

SOCIALIST WOMAN

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Signed articles do not necessarily represent editorial opinion.

EDITORIAL

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE WLM AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The main emphasis of the first stage of the WLM was to identify and understand the nature of women's oppression, to turn personal anger and frustration into a political theory and programme of action. This was the importance of 'consciousness raising'. This stage was crucial in developing that such a theory already existed and that it was a simple question of 'bringing into' the movement a Marxist theory of women's oppression which was thought to be relatively unproblematic. But, of course, mainly because of the disastrous effects of Stalinism on the development of Marxist theory, only the very bare bones of a theory of women's oppression in advanced capitalism existed. There are, however, significant limitations to consciousness raising as a method of developing a theory and a political movement, as many in the movement have realised. These include a tendency to reject, a priori, any theoretical approach which does not immediately relate to experience. Also a tendency to take up the Germaine Greer type of position, which sees women's oppression mainly in terms of impositions of roles and cultural definitions of women's identity. This led some women in the movement to stop at a stage where they had achieved a certain kind of personal liberation through deconditioning themselves of oppressive cultural definitions, re-arranging roles within their social relationships and, insofar as this was possible, they saw little necessity for further political commitment, their commitment to the Women's Liberation Movement became purely social.

That is, they relate to the movement in terms of gaining a kind of social solidarity to maintain their personal liberation in the face of continuing sexist pressures from the straight world. For want of a better term this current could be called 'life stylist' in that their politics stop at the level of life style. The other currents that we will now discuss do not reject 'life stylism' but politically go beyond it.

The other currents can be divided into four types: radical feminists, libertarians, reformists and revolutionary socialists. This typology is somewhat schematic in the sense that empirically they occasionally merge, and in the sense that further differentiation is needed between different types of revolutionary socialists. These currents represent different interpretations of the second stage of the WLM (which could be marked by the conference after Skegness in Manchester 1971), that is the move towards an external orientation, the search for a strategy for destroying the oppressive institutions that were identified in different ways in the first stage. They must also be understood as differing reactions to changes in the general political context, in particular the growing militancy of the working

class. The differences in responses are to be explained partly in terms of prior theoretical formation and political experience.

The core of the libertarians probably consists of those who emerged from, or were most influenced by, the rejuvenation of anarchism that was produced by aspects of student radicalisation. This was carried over into and developed within the growing WLM. There it was strengthened by a basic aspect of theories of women's oppression that focused on the consequences of various forms of authoritarianism. Predictably, they responded to the increase in working class militancy by involving themselves in the least union-dominated aspects of working class politics, viz: claimants' unions, some tenants associations, etc.

FEMINISM

Although there are a number of different versions of radical feminism, their common basic theme is that the struggle for women's liberation is the central political struggle, the struggle with the greatest potential for revolutionary change. This is based on several arguments, not all of which are part of every version of radical feminism; firstly, they argue that the family is the most fundamental oppressive institution for the maintenance of the present system and therefore the struggle against it has political primacy; secondly, women's liberation has most revolutionary potential because women have least interest in the status quo, the male working class are continually held back by their male chauvinism and their vested interest in the family and the oppression of women. Radical feminism was particularly strong in the early stages of the WLM when prior to the upsurge in working class militancy, there was an apparent empirical relevance of the idea that the male white working class had been compromised and integrated by — among other factors — its complicity in the oppression of women (and of blacks).

The increasing political activity of sections of the working class somewhat undermined the practical significance of radical feminism which could not provide an adequate theory of how such political developments related to the WLM, or of what strategy the WLM should have towards them. Most women intuitively saw the necessity to relate to them which they did through supporting strikes, mobilisation around the struggle in Ireland, etc. We shall discuss these responses when we discuss the revolutionary current (which has been significantly strengthened by them), but before getting too euphoric about them, it is necessary to distinguish between, on the one hand, a theory losing its practical influence because it is surpassed by events and, on

the other, an alternative theory being accepted. In fact, because an alternative theory, i.e. a revolutionary socialist theory, which could both explain these events and provide a coherent and detailed analysis of their importance for women's liberation, does not exist in a sufficiently developed form, therefore, various forms of radical feminism still hold a strong position in the theoretical debates going on in the WLM.

The reformist current which has only recently appeared — around the campaign on the Anti-Discrimination Bill (this does not mean that any campaign on this is inherently reformist) — is mainly based among women in the professions, particularly the media. Their main perspective is one of finishing off the tasks of the suffragettes in terms of the remaining obstacles to women's career and other forms of overt discrimination. Of course there have, in many periods, been similar groups of women, what is distinctive about these is their close relationship with the WLM. Because of their articulateness, and organising ability they have, in London in particular, made their definition of and strategy for the campaign the most influential one.

