job was at Thorn Electrical in North London. 'Although I left to have a baby, my job was made redundant earlier this year. Our district official of the TGWU did nothing to save our jobs. The result is that the union at Thorns is now very weak, and has to be rebuilt from scratch. It won't be the officials that do it, it will be the militant rank and file.'

While Cathy is on the march her boyfriend will look after their baby. 'Being a mother doesn't mean trade union issues do not affect me. I would like to get a job but there aren't any—even if I could, my last job paid £55 per week and I wouldn't be

able to afford a baby minder and bus fares out of that.'

Jackie Hillier lost her job last November when the Arts Council cut grants to theatre companies. She had worked for 'Counteract' the feminist and socialist theatre company. Over the past few years they had travelled around the country to political meetings performing plays on abortion, cuts in the NHS, hazards at work and the Employment Act. 'There is now very little political theatre left—even Bell and Braces which had a rolling grant from the Arts Council is now under annual review.'

The actors union, Equity, has not organised an effective fightback to the cuts. 'As so many actors and actresses are not allowed union cards there is nothing to protect them when their grants are cut.'

This is the first Right to Work march Jackie has been on. 'Massive redundancies means that we have no bargaining power and the whole trade union movement goes under. Particularly with things like the Employment Act which restricts our right to organise any fightback at all.'

HOW DO WE ORGANISE WOMEN?

For the past few years women members of the Socialist Workers' Party have set up Womens Voice groups as a way of involving women in activity and drawing them towards SWP politics. Now there is a debate within the SWP over whether this is the most appropriate way to relate to and organise women, to involve them in our politics and activities. Some members feel that Womens Voice groups should continue as they are; others feel that the groups should be disbanded and work around women be taken up by the SWP as a whole. The future of Womens Voice groups will be decided at the SWP conference in November. In these two articles the main points of each argument are put forward.

Womens Voice has always stood for women's liberation and socialism. We have always understood that the fight for women's liberation can only be seen as part of the fight for a socialist transformation of society, in which the organised working class take control of the factories and workplaces where wealth is produced. That wealth could be produced for the needs of the whole of humanity and not for the profits of a few, and the responsibility for childcare and housework be on the whole of society, which can lay the basis for women's liberation.

To achieve socialism we need to build a revolutionary party based in the workplaces, which involves tens of thousands of women, because the female half of the class has to be part of the revolutionary process. We need it in the workplace because it is there that women and men are organised collectively, and where they can begin to gain the confidence to fight against their exploitation and oppression.

Over the last few years, we in the Socialist Workers Party have tried to reach those women workers through the Womens Voice groups and Womens Voice organisation. Many women in the party now believe that the groups have failed to do this, and instead have related to issues of individual oppression rather than to the collective struggles of women workers. Why do we think this?

Firstly, if you are organising in the class, it means organising round the workplace, because it is *there* that workers have the power to change things. So regardless of the issue we take all our political campaigns there—whether they are CND, Nazi attacks or abortion. And when we are talking about workplace organisation, then an organisation of women doesn't fit. Even the smallest dispute in a workplace needs solidarity which cuts across sex and other divisions between sections of the class. Every issue—whether wages or sexual harassment—has to have the support of *all* militant workers. Because WV bulletins and intervention don't fit, this has led many WV members away from the workplace and towards issues which are much more peripheral to the class struggle.

It has also led to the sort of situation where far from an increased number of party members working round women, fewer people are now involved. Only a minority of SWP women are involved in the groups, yet they are seen as our main perspective around women. This is not because most SWP women are against organising women—many of those not in groups have

excellent records of organising women in workplaces and unions—but because the groups are irrelevant to the sort of union work and workplace work which we see as so central.

Thirdly we have developed a situation where things are seen as 'womens issues' or 'industrial issues' instead of seeing that work around the industrial issues of, say, Lee Jeans or the Liverpool Typists are exactly the ways in which we will in the best women fighters in the class to our politics.

For all those reasons we now believe that we are wasting our resources in building the groups and instead should be putting our energies into making sure that the party as a whole does consistent work round women workers, and that all our work is directed to the workplace—where we can begin to organise to change.

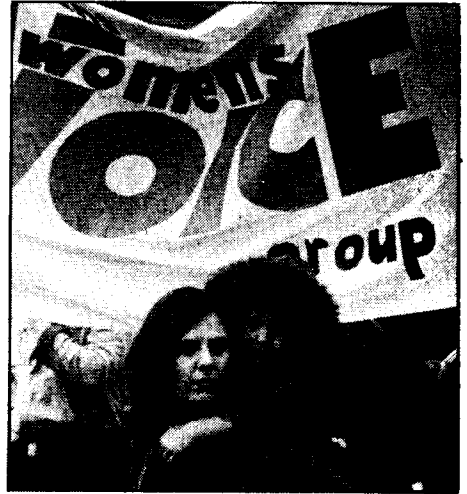
In practice many SWP women have already voted with their feet, and the groups have been folded. Only a third of the groups listed in the back of the magazine actually exist in any sense.

Some people worry that the party won't take up womens issues, to which we reply that what the party takes up depends on what we as party members do to ensure that things happen. Nor does it mean we will abandon our periphery. There is only a very small number of non party women in WV groups. We do not want to lose them, and hope that some will join the party. We hope that others who won't want to make that commitment will still work with us in the Right to Work Campaign, the Anti Nazi League, CND and the other activities we are involved in. The magazine sells to many people outside the groups and is a way of ensuring we have special ways of reaching women.

But we are also looking to the new periphery of the thousands of women involved in the above campaigns, on the Labour Party demos against unemployment and in disputes like Lee Jeans and the Liverpool typists. We hope that if the whole party worries about working with and recruiting these women workers, we can win some of them to our revolutionary politics, which is an exciting prospect.

It can only be done with the full commitment to the ideas of womens liberation and a complete recognition that the workplace is central to our work, for as the great female revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg said: 'Where the chains of capital are forged, it is there they will be broken'.

Lindsey German



FIVE YEARS ago the first Womens Voice Groups were started, many of them around the James White Bill to restrict womens abortion rights. The Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts had become law, yet still women weren't equal. Women had become a permanent part of the workforce and were now the largest area of recruitment to Trade Unions.

Women at Trico struck for equal pay relying on their own organisation rather than tribunals, sparking off a whole spate of equal pay strikes. Women were campaigning for maternity leave and better nursery provision.

It was against this background that WV was built. At first there were a small number of groups. These grew, others were encouraged by the initial success, until three years ago we formed a national WV organisation. We did so because we felt we had a perspective for womens liberation and organisation which the womens movement had failed to provide. The WV groups were based on activity and an understanding of the relationship between our own liberation and the struggle for socialism.

We wanted WV readers who weren't in the SWP to organise with us who were, whether in support of a strike, a campaign against nursery closures, against restrictive legislation on abortion. We wanted non-SWP members to discuss political ideas with us, we wanted them to become not just readers of WV, but to get involved in the activities and campaigns written about in the magazine, to become involved, to see it as their magazine and also to sell it. Certainly we wanted women to join the SWP, but recognised that precisely because of the nature of womens oppression that many would wish simply to be WV members.

In the course of building WV there has been some sharp debate. None more so than now. Although SWP conference last year reaffirmed its commitment to building WV as a means of relating to and organising women, some comrades are now arguing that we should disband WV groups. They argue it hasn't worked; there are so few groups; that as a result of the perspective to build WV, the SWP itself has failed to take up



womens issues; that the logic of separate organisation of women is to move away from an understanding of the need to join together as men and women in the one party. It is also argued that as the womens movement has collapsed WV has been recruiting women from that quarter who are 'middle class' and have diluted our politics by failing to understand the 'centrality of the workplace'. Finally WV has failed to recruit working class women.

Many of these arguments are nonsense as those of you active in WV will know. The last two years have been undoubtedly hard—the low level of struggle; a Tory government hell bent on smashing the living standards and trade union organisation of working people, not to mention three million on the dole. We haven't built a huge organisation, but neither has any revolutionary organisation—including the SWP. This is no argument for disbanding WV. I doubt if by winding up WV will the SWP itself be able to address itself any more effectively to the problems of womens oppression, it was precisely to redress the balance on issues of exploitation and oppression that WV was set up.

WV groups which have sustained themselves through this period—and there are lots of them still—have done so not by 'consciousness raising' but by involving themselves in ongoing local campaigns, local issues and around disputes which have arisen such as Tandy's or Lee Jeans in much the same way as we have always done.

The reasons WV was set up in the first place are as relevant today as then. Our double burden—as women workers and as women—will not go away this side of the barricades. We have to organise as *women* for our own self liberation. There is a basis for a revolutionary socialist womens organisation. What WV needs is more input and commitment from the SWP in the many struggles ahead for women. We don't believe in throwing the baby out with the bath water. There is a list at the back of the magazine for those interested in joining WV, telling you where there are Womens Voice groups. Join with us in the struggle.

Linda Quinn

FEMINISM

Heroic History or Critical History

THE HISTORY of the women's movement, like that of the socialist movement, is full of differences of opinion, rival organisations, and even occasionally physical conflict.

Perhaps the most dramatic example was in May 1793, at the height of the French Revolution, when a well-known feminist, Theroigne de Mericourt, was beaten up by members of the Club of Revolutionary Republican Women.

In Britain, it does not seem that women ever came to blows over political differences, but the differences have been there on many occasions and at the most crucial points in the history of the women's movement.

In 1896, for example, at the annual conference of the National Union of Women Workers, there was acute disagreement between those members who called for a campaign against the system of deducting fines from wages, and some of the upper class philanthropist women who attended. A Mrs Cadbury claimed that, 'Naturally, undisciplined and unruly girls are averse to fines, but orderly girls consider it to their advantage, quite as much as to that of their employers, that rule and order should be maintained.'

And in 1906, the Lancashire Women

on the sectarianism of the few. *This is quite simply because class conflicts cut right across any feminist movement or campaign.*

Of course, united fronts and broad-based organisations have always been part of the women's movement from the very beginning, and a very necessary part, but it is wrong to try to evade the political conflicts within them. Wrong, both because it distorts the past and because it makes it impossible to learn from history.

It is impossible to understand why the Revolutionary Republican Women attacked a 'fellow feminist' without appreciating that this took place a few days before one of the crucial turning points in the Revolution, when France was surrounded by hostile armies, the Girondin Party (which Theroigne defended) was about to capitulate, and only the seizure of power by the Jacobins at the end of May saved the revolution from collapse.

In late 19th century England, the attempt to create 'women's unions' uniting everyone from upper-class professional women to factory workers was full of problems which can't even begin to be understood without asking the question, *What is a trade union for?* Unfortunately, the example quoted above of the National Union of Women Workers is often written out of the history

'Very often women's history is written as to paper over cracks—the stress is all on unity and sisterhood.'

Textile Workers' Representation

Committee wrote about the first suffragette demonstrations: 'We are in great difficulties because our members in all parts of the country are so outraged at the idea of taking part in such proceedings ... It is not the fact of demonstrations or even violence that is offensive to them, it is being mixed up and held accountable as a class for educated and upper class women who kick, shriek, bite and spit.'

Very often, women's history is written as though to paper over these cracks (*The Cause*, by Ray Strachey, is an example). The stress is all on unity and sisterhood, the courage of individual women and the feeling that they all, after all, made some contribution to the common crusade.

Sometimes, on the other hand, such 'splits' are denounced wholesale, and one side or the other blamed for dividing the movement instead of uniting with all other women everywhere. (Claire Tomalin's treatment of the Revolutionary Republican Women in her *Mary Wollstonecraft* is an example of this).

In fact, the history of feminism is *by its very nature* full of divisions and conflicts, which cannot be explained away or blamed

of 'women's unions' just because it was less successful at paper over the class differences!

In the case of the activities of the Suffragettes, inspiring as they often seem it is the case that they neither sought nor, on the whole, got the support of the masses of working women in areas such as Lancashire. Their support for women's suffrage was wasted on the less militant and less successful, moderate Suffragist wing of the movement.

Understanding the relationship between class struggle and feminism, between the things that unite women and the things that divide them, is absolutely essential if we are ever to win socialism and women's liberation. No one would dream of excluding argument and controversy from the history of, say, the Labour Party, so it is time we faced up to it in the history of the women's movement.

Yes, women's history should be an inspiration and an example to us, it should include everyone who fought for whatever reasons—but it should also be *critical* and *class conscious* history, or else it is an entertaining but useless occupation.

Norah Carlin

SWEATING IT OUT

IN Victorian days it was fashionable for women to be pale and floppy, to indicate they didn't have to work—even if they really did. Among other advantages, this ensured that 'ladies' generally looked more 'feminine' than working women.

A new American book on women and sport—*Out of the Bleachers* (bleachers are the cheap seats in a baseball stadium)—includes reprints of some late Victorian writings on the 'dangers' to women of developing firm muscles: 'But the haze, the elusiveness, the subtle suggestion of the face are gone ...' they were warned in 1889. Rather like that other hazy frightening Victorian threat to young ladies that 'the light will go out of your eyes if you lose your virginity.'

Nowadays the style has changed. But is there a real difference?

Women's sport is generally regarded as more boring than men's—less demanding, less exciting. Even then it's all relative: In India the English women's cricket team recently played to packed crowds and became nationally known figures—because *any* cricket is exciting in India. In England they are still unknown.

Some modern articles on women's sporting capacity still paint a picture of women as merely disadvantaged in comparison to men: less muscle, more fat, proportionately smaller heart and lungs, less iron in the blood, less efficient at sweating.

And all these do *seem* at first sight to be sound reasons for treating women more gently in training and in performance. There is no doubt that women *are* treated more gently—whether in the US Olympic team (according to the editor of *Out of the Bleachers*) or in East London sports clubs (according to the experience of two friends of mine).

But the limits on what women athletes can do are still entirely open—particularly in endurance sports like long-distance swimming and running. The record for a two-way crossing of the channel (19 hours and 55 minutes) is held by a woman. And in long-distance running women are catching up on men at a phenomenal rate.

Norwegian Grete Waitz is way in front in this: in the 1978 New York Marathon she knocked two minutes off the women's record—to make a time that medical experts thought *might, one day, conceivably* be possible for a woman.

This sort of achievement is forcing the physiologists to redescribe women. For example, on the question of sweating, it is said: '...females do not begin sweating until the internal body heat has risen to a slightly



Woman pole-vaulter 1900

higher degree than is the case in men. Thus there is less ability to react to unfavourable heat ...' But Jim Fixx, in the latest issue of *Running Magazine* reports that women sweat *more* efficiently than men: 'In one hot-weather comparison of the sexes, only half the men were able to complete a four-hour work session. By contrast 92 per cent of the women were successful. The researchers concluded that women achieve proper thermoregulation with less sweat, perhaps because they are capable of a more precise sweating response. 'The male,' said one of them, 'is a prolific, wasteful sweater.' "

There is also dispute about whether women's body-fat is an advantage or a disadvantage. For some 'more fat' just means



Willye B White winning 100 yard event, 1961

'less muscle per unit volume'. More recent opinion suggests that in endurance sports (long-distance swimming and running), the extra fat may serve as an energy reserve.

Women's achievements are forcing the physiologists to change their tune: they could also have an effect on the sexual significance of men's achievements.

For example, Willye B. White ran and jumped her way from a black sharecropping family in Greenwood, Mississippi, to become—at 16 a silver medal winner in the long jump at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. And she was in the US team for the next four Olympics. She says, in an article in *Out of the Bleachers*, that her sporting career gave her independence and self-confidence.

But she also says: 'A female athlete is always two different people. A male athlete can be the same all the time. He doesn't have to defend his masculinity.' So off the track she wears 'short dresses and lots of make-up'.

But she doesn't date athletes: 'Athletes expect you to idolise them and since I am an athlete, too I do not think they are a great deal'.

Meanwhile, you don't have to be an Olympic athlete to gain benefits from running—benefits that the Victorians could never have dreamed of. For example, not only can you run when you have a period, but you can run when you're pregnant (as long as you're already used to running) and, it seems, you're likely to have a much easier pregnancy as a result.