REVOLUTIONARY CURRENTS

The core of the revolutionary current were active in the student movement of '68 and '69, some were then members of, or close to, revolutionary organisations. But the effect of an increasing consciousness of their oppression as women and their involvement in the WLM was not a simple one of intensification of radicalisation. Because a theory of women's oppression hardly existed and it was not an easy question of 'applying' marxism to problem of women's oppression, and because of the residues of bourgeois ideology, in this case male chauvinism, within revolutionary organisations there was during the first stage of theory-formation, the revolutionary current was not as distinctive as it has now become. It did exist at this stage, e.g. the various marxist study groups in the London workshop, but unless there exist clearly developed alternative theories, the early processes of theory formation are necessarily more unifying among oppressed groups than discussion and implementation of programmes and strategy. The emergence of a relatively strong left current is an understanding of the necessity to play a specific part in the intensification of revolutionary struggle. I underline 'specific' because an important consequence of the first stage of the WLM for the majority of the left current is to reject all perspectives which merely offer a different version of their starting off point, student politics, i.e. a submergence of the issues and organisational forms of women's liberation into an economistic conception of class struggle.

In briefly outlining the main characteristics of these currents I do not want to imply that they are all totally false except for the revolutionary socialist one. This clearly is not true, for example, many of the criticisms made by the libertarians of the dangers of the movement becoming bureaucratic and generating its own internal authoritarianism are important and are accepted by most revolutionary socialists who have been active in the movement. Similarly, the hostility of the radical feminists towards economism is correct, except that they tend to assume that all marxists are necessarily economistic.

On the question of future perspectives there is an important step which could now be taken in relation to the campaigning, external orientation aspect of the movement. That is

the organisation, from a position of strength, of campaign based alliances with organisations that are not part of the WLM e.g. trade union branches, local Labour parties, tenants associations etc. This could increase the effectiveness of the campaigns both in terms of their immediate objectives and in terms of the more general goals of politically involving more women who are not yet in the WLM and of combatting sexist ideology in the working class. It would be complementary to, rather than an alternative to, the existing tactics of the campaigns e.g. in the Family Allowance campaign the occupations of post offices and the gaining of support through a petition.

CAMPAIGNS

One of the important consequences of the first and continuing stage of the movement (mentioned above) was that it established the idea of the self organisation of women against the different forms of their oppression not only as a principle but as an increasingly powerful practice. This means that we now have the strength both to initiate campaigns which are gathering momentum among women not initially in the WLM, and also to get the support of other organisations on the basis of the demands that we establish as the basis for the campaign. There is not the same degree of danger that there might have been if the same step had been taken earlier in the development of movement, of such alliances either becoming useless fronts to cover up the other organisations' real intention of inactivity (i.e. of our initiative being used for their own purposes) or of the campaign becoming dominated by political perspectives, e.g. that of the Labour Party on equal pay, which distort the campaign's initial objectives.

Now we are in a position at least on some of the issues we have been discussing and organising around to go, with a clear conception of what we think must be the demands of the campaign, to trade union branches, local labour parties, students unions, tenants associations, etc. and demand their active and material support for, e.g. the family allowance campaign, the Anti-Discrimination Bill campaign, the establishment of womens' centres, the setting up of anti-inflation committees, the abortion and contraception campaign etc. In attempting to get support one should not allow the organisations to get away with a formal gesture made by the secretary in private communication between us and them. Rather, in demanding support, we should specify the actions that must follow and give meaning to any declaration of support. Frequently e.g. in the case of the local Labour Party we may well not get the support of the organisation as such. But by raising the issue and the general political ideas behind it within the organisation e.g. by arguing for our campaign at one of their meetings, we can both get the immediate support of individuals within it and also start a debate within the organisation which might lead to further support.

Hopefully, this general strategy will be discussed in detail at the conference. Before it can be put in practice, we need to work out what we want from the organisations that we could bring together in campaigning groups; to do this we must analyse the potential political power of the different organisations we could orient towards for e.g. in the case of radical social workers we should not merely request their general solidarity with the family allowance campaign but suggest that they refuse to implement the government proposals.

Hilary Wainwright

SWEATSHOPS —



yesterday & today

SWEAT SHOPS IN EAST LONDON — 1973 STYLE

The complacent myth of our 'affluent society' which has banned forever the horrors of earlier periods (illustrated opposite) was given a knock recently when a group of 'legitimate' businessmen in East London decided to 'expose' the existence of sweated labour in their area.

They complain about the existence of several Indian and Pakistani owned sweatshops which are cutting into their trade by undercutting their prices.

Now sweated labour is not new to East London (or restricted to it). Nor are the Indians and Pakistanis the first wave of immigrants to establish themselves as 'legitimate' businesses on the backs of sweated female labour in this trade; they are merely the most recent. But there are two aspects to this problem. Not only are these sweatshops run by immigrants, but they employ largely immigrant labour, and it is with the problems of this labour force that we are concerned. It would therefore seem a step in the right direction that this campaign has been taken up by the National Union of Tailor and Garment Workers.

But there are aspects to this campaign which cause one to look again. One might be forgiven for assuming that if a union takes up a question like this its main concern will be to organise the women involved, demand that the conditions of the factories act be implemented; and that the standards laid down by the union concerning wages and conditions be adhered to.

But what does the union's area officer, Harry Kay, have to say on the question? 'This is not a racialist campaign against Indians and Pakistanis: we are simply against the principle of sweatshops, whoever is running them. By using *illegal methods* they are undercutting *legitimate businesses*...and *having a possibly harmful effect on our members*.' (our emphasis).

Let us look at the main points in that remark. Mr. Kay is obviously not concerned with the plight of the women exploited in these sweat shops. He is concerned about 'legitimate businesses' being undercut; is not concerned that workers are being exploited, and profits being realised but only at the fact that this is being done by illegal means; and is not concerned about unionising these women, organising them and improving their conditions, but is only concerned about the 'possibly harmful effect' on present union members, because *their rates will also be undercut*.

In other words, his only solution is to drive these employers out of business for using 'illegal means.' But where will this leave the women at present employed there? They take these jobs because in many cases they do not speak English with sufficient fluency to get any other kind of employment. The only alternative would be a factory, and in many areas such employment for women does not exist. Even where it does, the pressures upon immigrant women in particular make them tend to close ranks and confine their activities to within their own communities; and the latest legislation on immigrants will make them even more reluctant to apply for national insurance cards, etc.

Also for many immigrants, the need to acquire some money quickly as security, to establish a stable home, to bring over other members of the family and so on, means that they will willingly work 60, 70 and 80 hours per week in such jobs.

It has been estimated that for an 80 hour week a good machinist in a sweatshop can earn £60, but this is piecework, and so the sheer intensity of the work must be gruelling. Also the conditions under which these women often work are conditions of overcrowding, inadequate heating or ventilation, inadequate toilet or washing up facilities, faulty machinery and electrical equipment, etc. There will probably be no fire fighting equipment or fire exits, despite the fact that they are working with highly inflammable material, in conditions of overcrowding. They are not covered by national insurance or union membership and have therefore no defence against dismissal, demands for extra hours, etc.

And yet the local union official is concerned about the danger of 'undercutting' 'legitimate businesses!'

The advantages to owners of such businesses are obvious. Their overheads are virtually nil; productivity is high and labour problems easily dealt with; profits are correspondingly high. The problem of undercutting arises for the 'legitimate' businesses because other, larger 'legitimate' businesses, sub contract work to the sweat shops, or buy for retail from the sweatshops because the rate of exploitation there is so high, that they can afford to keep their prices at a competitively low level.

So where does the root of the problem lie? Not in the illegality of the thing, because putting them out of business for operating illegally will solve nothing. As they are closed down in one place under one name, they will open up in another place under another name, and 'policing' against such practices is impossible, with a ratio of one inspector per 1,000 registered factories. They will be able to do this, because the women will still need work and will still be faced with the same problems of finding it. Secondly, their customers will still be looking for cheap goods.

About the second point there is little we can do at the moment, but about the first we ought in all areas to consider the possibilities. It is obviously useless, as we can see from this example and from others we have commented on in the past, to rely on union officials to organise and fight for the rights of small groups of women workers. The first priority is that such women are unionised, because until this is achieved no real fight can be waged. Obviously most of us are not in a position to do this ourselves, not being union officials, but we can pressure the relevant unions, and more importantly, we can go directly to the women involved and try and discuss the situation with them. The problems of 'legitimate' business must not be solved at the expense of the women who work in the sweatshops, but at the expense of those who run them for their own profit.

Francoise de Casparis
Linda Sheldon

EQUAL PAY — AEUW RETREATS AGAIN

The government's incomes policy weathered successfully the attempts of the low-paid hospital and gas workers — both new to militant struggle — to gain a worthwhile increase during the first part of this year. Although vague exhortations about support were heard coming from the direction of Congress House, the union movement failed to organise any real solidarity; and neither the miners nor the Ford workers were prepared, in their turn, to do battle with the Tories. The next challenge to the government looks to be coming from the engineers.