Janet Vaux



Women's mini-marathon, 1976.

WOMENS HEALTH

Too thin or not too thin...

A FEW WEEKS ago the papers were full of stories about 'the model who ate herself to death'. The woman concerned spent her life on a programme of three days of total fasting, followed by a 'binge'—a huge meal—then returning to three days of fasting. She died following one of these binges, after she had eaten about twelve pounds of food.

A lot of us diet in varying degrees, perhaps after the Christmas holiday when we have stuffed our faces full of booze, turkey and Christmas pud, or before we are about to go on a holiday and can't face the prospect of a blob-like creature, fat rippling every time we take a step, emerging half-naked on the beach.

There's nothing new about wanting to be slim. Think of the Victorian 'handspan' waist of 17 inches. Some women even got their lowest rib removed to achieve this. It has long been considered to be 'feminine' to eat like a bird, to pick at light food, rejecting potatoes, bread and alcohol.

Whatever the reason, we are told that at least half the adult population of Britain is overweight—and that means in medical terms, too much weight for general physical health. Why? Well, a few people are overweight from just too much good living. The Tory cabinet don't seem short of a pound or two in more senses than one. They suffer from too many whiskies and expense-account lunches. But for working class people it's a different story.

The sort of food that is recommended by doctors and nutritionists as healthy and nourishing costs a lot of money. Stodge is cheap, and high protein foods are not. Meat has become a luxury. Over-priced convenience foods are continually thrust at us as a cheap, efficient way of feeding the family.

At the same time, a multi-million pound slimming industry exists, flogging appetite-suppressants, bran and cellulose, biscuits that taste like cardboard, and even 'by-pass surgery' or wired-up jaws to stop you eating. There are about four magazines on the market entirely devoted to slimming.

The desire to conform to the slim, sexy image of womanhood results in very drastic measures. One husband was reported in a magazine a few years ago as having soldered a wire around his wife's waist, just too tight for comfort. Every week she lost a little

weight, and every week he re-soldered the wire just too tight again. Eventually the much slimmer woman left her over-concerned husband we're glad to say.

The pressures on women, particularly young women, to be the 'right' shape are enormous. Eating is associated with love, that is, someone who loves you will feed you or make sure you're fed well. Think of all the chocolate box ads on TV—all are directed at men, urging them to buy chocolates for the woman they love. And at the same time, the message goes, you will never be loved unless you're slim and sexy in the first place.

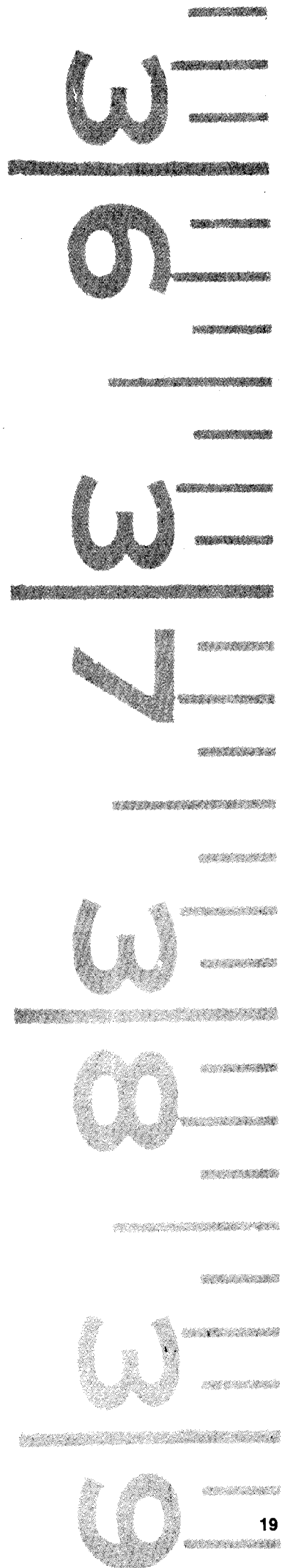
So most women, at some time in their lives, decide to diet. There are crash diets—steak and champagne, or bananas and boiled eggs, for a week or two—and there are long-term diets during which you cut out sugar, bread, potatoes and butter, and you get fed-up with not seeing results, so you eat a few bars of chocolate to console yourself.

Or you can go to your doctor, and he may prescribe appetite-suppressants—which may make you forget about food but turn you into a hyper-active insomniac. In this process you may become so obsessive about your weight that you never recognise the point when you have achieved your 'ideal' weight. It's called anorexia, and it can kill. Ninety per cent of anorexics are mostly young women. Anorexics and compulsive eaters share a preoccupation with food and a desire not to be noticed.

According to the statistics of Metropolitan Life Insurance, if you are 20 per cent overweight your expected lifespan is reduced by 25 per cent, and you are more likely to suffer from digestive and respiratory complaints, back-aches, diabetes and heart complaints.

We should not be looking for a 'Body Beautiful' that everyone should aspire to. Instead we should be demanding that everyone has the right to look the way they feel happy and comfortable with, and that everyone should have the resources to be healthy. That doesn't mean NHS health clubs, but that everyone should be able to have decent, tasty, nutritious food—and everyone includes the thousands of people who starve every year in India and Africa. It means that instead of changing the shape of our bodies, we have to change the world.

Penny Packham Lyn Turner



REVIEWS



RAINCOATS ODYSHAPE (ROUGH TRADE)

This is a new kind of music, a conscious attempt by women to create a sound of their own: soft, gentle, quiet but still angry. It takes some getting used to, because it is so different to the sounds that we're used to, but once you accept that, it's addictive.

Unlike the Slits, that other female-dominated new wave band, the Raincoats have not turned to black music for their inspiration, nor do they use traditional rock as do the Au Pairs. This is a jangling mix of guitars, violin, and various different percussion rather than the usual drum-kit on every song. The band and friends don't keep to the same instruments either, but all contribute together, elim-

inating the competition in most music and the emphasis on having to be a virtuoso in your own instrument. In this way, it truly is a group effort, with everyone working together.

The songs deal with the writers' own lives, and so with their experiences as women, resulting in some lyrics that make you smile with recognition. Take their words on worrying about looks: 'Hung up on fractional inches/Hung up for the cloth that pinches/Do I measure up to your expectations?/Am I owed any explanations?/She looks embarrassed, in the mirror, in magazines... I wonder if I'll ever look right?'

You won't hear this music on daytime radio, and may have problems finding it in local shops, but it's well worth looking out for. Raincoats are good company on wet and sunny days...

Diana Windsor

POWER CORRUPTS—THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST NUCLEAR POWER HILARY BACON AND JOHN VALENTINE PLUTO PRESS £1.50

If, when you start this book, you have the feeling that there must be some good in nuclear power or if you've never really thought about it, by the time you come to the end you will be convinced that nuclear power is unnecessary, appallingly dangerous and the cost is astronomical.

The book is short, very clear and straightforward and gives all its sources of information. It begins by very firmly dismissing the notion that we have nuclear power stations to generate electricity. The manufacture of plutonium for nuclear weapons provides the true reason for their existence. This is also the explanation for the secrecy and unlimited financial, technological and political power which governments have granted the industry.