At the National Committee of the AEUW's Engineering Section — the union's policy-making body which met early in April — delegates voted to lodge a claim for a £35 National Minimum Rate for a 35-hour week, this to take effect from the end of the current agreement (which runs out in August).

These decisions represent an important step forward in the resistance of the working class movement to the government's constant and increasing attacks on its living standards. The British working class is famous for its economic militancy, and the AEUW, traditionally one of Britain's strongest and most self-confident unions, is promising to take on the employers and government in the way it knows best.

However, we have to recognise the fact that this traditional strength of trade-union consciousness is also in another way a weakness. The £35 minimum applies to skilled — almost invariably male — workers; the demand is for "pro rata increases for other grades" — semi-skilled, unskilled, apprentices and . . . females. And last year's agreement — on the basis of which the present rise is demanded — was certainly nothing to boast about. The original demand for equal pay somehow got lost along the line and women ended up with **90% of the unskilled rate** — lower in money terms than three years previously.

The National Committee did indeed reiterate the resolution from the 1973 AEUW Women's Conference that it was "perturbed at the lack of activity and progress on the Equal Pay question" — but then went on to water down a resolution from North London District instructing "Executive Council to launch an intensive campaign on the question of Equal Pay" to one advising them to do so.

HEAD-ON COLLISION

Since the current minimum rate for skilled workers — operative from 25th August under last year's agreement — is £25, and usually for a 40-hour week or more at that, the conference's resolution reflects a decision by the militants in the union to take on the government and its £1 + 4% (or whatever Phase 3 may bring) in a head-on collision. By way of an additional safeguard, the delegates voted for "national industrial action if necessary" — following last year's fiasco of plant bargaining — and that the National Committee should be recalled before any agreement is signed.

The June meeting of the AEUW National Conference — which lays down policy for all four sections of the Amalgamated Union — backed up the wage demand by reaffirming the union's opposition to any form of wage restraint and opposing pay and prices negotiations with the government (leading to Scanlon's withdrawal from the talks).

"THE INIQUITOUS SYSTEM OF FEMALE LABOUR"

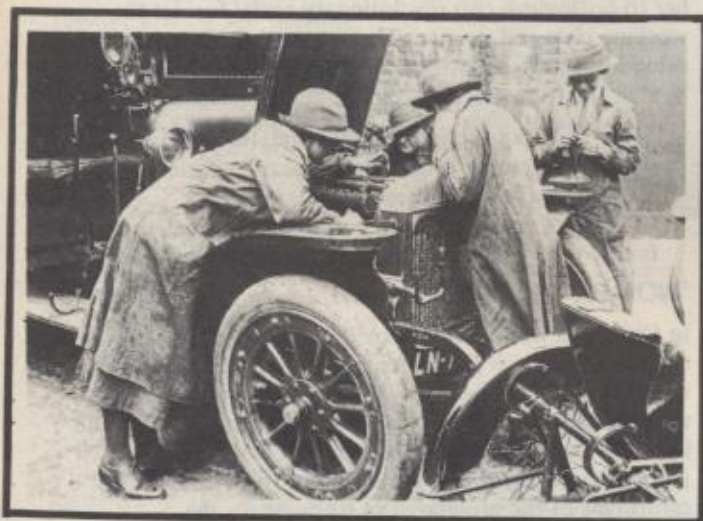
The Engineers' Union has not exactly got a record of fraternally welcoming women into the trade on equal terms as fellow workers. Women have worked in the metal trades since the 14th century, and after the Industrial Revolution were employed in large numbers in the Black Country in such trades as chain-making and stamping of brass nails. The reaction of the organised male engineers was to attempt to exclude women from the trade altogether, on the argument



that they lowered the rates (as, without unionisation, they were bound to). Such enlightened statements are on record as, from the Birmingham Brass Workers, the slogan "To organise is to recognise" — a refusal on principle even to cooperate with other bodies attempting to organise the women; from the Nut & Bolt Makers a resolution to the TUC in 1884 to "stamp out the iniquitous system of female labour"; and from the Nailmakers, a petition to Parliament, asking it to restrict women to "their own size of nail".



Between 1884 and 1911, the number of women working in the trade increased from 14,000 to 128,000, and the demands of the First World War, combined with the call-up of large numbers of male engineers into the armed forces, boosted the number of women and girls employed in engineering and munitions to nearly half a million. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers' main preoccupation was as far as possible to maintain existing practices and rates until such time as the rightful occupiers of the jobs could return to them, and to get the women out at the end of the war as quickly as possible. While the ASE cooperated with the National Federation of Women Workers (a women's general union) in organising women in some places, its own doors remained closed to women. The employment of women in the trade fell after the war to 200,000.



Finally, when the Second World War had brought a second influx of women to the industry, the AEU began to pay attention to the rates the women were getting, and belatedly admitted women to membership (of the Women's Section) in 1943. With the post-war economic boom and phased demobilisation of the armed forces, there was not the large-scale dismissal of women from the industry which had followed the previous war, and the permanent employment of significant numbers of women in engineering began to be recognised, albeit reluctantly, as a fact of life.

At the present day, nearly 10% of the nine million women in employment work in engineering, making up one quarter of engineering workers; and the increase in the women membership of the AUEW over the last 20 years (90,000) is the second largest of that of any union.

TODAY'S PROBLEMS – EQUAL PAY

The central question in most discussions concerning women in the AUEW is that of equal pay. The union's attitude can be summed up as stressing organisation and militancy in achieving equal pay for women, rather than the reliance of the Equal Pay Act and job evaluation advocated by more right-wing unions such as the EPTU. The fact that this approach, though not "wrong", is clearly inadequate in practical terms (equal pay for what? how to achieve "militancy"?) is illustrated by attempts within the union to develop the position along the lines of the demand for "Equal Pay for work of equal value" – rather than accepting the limitations of the Equal Pay Act which confines itself to "Equal Pay for the same or broadly similar work" (which the union claims has applied to women in engineering since 1940)

Over two-thirds of the women employed in the engineering industry are concentrated within the "Mechanical and Electrical Sectors"; and within these the highest concentration of women workers is in Electrical Engineering – where they make up 39% of the workforce – followed by Instrument Engineering (36%). Of the latter two categories (both of which require a high degree of the manual dexterity attributed to women), between half and two-thirds of the women employed are in semi-skilled occupations, the bulk of the remainder being in office jobs of various kinds related to the industries. (The largest proportions of men in these categories are in skilled jobs; and in semi-skilled occupations, only a little over half the numbers of women so employed.) In a situation of this kind, the obvious question is "equal pay to what?" The 1973 AUEW Women's Conference clearly had in mind these problems of distribution in "equating" jobs when it drew attention in its resolution to the fact that "many employers are using the time limit of the 1975 Equal Pay Act to make some jobs, particularly some electronic work, as women's work. This is a manoeuvre to get around the Act."

Nevertheless, the danger remains in the "Equal Pay for work of equal value" formula that this will mean in practice job evaluation – with all its drawbacks of associated work-study and increased management control, the subjective element in the evaluation so that traditional values (e.g. rating women's dexterity low) are merely reproduced in a "scientific" guise, and the fact that almost inevitably in a capitalist system, the only value that can be assessed is value to the employer. (The Women's Conference went on to oppose "job evaluation for women only" and this was endorsed by the National Committee.)

The AUEW in a recent paper 'Women's Rights – Employment in Engineering' suggests "some form of carefully controlled assessment . . . which would include joint consultation at plant level and involve the women concerned." Such safeguards are obviously necessary and desirable, and must be fought for wherever the question can be raised. But the problem remains one which is likely to occupy for some considerable time those in the union movement and women's liberation movement who are concerned with the practical interpretation of their principled positions.

THE ENGINEERS' PAY CLAIM

The immediate question meanwhile is the implementation of the engineers' pay claim. This is likely to be complicated by the uneven position within the industry left over from last year's claim and the intervening freeze – with some small employers having been forced, by the common interpretation of the "£1 + 4%" formula as a norm rather than a ceiling, to give larger rises than usual, while other firms have used Phase 2 as an excuse not to implement the second half of last year's agreement. We can only wait and see how this will be resolved in practice.

However the importance of the declared intention of waging a national struggle to raise minimum rates, and in particular to achieve a shorter working week, lies in its recognition of the need for some kind of unity in confronting the government's offensive. We must support in every way possible the success of the pay claim as a vital step in defeating the government at this time. But at the same time we must recognise the limitations of its terms of reference, and that such unity can only be short-lived until we can find practical ways of breaking down the deep-rooted social and psychological divisions between those sections of the working class in positions of economic strength and the less well-placed.

Marilyn Scotcher

FEMINISM OR MARXISM

'In Lieu of an Editorial' — a reply

Carol Riddell's central thesis* can be summarised as follows:

Women's oppression is intimately linked to the reproduction on social relations. Marxist analysis has in the past concentrated on the relations of production and on the 'material, technological aspects of the reproduction of the relations of production.' Since Marxists have been predominately men and have, therefore, had no experience of the way in which the reproduction of the relations of production affects women, Marxism has failed to understand the significance of this process at the level of theory. The way in which the reproduction of social relations is organised is closely linked with women's sense of identity — it makes them believe that they are inferior and it makes them accept false values (diffused through the media, education, morality, culture in general) as real ones. Women live in bad faith as a result. The WLM is of crucial importance, not only because it signals women's liberation in production and the family, but also because it struggles for personal re-definition. This total struggle compels women to organise on their own.