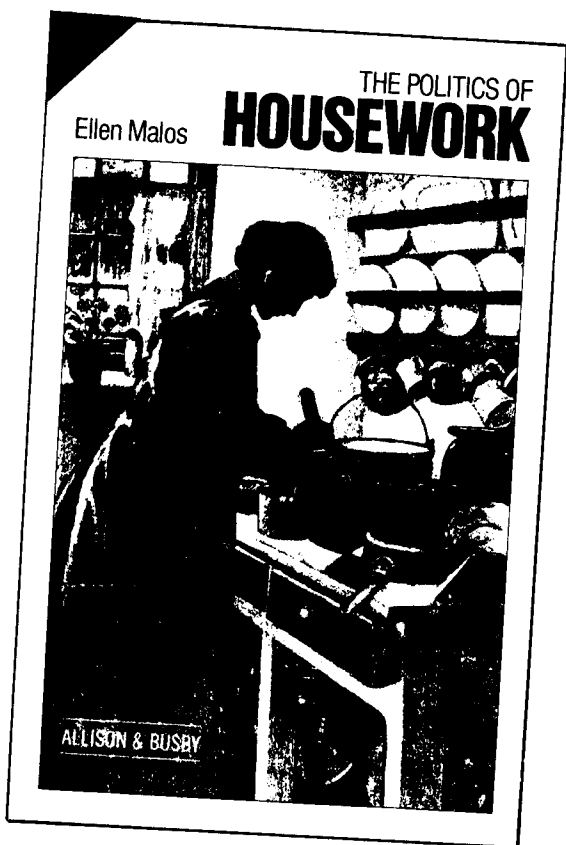
Low level radiation, which is routinely leaked into the environment at various stages in the nuclear cycle from the mining of uranium to the disposal of waste, is causing massive increases in the rate of cancer and cancer-related deaths both in workers themselves and in nearby populations. Yet the nuclear industry's 'government-funded propaganda machine' does its best to distort, confuse and whitewash the figures. A spokesman for the Central Electricity Generating Board has said the nuclear industry has not caused *extra* deaths, the deaths just happened *earlier* than they would otherwise have done!

The book describes the impossibility of safely disposing of waste, the dangers of spent fuel transport (8.5 tonnes of active spent fuel passes through London each week), the probability of an accident and the likely consequences, the costs both environmental and financial. Civil liberties are particularly vulnerable—the process imposes difficult and dangerous working conditions but totally overrides the rights of workers. There is an armed police force specially for the industry which is authorised to shoot on *suspicion* (of what?) as well as having rights of entry and search on suspicion.

What is missing from the book is a strategy for action to oppose nuclear power—though the possibility of mass action is hinted at in connection with the transport of spent fuel and disposal of waste (what about at the site of raw materials such as gravel to prevent their delivery at power station sites?). The Fire Brigades Union has officially condemned the transport of nuclear waste, and our task is to build on that kind of trade union resolution to the point where people refuse to work to make the profits for our rulers to pour into an industry which can only lead to our destruction.

Patricia Gibbons





THE POLITICS OF HOUSEWORK
ELLEN MALOS
ALLISON & BUSBY
£3.50

WHY can't women realise that being a domestic slave is dangerous? How is it that all the plays, poems, songs, books and tracts of the Women's Movement have had no impact on the way some women bring up their children?

Read *The Politics of Housework* and you will realise. This book is a collection of essays about housework. It will, no doubt, sit respectably on the shelves of every sociology department in the country. The victims—mothers with young children—will remain as free as crippled sparrows.

Some women get inspira-

If you want to review a book you have read, a film you have seen, a television programme you have watched or a band you have listened to, contact the Women's Voice Office (Reviews), PO Box 82, London E2. Phone 01-986 6222.

tion from the past. Long, long ago our menstrual blood was believed to give us divine powers. Only 600 years ago we were respected members of the community: we didn't just produce children we were skilled workers. The old guild records prove that there were women barbers, women furriers, women carpenters. This dazzling information is supposed to dim the fact that we had no rights. As for duties, a fourteenth century text instructs a woman to keep her husband 'in clean linen, for that is your business' because he goes out in rain and wind, in snow and hail now drenched, now dry, now sweating now shivering, ill-fed, ill-lodged, ill-warned and ill-bedded'.

No eloquent scribe lists women privations, no one points out we had no civic rights. There were no women on juries, no women constables, no women reeves. When social conflict became too great women were the ideal scape goats. It was women who were put in the ducking stool for standing up for themselves (nagging) and women who were burnt as witches.

The contributors to *The Politics of Housework* made no effort to romanticise about this century. They point out that women have been drawn into, and pushed out of, the labour market as required. Obviously the 50

per cent who're financially dependent on a man are more subordinated than those who earn money. But wages do not necessarily reduce oppression in the home. Valium and mental hospitals replace the ducking stool of the middle ages.

Again the struggles which women have been involved in during the past 15 years get no mention. Fights for union recognition, equal pay strikes, the abortion campaign have made improvements as well as increasing the confidence of those involved. These are as relevant as the fact mentioned that Sweden has the best social services in Europe, because a large workforce was needed, and the fact that the French government gives fairly generous child allowances—to encourage the birthrate.

One of the demands of the Women's Movement is 24 hour childcare. Instead of describing campaigns for nurseries we are treated to pages and pages of discussion on the wages for housework demand—which is eventually dismissed. One of the reasons given is expense: 'The Chase Manhattan Bank gave an estimate of \$257.573 (£120) per woman per week in 1970 which, according to the Houseworkers Handbook,

would have amounted to twice the US government budget. The high cost, they say, is due to 'the incredibly inefficient organisation of housework in 50 million isolated identical (in terms of production) domestic factories'—home'.

This is ammunition to those of us who're told there's nothing to housework. Day to day minor chores are always there. Even when neglected a woman, due to her conditioning, is aware of them. A visit to the bathroom is a reminder that the sink needs cleaning, the soap's nearly finished, the towel's wet, the flannel stinks and that the bath's scum line has UP CHARLTON engraved in it. It's time all members of the household felt responsible for this.

It was on women's oppression in the home that I expected this book to be useful. Doesn't the Women's Movement pride itself on the fact that the personal is political? Yet there is only one essay about sharing housework. In it an American gives an entertaining account of her efforts to enlist her husband. At first he was enthusiastic. Wasn't he against every form of oppression? In practice he used every tactic to avoid his share.

Julie Fancy

BLOOD SISTERS
VALERIE MINER
THE WOMEN'S PRESS
£3.50

Beth and Liz are both daughters of Irish emigrés and are cousins. They meet up in the home of Beth's mother, Gerry, in London. Liz is on her way to Ireland to pick up the threads of her Irish heritage which she feels she has lost because of her life in America. When the cousins get to know each other a whole realm of political differences are revealed. Liz is an ardent feminist, Beth a member of the Provisional IRA. Through their friendship the question of the relationship between feminism and socialism is tackled.

But the attempt fails. The characters are stereotyped:

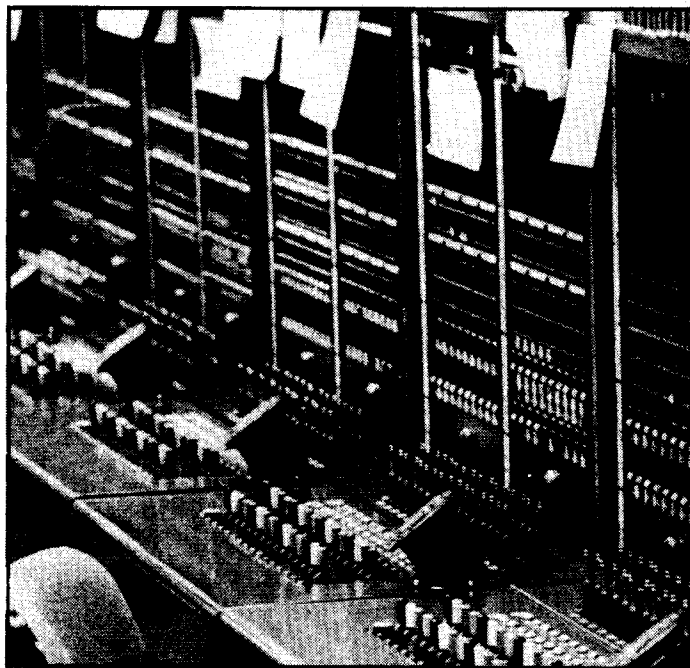
Liz lives a bohemian life style in a women's house in West Hampstead; Beth lives with her mother in a small flat in run-down Tufnell Park and spends her time hatching plots in pubs. The IRA are seen as a bunch of scheming men, the feminists as a bunch of looney women. This type of portrayal is very dangerous because it confirms existing prejudices against both socialist and feminist politics. I found that I was questioning Valerie Miner's sincerity, especially at the end of the book, because the conclusion seems to be that all that's important is to be sisters—blood sisters—and that this can cut across everything else. Not that I think it's right to demand political correctness from a book. But I do think that this new offering from the Women's Press leaves a lot to be desired.