While much of what Carol says is perfectly correct, there is a basic confusion in her argument stemming from her failure to give any theoretical elaboration of what she calls the mode of reproduction of social relations. At places her argument implies that the mode of reproduction comprises all social relations outside the factory: the state, culture centres, education, the family, etc. Elsewhere she implies that it is the set of social relationships centred on the family, in particular the socialisation of children.

Her argument, however, challenges classical Marxism on two fundamental aspects: 1. that it is the way in which man (the generic man, not the male) produces which determines, if only in the final instance, his life. This is no mere metaphor (as she suggests) but a fundamental thesis of scientific Marxism. In fact, her argument here should not be with Marxism at all, but with 'vulgar Marxism' which reduces all other aspects of social relations to production and relations of production. She is very much influenced here by Mariarose Dalla Costa's 'Women and the Subversion of the Community.' Dalla Costa's major weakness is to give the family as much importance as the mode of production in the social formation, and not to see that the family is determined by the mode of production. When Dalla Costa writes that 'this family is the very pillar of the capitalist organisation of work' she says nothing more than that the division of labour, of which the division of labour between men and women is an instance, is a precondition for the development of capitalism. She certainly does not seem to understand that the very development of capitalism in fact challenges the existing division of labour between men and women. We hope to come back to Dalla Costa's theses in the next number of *Socialist Woman*, since her pamphlet is the first important breakthrough for a long time on the connection between women's oppression and capitalism and the questions she raises require the fullest discussion.

The other equally fundamental thesis of Marxism that

Carol Riddell challenges is that the working class is the only true revolutionary force capable of overthrowing capitalism and that the conquest of political power by the proletariat requires a revolutionary party. Her theoretical division of society into two spheres, the world of production and the world of reproduction, one based on class oppression and the other on oppression of women, leads her to distinguish two revolutionary social forces: the working class and women. That is, instead of a scientific category 'class' she introduces a non-scientific category 'sex' in the following schema:

- world of production and material, technical aspects of the relations of production = men = classical Marxism = class-based revolutionary party
- world of reproduction = social relations based on the family = women = revolutionary feminism = WLM

'WOMEN'S POLITICS'

In Carol's view, the WLM provides the way for revolutionary women 'to play an equal and unhumiliated part in creating the permanent revolution.' Essential to this, she argues, is 'our right to self-organisation, to decide and lead our own political campaigns.' But what are 'our own political campaigns' that are different from the political campaigns of the proletariat in its quest for the revolutionary transformation of capitalist society? The struggles in Ireland and Vietnam, the domestic working class struggle, the dissolution of the Communist League in France, the persecution of immigrant labour in the capitalist metropolises, etc., etc. — are not all these as relevant for women's political campaigns as are specific aspects of women's oppression? And if capitalism has to be seen as a whole and can be overthrown only as a whole, is not the revolutionary party central to this strategy.

There are many points that Carol has raised in her article which could and should be challenged. For example, one would question such things as the 'non-material' aspect of the reproduction of social relations. Unfortunately, space only permits us to raise one more point here. Carol writes that the WLM challenges a deep-seated axiom of the Marxist revolutionary movement: that personal redefinition is peripheral to the pre-revolutionary situation. This is quite incorrect, for the Leninist party, by demanding of its members that they become professional militants, imposes upon them a certain style of living and a certain ethics. For this reason, it is painful for a middle-class intellectual to become a working class militant, since to do so involves challenging many of his/her deepest notions, for example, the right to a private life, etc. Some never make it at all and in the end leave the party, bitter and disappointed.

These criticisms of Carol Riddell's positions do not imply that we do not think the WLM has got an important role to play. On the contrary, a revolutionary movement of women is a precondition for their political and social emancipation. What we do question is that this movement can be autonomous from the class struggle or from the revolutionary heritage of Marxism-Leninism.

Tessa van Gelderen

* See last issue of *Socialist Woman*.

Revolutionary Organisation

The continuing debate inside the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) about the relation between women's liberation and the class struggle, the massive rejection of Selma James' anti-trade-union positions at the last WL conference, and the growth of a socialist current within the WLM, make an article on the relationship between the revolutionary organisation (The Leninist Party) and that layer of people radicalised around the question of women's oppression and loosely grouped in the WLM timely, not to say overdue.

For discussion, both inside the WLM and in the revolutionary groups, on the relation between capitalism and women's oppression, class struggle and women's struggle, Marxism and feminism, has overwhelmingly been characterised by a failure to confront the key problem of defining the relationship between the WLM and the revolutionary organisation (which is a specific instance of a more general relationship between the revolutionary organisation on the one hand and on the other the 'mass vanguard' that is constituted by all those who have become radicalised during the big upturn in the class struggle in the advanced capitalist countries since 1967-68). Nor has this problem been explicitly taken up either by those militants of the left groups who are active also in the WLM or by those members of the WLM who reject the revolutionary groups as male-dominated. However, the precondition for transforming the present WLM into a movement of mass proportions is that the revolutionary organisation should become capable of playing a leading role in this process. The problem is thus an urgent one—this article is only a preliminary attempt to define it.

'WOMEN'S POLITICS' v. LENINISM

Revolutionary Marxists active in the WLM find themselves confronted by a very powerful ideological current which argues that the Leninist theory of organisation has no relevance—certainly no immediate relevance—to women's struggle against their oppression. For some exponents of this current there is an automatic contradiction between being a militant and being active in the WLM, for others the question of a party is for a distant future. Many feel that the WLM represents, if only in embryo, the rise of a 'new' politics which challenges capitalism by drawing into the struggle all the oppressed. Unlike the organisations of the working-class, which are bureaucratised, hierachical, male-dominated and anti-democratic, the WLM is seen as being truly democratic abolishing the separation between the private and political, between the leaders and the led; it tolerates no division of labour because to do so implies a departure from true democracy. Instead of demanding an adherence to a strategic political programme, all that the WLM demands from its members is a sincere

'commitment to women's liberation: the movements' practice is left to the spontaneity of its members. This is sometimes called 'women's politics' or the 'new politics' and occasionally and in a slightly different context, 'community politics'. It is not difficult to discover that this 'new' politics is actually a rather old politics, a politics which is neither social-democratic or Leninist but that of spontaneity. Its arguments, as often as not, are accepted even by those who claim adherence to Marxism inside the WLM. What underpins them all is a belief that the WLM is women's answer to Leninism.



SYLVIA PANKHURST

There have been various attempts inside the WLM to provide a 'scientific' basis for the concept of women's politics, a concept which leads to the view that women's priority lies in the development of a spontaneous, autonomous women's movement. This very aim forces the theorists of, for example, the mode of reproduction to depart from the terrain of classical Marxism as soon as they start. They postulate an inverse relationship between the mode of production and the mode of reproduction, or set up a model of capitalism in which the two compete for dominance. This argument is taken up elsewhere in this issue of SW! what is relevant for us here is that in these theories the fundamental concept of Marxism, that of a class, is replaced by the category of 'sex' and the Leninist theory of organisation is rejected in favour of an autonomous movement of women.

Revolutionary Marxists have dismissed the concept of women's politics without trying to understand precisely why anti-Leninism is so strong in the WLM. The reasons are complex but we can identify three crucial factors:

a) The origins of these politics are to be found in the historical and political conditions that produced the WLM. The mass vanguard, of which the WLM is an important and integral part, arose first of all on the basis of solidarity with the colonial revolutions (Cuba, Vietnam) and was strengthened by a deep crisis of confidence in the imperialist metropolises. This radicalisation took

& Women's Liberation

place outside the traditional organisations of the working class and in reaction against the bureaucratic leadership of these organisations and was combined with an initial relative passivity of the working-class. This spontaneous revolt against capitalism produced an optimistic belief that capitalism can be successfully challenged and perhaps even overthrown with or without the working-class by a spontaneous movement of the oppressed social layers. Hence the ideology of spontaneity is a general feature of the mass vanguard.

b) The continuing dominance of this politics inside the WLM cannot be reduced to the historical factors present at its birth. This movement did not decline, like the student movement, with the entry of the working-class into the political arena. On the contrary, it has continued to grow and produce a considerable literature and ferment of ideas. While the movement here in Britain has not achieved the dimensions of that in the United States, (Which partly explains the strong American influence) it has nevertheless survived all predictions of its imminent disappearance, grown in numerical strength, developed theoretically and responded very positively to the upsurge in the working-class struggle of the last two years. The continuing presence of the WLM is one important indication that the social crisis of the capitalist order continues unabated. But that the politics of spontaneity continue to dominate this layer of the mass vanguard is a direct consequence of the failure of the revolutionary groups to react sufficiently swiftly, or in an adequate fashion to this new front opening in the class struggle.