Claire Harris

LETTERS



We're pulling plugs



Women's rights yes - but what of the child?

Dear Womens Voice

I am angry after reading the editorial in the September issue of *Womens Voice*. The logical conclusion of your argument is that socialists should advocate euthanasia.

The baby in question was born with Downs Syndrome (the word 'mongol' is quite obviously racist but that doesn't appear to worry you). The operation was minor surgery to relieve a blocked intestine. By arguing that this is 'artificially' keeping the child alive you use the logic of those religious cranks who refuse blood transfusions.

In the past most Downs children died in the first three years. Mainly because of heart conditions or from chest infections. The discovery of antibiotics has greatly increased the lifespan of people with Downs Syndrome.

They are rarely physically handicapped—they can now be admitted to a special school before they are five and can stay on until they are 19 (as a result of a struggle of parents in Oxfordshire). They can live full and interesting lives, they can give as well as receive love to friends and relatives. Most families with whom I've had contact demonstrate that having a handicapped member can add things to compensate for the heartache and worry.

Of course it's true that in Thatcher's brave new Britain services for the handicapped and their families are inadequate. But is's not true, as you imply, that parents are

'forced' to care for them. There are social services hostels which provide long and short term care. Fostering and adoption are now increasingly used as an alternative to institutions.

Of course none of this is enough. But it is possible even under capitalism. It is our duty to defend and fight for more services. Also we must realise that the mentally handicapped are oppressed in capitalist society—they are 'useless' because they are not 'productive'. What is more in many cases they cannot articulate their needs or desires. It is our duty to defend them.

For this reason we cannot support any argument that medical non-intervention be justified or socially acceptable because a mentally handicapped person will be a 'burden' imposed by the cuts. This is of course true. But would you also argue that old people should join EXIT because of the cuts in hospitals and old peoples homes? I hope not!

The ideas underlying the editorial are wrong. They are ill considered and based on pessimism. I must make it clear that I support a woman's right to control her own body—but this is a separate question. The child was an independent life whose survival depended on the values placed on her worth as a handicapped person. I hope you change your line.

Jim Fagan
Hackney SWP

Dear Womens Voice

I had always thought that my bosses knew what they were doing. They seemed to have their work well organised and could pull a smart answer out of the hat if they needed to. It didn't seem possible to stand up to them and to get them to treat us secretaries as equals—there was always some petty regulation they could use to make us feel as if we were not up to scratch.

That is, until they decided to make the switchboard operator redundant and threaten two more of us with redundancy. The idea is to get some fancy new-technology telephone which does not need an operator. We started to question the management decisions which had led to this. We went to the union (NALGO) to ask what we could do. Although there is little chance of saving the switchboard operator's job, we will probably have a protest strike and we will refuse to do any of her work.

The thought of the secretaries refusing to do work they are told to has terrified our management. It really is like taking a toy from a child. Amidst their lunatic rantings they come out with arguments about the recession and having to save money in order for any of us to have jobs. They say that we are all in the same boat and that we have to co-operate and pull together. The switchboard operator is expected to shrug her shoulders and say 'it's all in a good

cause'. This is how the management intends to divide and rule us. They want us so terrified about losing our jobs that we will do the work of our mates to save our own skin.

We will not co-operate. We are not party to any of the policies which have led to our department's financial difficulties (in fact we have opposed some of them), just as the decision to cut university funding was not ours.

The last couple of weeks have shown us what our management is like. We can see through them, they are interested only in holding onto their fat salaries and they do not care who pays for it.

Mary Williams
East London

She should join a union

Dear Womens Voice,
I was pleased to read the article by Chantal Galliker in your September issue, as the matter of domestic workers has been largely ignored by even the TUC until recently and, of course many such workers are not protected by the Sex Discrimination Act. It's not only 'au pairs' who are employed under these appalling conditions. Similar accounts of exploitation could

easily have been obtained from nannies, cooks, gardeners, butlers, grooms, chauffeurs or any other workers whose employment is largely ignored when governments (Labour included) introduce employment 'protection' legislation.

I sympathise greatly with Chantal, having done similar work myself (though for much more pay) but one thing did bother me: as a student of English why was she not a member of the NUS? They would no doubt have offered her plenty of advice, and, if necessary, legal aid. As a domestic worker she should have joined a union such as the TGWU or the GMWU, both of which are currently recruiting large numbers of domestic workers, mostly in hotels and restaurants.
Zoe Pitt
TGWU
Nottingham

Cold war costs lives

Dear Womens Voice

You will no doubt have been as alarmed as we are by the Cold War policies being adopted by Reagan and Thatcher. While the effect of these policies for us in Britain has been to cause uncertainty and fear about the future, in Central America they have already cost thousands of lives.

While credit and spare parts are being denied to the revolutionary governments in Nicaragua and Grenada, military aid to the Salvadorean junta and the Honduran and Guatemalan armies has been massively increased. At the same time thousands of former National Guardsmen from Nicaragua are being trained in Miami and Honduras with the active connivance of the US government. Far from condemning these policies, Margaret Thatcher has tacitly supported them, even though some 10,000 people have been murdered by the security forces in El Salvador since Reagan's arrival at the White House.

In response to this horrific situation an East London El Salvador Support Committee has been formed.
Richard Furtada
East London El Salvador Support Committee.
302 Burdett Road London E14

DIRTY LINEN

Who is it that can't take their minds off their promotion prospects, except to explode over a sexy pin-up? Who is it that doesn't understand the stress on working wives of a double job? Who would think it silly to try to persuade men to give a real hand in the housework (not just drying up, but cleaning the lavatory as well)?

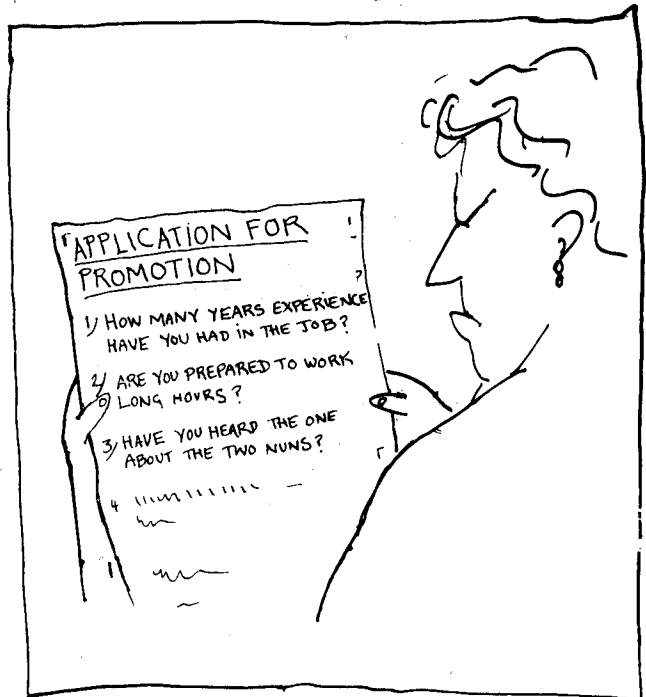
Would you believe ... feminists? Well anyway, Anne Robinson, the Women's Editor of the *Daily Mirror*, is able to believe it.

Her hard-hitting feature on the stress of being a working wife, based on a recent Lancaster University report, would probably have never been written without the last ten year's of the women's movement campaigning.

But she says: 'Let the feminists get on with their campaign to rule the world. Most of us would be better off freeing ourselves from some of the stresses of running two lives.'

Maybe it's just that all the 'feminists' she meets have *au pairs* and high-powered fascinating jobs: Women's Editor on a national newspaper, and so on.

Or maybe it's the *Mirror's* usual standard of accuracy in reporting any politics to the left of Denis Healey.



What do they do in a patent agent's office?

A woman technical officer in a Birmingham patent agents was recently passed over for promotion, on the grounds that she doesn't like dirty jokes.

She has also lost her claim that she had been the victim of sex discrimination. The industrial tribunal accepted the firm's claim that,

although she was the most senior, experienced and competent candidate, she had been 'too aware of her superiority over her male colleagues', had 'lost her sense of humour' and 'ceased to be 'one of the boys', so that 'it had become difficult to tell her a dirty joke'.

I don't suppose she sees the funny side of that, either.

He tried to join the SAS, but they said he was too famous. Bode of the TV series *The Professionals* (actor Lewis Collins) carries his image of chic brutality back into real life. He was

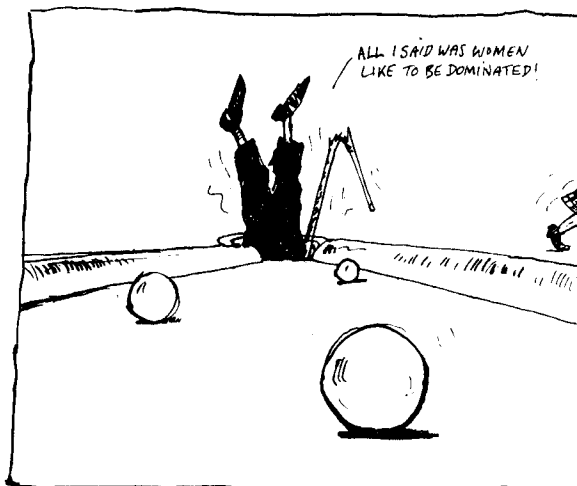
recently fined £300 for trying to clear up a quarrel between his father and two young women by firing a gun into the living room wall.

He was a part-time Army paratrooper at the time when the SAS rejected him, on the grounds that his face was too well known for their brand of secret army work. But he still says: 'The SAS are my heroes.'

In Belfast and Derry the SAS image is less glamorous: it has a reputation for a professional line in murder and torture.

And did you know that the rise in the 'illegitimate' birth rate is due to teaching children about contraception?

Apparently unmarried parenthood has risen in every age group, except those too old to have received sex education at school. Clear proof. (For the *Daily Mail*, anyway—which seems to be against sex education).



More on the sexual innuendoes of snooker: according to Steve Davis—the new and youngest ever world champion—it's a symbolic game. It's a cruel game. And, let's face it, the

majority of women like to be dominated ... The cue is a well-known phallic symbol.' But, he adds modestly, 'I don't expect to give the girls in the audience an orgasm when I pot the ball.'

SANDRA



No longer left out



EVER since my sight began to fail about ten years ago I have had to rely on tapes, braille and people reading to me for everyday information. Publications such as *Womens Voice* and *Spare Rib* were not available to me. I have been a feminist for most of those years, learning about the women's movement through friends reading to me.

Only the feminist magazines told the truth about feminism. But I could not read them without assistance.

Depressed and frustrated about the situation, I decided to advertise for other blind or partially sighted people—or indeed sighted allies and friends—to help me set up some talking magazines, socialist and feminist. I was inundated with phone calls from sisters and brothers feeling as frustrated and isolated as I.

At a meeting of these people we set up the 'Alternative Talking Newspapers Collective'. We found people to help us with technical things, a studio, tape copying facilities, a plethora of readers and helpers.

We formed a structure, and an editing process to sift through the enormous amount of material we wanted to cover in each issue but just did not have room for, and then decided to bring out monthly socialist and feminist magazines.

We wrote to a lot of socialist and feminist magazines to gain permission to copy, and then we began to get a lot of publicity and support. We brought out a trial run in May, which was such a success that we deadlined our first issue for 1 July. We called it *Left Out*.

Having launched the socialist magazine we turned to our next project, a feminist monthly. We brought together a committee of women, and scheduled *Womens Tapeover* for mid-September.

Braille and tape services are controlled by charities who are financed by the benevolent rich and the government. It's not surprising, then, that these services don't cover the sort of material produced by left and feminist organisations. The charitable organisations say that they have to cater for the majority of blind people, who are over sixty. But the time-worn excuse of no money covers a multitude of sins, and I feel sure that the attitudes of

those in control are not well disposed to socialism and feminism. Besides which, charity isn't exactly a socialist concept.

There are many of us who will join your ranks eagerly, participate in your campaigns, be as vociferous as you about issues that affect us all. But we are not being given the chance; some of us don't even know what is happening. That material is actually being censored by the 'well-meaning' often right-wing attitudes of the volunteers who man our services. We need your help to spread these ideas.
Kirsten Hearn

Anyone interested in helping with or subscribing to either of these magazines should contact Alternative Talking Newspapers Collective, Box 35, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8. Left Out and Womens Tapeover cost £3 a year to subscribe. Send cheques or postal orders, made out to ATNC, to the above address. Donations are also welcome.

Why I became a socialist

Rosemary Puntin comes from Newcastle, and has spent more than a year on the dole. She told *Womens Voice* how her experience of unorganised workplaces and then involvement in the Right to Work Campaign led her towards socialist ideas

I come from a Catholic working class family. Most of them vote Labour, I think, but there might be a few suspect Tories! My mam has brought up three kids and a husband. I include the husband because all the women in my family cook, wash and clean for their husbands so I think it's just like having an extra kid.

I went to a Catholic convent school. I really hated it. I can remember some Sunday nights, when I was only about seven, crying in bed, worried because I hadn't gone to mass and I knew that the teacher would ask me on Monday morning what the sermon was about and what colour robes the priest wore. So my sister, who was much better at going to church than me, used to tell me—but sometimes she got it wrong.

The school was very strict. Most of the kids there were working class. But I don't think the teachers can have thought of that, because when I first went there I remember bringing home a list with the school uniform written on it. The list including everything from shirts to a briefcase, and were only available from a really expensive shop called Raymond Barnes. My poor mam had to get me this uniform and it cost her a fortune.

I gave my mam a hell of a time when I was at school. I hated it so much that every morning I used to plead with her to let me stay off. I used to say it was alright for her going out to work—nobody bosses her around when she's there. I must have had some grand ideas about work!

But they soon disappeared when I started work myself. Most of the work I've done has been poorly paid shop work. I've never worked in a place where they had a union, although they all needed one badly. Once I tried to start one up. It was in a chemists' shop in Newcastle where I was employed as a sales assistant along with another ten women. We were also expected to do cleaning, but needless to say we weren't paid for that.

I talked to one of the women who I thought would know how to go about organising a union, but she said 'what do we want a union for?' I nearly died—I had thought it was such a great idea because we all complained about the conditions there, so why not do something about it? It wasn't only the cleaning thing that got me. The place where we were supposed to have our teabreaks was under the shop in the stock room. The paint

was peeling off the walls and dropping into the cups. The toilet was cracked and when you sat on it the water ran out onto your feet. The toilet walls were damp and there were always loads of little flies in there. And this woman was asking why we needed a union! The fact that her husband was scabbing on the lorry drivers' strike at the time may have had something to do with it.

I couldn't wait to get home and talk to my step-father about it—I expected him to agree with me. But he said that I should be grateful for the job, and the shop had a lot of overheads like heating, lighting and rates. But most important he said they had a profit to make, so instead of complaining I should be glad, and understand about the profit the shop had to make.

'The only people who are going to help the working class ARE the working class'

I asked him if he thought that when they made this profit they would give us higher wages and a decent tea room and loo. He told me that there was no point in making a profit and then giving it to the staff.

We also had a discussion about the NHS prescription charges. He said that they had gone up because we are all greedy—we get things on the NHS when we don't need them, and the workers are always too greedy. That really disgusted me, because my step-father's working class himself.

Anyway I didn't complain about the job for much longer because soon after that I went on the dole. After a while of being on the dole I became really fed up. There's a real stigma attached to being unemployed. There's always someone telling you how many scroungers there are, or somebody who knows someone who's running a car, got two colour televisions and buying their own

house—all courtesy of the Social Security!

I've always cut down anyone who was talking like that, but usually after you win the first part of the argument and explain how little people get from SS, you get onto the matter of how unemployment is caused. I can't remember how many times I've heard 'if the blacks went back to their "own" country there would be more work for the rest of us' or 'if women would stay at home then men with families could have jobs'. It's so easy to say things like that. They are the excuses the bosses want us to make, because as long as we are at each other's throats we will never get organised to fight the real culprits—them.

One day when I was signing on I was given a leaflet outside the dole office. I read it and got really interested. It was from the Right to Work Campaign, explaining about a march that was coming up, going from South Wales to Brighton to picket the Tory Party conference over unemployment.

I filled in the form and decided to go to a meeting to find out about it. I became involved in raising money for the march and leafletting the dole. It really encouraged me to meet other people who were unemployed, and realising that with the help of employed workers we could fight back.

I was asked if I'd like to go to an SWP meeting, but I wasn't sure because I thought I might not be intelligent enough to discuss politics. But Alan, my husband, encouraged me, so I went. After a couple of meetings I realised that the only people who are going to help the working class are the working class. Until then, in the back of my mind, I still had faith in politicians.

I joined the SWP along with Alan after a good meeting. I've been on the dole now for more than a year, and the only thing that has kept me going is political activity. Since I first joined the SWP I've gained a lot of confidence. I've been involved in the organising for this year's Right to Work march, and I'm looking forward to the picket of the Tories in Blackpool on 16 October.

I became a socialist for loads of reasons, some of which I've mentioned here but there are a lot more. To be a socialist is a case of looking at the class division of this society, hating it and wanting to change it.

Womens Voice is an organisation that fights for women's liberation and socialism. We fight for: Equal pay Free abortion and contraception Maternity leave and child care provision The right to work Against all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex, sexual orientation, or race. Women's liberation is only possible through women organising and fighting for themselves. Women's liberation can only be achieved by linking its struggles to those of the working class and overthrowing the capitalist system. *Womens Voice* supports the aims of the Socialist Workers Party. It is organisationally independent but based on the politics of the SWP.

**Your nearest
Womens Voice
Group meets**

**join the
fight!**

I want to join the fight ...

Name
Address

Send to Womens Voice
PO Box 82, London, E2
26

**WHAT IS
GOING
ON?**

WV groups

- **ACTON WV** Ruth or Jude 740 6660
- **NORTH BIRMINGHAM WV** Maggie 021 449 4793
- **SOUTH BIRMINGHAM WV** Jill 021 459 1718
- **BLACK COUNTRY WV** 27 Glen Court, Compton Road
- **BRADFORD WV** Trish Bradford 585 913 for details of meetings and activities
- **BRIGHTON WV** phone 696897
- **BRISTOL WV** Katrina 46875
- **Cambridge WV** contact Trisha Cambridge 68226
- **CANTERBURY WV** Barbara, Lyminge 862 742
- **CHELTENHAM WV** meets every Thursday. For babysitters and information, Jacqui 511370
- **CHORLTON WV** Claire 226 1048
- **COVENTRY WV** 361 585
- **COLCHESTER WV** 22 5650 for details
- **DUDLEY WV** Brigitte Brierley Hill 78308
- **EALING/SOUTHALL WV** Christine or Jane 571 1838
- **ECCLES AND SALFORD WV** Jannie 707 2557 or Ann 737 3800
- **EDIINBURGH WV** Penny 57 0731
- **EDGE HILL COLLEGE WV** Bev Southport 212 140
- **ENFIELD WV** Nora 807 1741
- **FINSBURY PARK WV** Wendy 01 254 9632 (days)
- **GLASGOW WV** Clare 357 1157
- **GLOSSOP WV** Derbyshire - Carol, Glossop 64287
- **GLOUCESTER WV** Maggie Gloucester 413910
- **HALIFAX WV** every Friday 12-1pm, Co-op Arcade on the Precinct
- **HAMMERSMITH AND WEST KENSINGTON WV** Ginny 749 7292 or Eileen 960 6088
- **HATFIELD AND WELWYN WV** phone Cathy Hatfield 65238
- **HEMEL HEMPSTEAD WV** Val, Berkhamstead 74468
- **HORNSEY WV** Maggie 341 1182
- **KENTISH TOWN WV** Pauline 586 5693
- **KINGSTON WV** Emma 979 9682
- **LAMPETER WV** c/o SDUC Lampeter, Dyfed, Wales
- **LANCASTER WV** ring 36196
- **LEEDS WV** Gilda 622 800 or Bev 457 098
- **LEICESTER WV** Fiona 0533 62855
- **LEYTONSTONE WV** Anne (556 5595) or Pam (558 1509)

- **LIVERPOOL WV** Jane 727 1182
- **LOWESTOFT WV** c/o 107, Montgomery Avenue, Lowestoft
- **LUTON WV** Denise 35 Chatsworth Road, Luton
- **MEDWAY WV** Lici, Medway 571628
- **NORTH MANCHESTER WV** phone Sandy 205 0384 or, Maria 205 7657
- **NEWCASTLE WV** Liz 854 782
- **NEWHAM WV** Pam 534 1417
- **NORWICH WV** c/o 56 Benedicts St, Norwich
- **NOTTINGHAM WV** Chrissie Langley Mill 62356
- **PIMLICO WV** Helen 730 7983 or Leslie 834 0760
- **READING WV** Shirley 585556
- **ST HELENS WV** Carol, St Helens 28178
- **SHEFFIELD WV** Sue 613 739
- **Slough WV** Sharon maidenhead 26862
- **SOUTH LONDON WV** Sally 720 5768
- **SOUTHWARK WV** c/o PO Box 82, London E2 9DS or Elaine 670 3774 (day)
- **SOUTH WEST LONDON WV** Marion 947 0560
- **STOKE ON TRENT WV** Sandra 814094
- **TOTTENHAM WV** Mary 802 9563
- **TOWER HAMLETS WV** Sue 488 2626
- **WALTHAMSTOW WV** phone Sue 521 5712
- **WHALLEY RANGE WV** Claire 061 226 1048
- **WREXHAM WV** Heather 872

London Road, Thornton Heath. Workshops, bookstalls, displays, creche, food. Women only. 7.30-10.30 evening event. Mixed. Details Emily 651 3643.

WORKING? CHILD-CARE PROBLEMS? Kingsway Children's Centre in the centre of London has places for children from 3 months to 5 years. KCC is an employer subsidised nursery run on a non-profit making basis by a management committee of parents and staff. The nursery workers, who include an SRN, nursery nurses, music and infants teachers will provide a caring and stimulating environment for your child. We try to keep the fees for parents to roughly childminder levels (they are currently £78 a month, going up to £99 in October for parents, plus an employer subsidy of £156 rising to £198). If you are working or thinking of going back to work and need somewhere you can trust for your children why not give us a ring on 242 4284.

SCOTTISH NA Cering Sponsored Bike Ride. 26-27 September, linking Aberdeen, Dundee, Perth, Stirling, Edinburgh, Falkirk and Glasgow in legs. Sponsors urgently needed. Contact Priscilla, Dundee (0382) 25945.

Small ads

CROYDON Womens Day 10 October 10.30-5.00 West Thornton Community Centre,

COVENTRY WV discussion meeting on 'WV — for womens liberation and socialism' Tuesday 13 October 8.00pm. Phone 361585 for details.

**Make sure you get the
Socialist Worker every week**

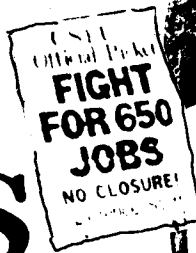
- FOR liveliest, up to date, inside news on ALL workers struggles.
- FOR regular, weekly news on all women's issues.
- FOR black and white unity in action.
- FOR Jobs not Bombs. No to Thatcher's missile madness.
- FOR the Right to Work. Employed and unemployed unite and fight.
- FOR workers solidarity and international socialism.



Buy it, read it and sell it!

DO IT YOURSELF

VISITING FACTORIES



T.G.W.U. EQUAL PAY FOR WOMEN

I worked in a shop until I got married and then as a part time worker in school meals while my children were growing up. It was only a while back that I realised that although I had been associated with a few strikes through my former husband when he was a shop steward — I had never actually been inside a factory. The same is probably true for the majority of us.

SEEING WHAT IT'S LIKE

I talked a friend of mine into showing me around his factory that manufactured cables. You could do the same. I expected to find workers all over the place because it seemed a fairly large factory. To my utter shock, although the evening shift was working, there were hardly any workers — it was all being done by machines. I knew machines would be doing a lot of the process, but in my wildest imagination I couldn't have imagined so much, and the smell was terrible it hung all over the place like a blanket. Then I saw my friend's job, he sat on a chair all of his shift just watching that the process moved smoothly and making some adjustments when necessary. It was such a monotonous, boring, mind-bending occupation. Yet workers did this day in and day out for years on end. When I left that factory I talked about it for days, it shook me. Yet since then I've found a lot worse conditions in other factories. It's an invaluable experience to actually get inside a factory and see it for yourself.

VISITING DISPUTES

It's always important for us to visit factories in dispute, to talk to people, get stories and to help in anyway possible. It is usually easy to find out when there is a local dispute; check in the local paper every week but normally you'll hear people talking about it. But the most important thing is to be consistent — always follow up your visits.

The factory I'll always remember visiting was in St Helens recently at Holman Mitchell where a group of male workers were fighting redundancies by occupying their factory. They worked in awful conditions handling lead, that was slowly poisoning them. I get quite nervous going up to a picket line, but after the first 'hello's' are said and the introductions are made I find my nervousness has gone. I say that I'm from the Socialist Workers Party and then show them our paper and magazine and then ask them if we can have a story from them — I'm now ready to argue politics, some are friendly, some are not. At Holman Mitchell's I found that I challenged all

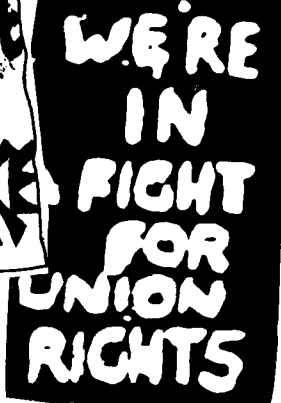
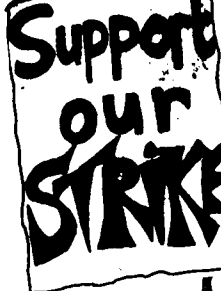
their set ideas about women. I gave the convenor a pamphlet called 'Sisters and Workers' which I had written an introduction to explaining how I came to revolutionary politics. A few days later I found it inside the factory with fingermarks all over it, it had been well read.

We had friendly discussions on such things as women's role in society, abortion, Ireland, the police, religion and was socialism possible? But being in that factory at short notice in the early hours of the morning ready to defend it in case it was smashed up by the bailiffs made them see women differently. We had to argue that if the bailiffs did come that we weren't stopping in the canteen as they wanted and that we were going to fight alongside them. What that showed to me was that we can talk and argue our heads off, but what really changes male workers' view of women is our activity — we have to prove that we can fight just as good as the next person on the picket line, it is there that you challenge all set ideas about women.

OUTSIDE THE FACTORY OR WHEN IT'S OVER

Outside the factory, in the pub, we bought them pints which they found hard to accept at first because 'women don't buy men pints of beer'. Once we had managed to break down the barriers that exist between men and women we all worked hard to win that strike. But it was smashed up by the police and bailiffs and a few weeks later, after picketing in all weathers, the union officials sold them out good and proper.

I'm not a person who weeps at sad films, or new born babies, but on my way to the meeting after the strike had ended I saw the deserted picket line with the placards leaning up against the wall, the top one read 'T&G Official Strike'. I wept first, then I kicked the placard out of hatred and contempt for union officials that had smashed the lives of really nice working class people that I'd shared cups of tea and ideas with while fighting for jobs in a factory that was ruining their healths. But in this capitalist society with three million on the dole, kids and all the other pressures that grind us down — they had no alternative but to fight for their jobs. One bloke from that dispute is going on the Right to Work March. It's really important to follow people up, visit them every week and when possible involve them in activity — that's what really counts after the dispute has ended.



RIGHT TO WORK CAMPAIGN

Usually when we visit factories for the RTWC, either taking workers from a dispute round to raise money and support or for the RTW march, there is someone in the factory whom we know, or have made contact with. In this case it is easy — you ask to see the person in question for 'union business', even if you don't know them personally it's better to have a name rather than none at all. When you are making contact for the first time it's brash confidence that counts — go to the gate and say you want to see the convenor/shop steward and say you're from the regional union office/health and safety executive ... whatever you think you can carry off.

ONCE YOU'RE IN

Explain who you are and what you want. We found when visiting factories that it's best to go through the arguments, about the need for unity between the unemployed and employed workers. Then we left sponsorship forms and collection sheets and called back in a few days for the collection. If you have the time and the people it's better to have factory gate collections for disputes/marches. But don't make the mistake we did. There was a factory we always visited for the RTWC and we decided to give it a miss in case they were fed up with us. Then one night I got a phone call from one of the workers asking me why we hadn't visited, and could they please have some collection sheets. This made up for all the insults, the foot slogging and the rebuffs. The lessons to be learned is to be consistent and never give up hope.

I still get a bit frightened going factory visiting, but a bit of confidence and after the first 'hello' it's usually alright.

Sadie Blood



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SECURITY ACT 1966

Reference Number 1610 125261

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I, J. SWAIN (full name in block capitals, please)

hereby appeal against the decision issued to me on _____
in connection with my claim for supplementary benefit.

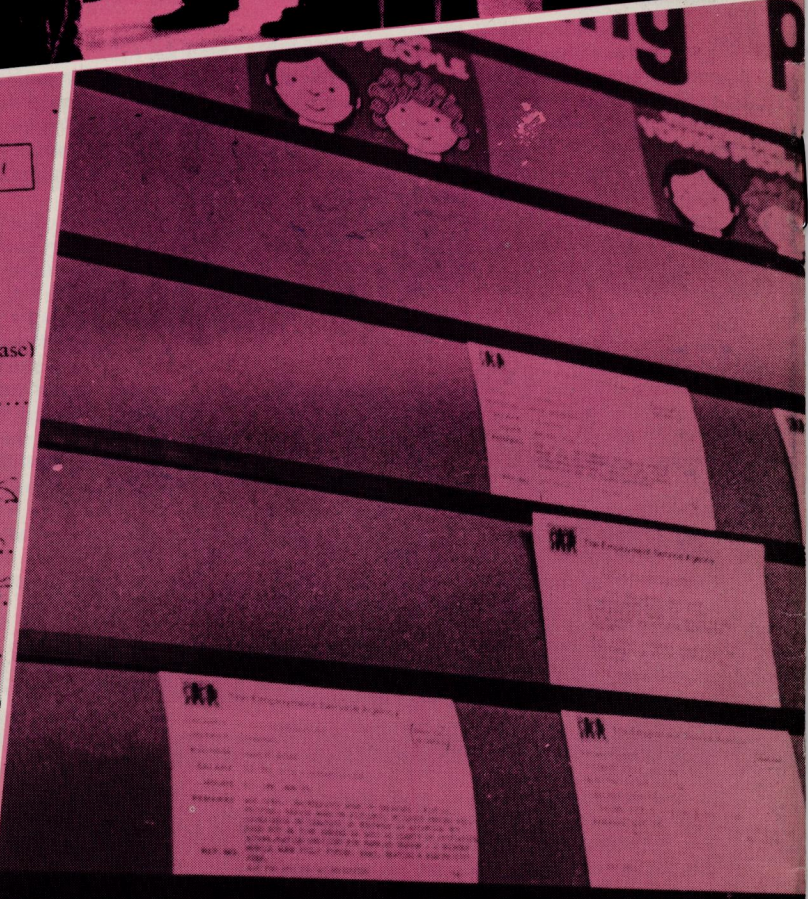
I appeal on the following grounds: MY PARENTS
MOTHER & FATHER ARE PENSIONERS AND
MY MOTHER TO KEEP MYSELF
THEY ALREADY HAVE RI STOPPED
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WARD SHIP RENT £3.89 GAS 10/-
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Signature of Appellant J. Swain

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Note. An addressed envelope is enclosed to use for sending in this form
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