At the level of theory, the revolutionary left has largely failed to understand the precise connection between women's oppression and the class nature of society; and how the basic contradiction of the system—the contradiction between the level of development attained by the productive forces and the maintenance of capitalist relations of production—affects the social division of labour between men and women in general and its weak link, the family, in particular. While accusing the WLM of petty-bourgeois feminism, it has itself failed to understand and explain in its platforms and documents, in the organisation of its work in this field, in its general political practice—the link between the class struggle and the struggle for women's emancipation. Work on the question of women's oppression has been approached in a sectoral fashion. And where such work has been done, the analysis of women's oppression adopted has been very much influenced by the relatively sophisticated theoretical production of the WLM itself. Ironically, instead of the revolutionary vanguard hegemonising the WLM it has been the WLM that has largely hegemonised the revolutionary vanguard on this question. This is a real case of the crippled supporting the blind, for the revolutionary vanguard has acted as if the question of women's oppression was separate from the mainstream of the class struggle, while the feminists in the WLM have argued that the class struggle is more or less irrelevant to women's liberation. Thus the revolutionary left has consistently taken into the WLM, not the *whole of its political programme*, but only a part, i.e. it has talked 'women's politics' to women. The political vacuum left by the revolutionary left's failure to hegemonise the WLM was filled by other ideologies. Anti-Leninism has thus continued to dominate this movement since the revolutionary left has not shown itself able to offer anything that was not already supplied by the movement itself: it was after all the WLM that radicalised hundreds of women and encouraged them to break with a traditional role seen as increasingly unbearable.

c) A third factor of crucial importance to the continuing anti-Leninist slant of the WLM, closely related to those above but needing to be spelled out, concerns the *history* of Leninism. The anti-Leninist of the present WLM relies on the feeling that the oppression of women is not really anything to do with the oppression of one class by another under capitalism (and all preceding modes of production). After all, what is the position of women in the non-capitalist countries? True, a great deal has been achieved in these with respect to the position of women, but women have certainly not become the equal to men. Of course, the explanation for this can only be given in terms of the concrete *history* of Leninism, of the degeneration of the first workers' state and the international Communist movement.

The rise of the WLM does not undermine the fundamental thesis of Marxism, which is that the proletariat is the only revolutionary force capable of overthrowing capitalism and replacing it with a socialist order. What it does do is to undermine all workerist and economic tendencies on the revolutionary left, and all *spontaneist* theories of mass struggle. It is increasingly realised that the WLM cannot take on really mass movement proportions without joining the working class struggle and that the struggle for women's liberation has to be carried on within the framework of the political activity of the proletariat.

MALE CHAUVINISM IN THE REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION

A major contribution of the WLM has been to document in great detail all aspects of women's social inferiority. The social division of labour between men and women in capitalist society is reflected at all levels, including within the organisations of the working class. As long as women are oppressed in society at large, men will tend to have a numerical majority even inside the revolutionary party. For the social division of labour between men and women makes it hard for female comrades to be as active as male ones. The subordinate position of women in society at large means that within the revolutionary organisation men too, even if only subconsciously, tend to treat women as inferior and women tend to act diffidently, thus helping to perpetuate the male image of them. An invisible mechanism is thus set up resulting in what the WLM would call a male dominated organisation.



IMG Militants on International Women's Day

The problem of male chauvinism inside the revolutionary organisation cannot be reduced to the personal attitudes of its male and female members. It affects the overall practice of the organisation. The number of women in positions of responsibility is invariably much smaller than would be expected from their numerical strength in the organisation as a whole. This means a massive under-utilisation of the talents and skills of the membership, a failure to realise its full political potential. Male chauvinism is also visible in the relative lack of importance that tends to be given to work among the masses on the question of women's oppression. Documents and platforms tend to treat the question of women's oppression as something separate from the mainstream of the class struggle, as an area of work which is basically the responsibility of women. This results in the effective autonomy of this work from other activities of the organisation. Political and organisational decisions which at each stage appear to be governed by purely technical considerations in effect reproduce the sexual division of labour inside the organisation—what Lenin called 'feminism a la rebours'.

Thus in a number of very concrete ways male chauvinism transcends the framework of personal attitudes and becomes an obstacle to transformation of the organisation into a revolutionary party capable of leading the political struggle of the proletariat at all levels of the society. A party under the sway of male chauvinism will be severely hampered in its efforts to bring the female masses into revolutionary politics. Moreover, once the political power of the bourgeoisie is overthrown, such a party will not be capable of leading the working masses in the construction of socialism.

It is instructive here to consider a historical example: the German Social-Democratic Party at the beginning of this century. As is well known, the SPD held that while it was absolutely necessary for the proletariat to conquer political power (the state), it was not necessary that the existing state should be smashed. Hence for the SPD, the parliamentary struggle was of paramount importance and provided the ground upon which it built its entire political strategy. The founding conference of the SPD put the demand for equality of all, regardless of sex, race etc into its programme.



But for a long time this was just so many words—until the question of electoral reform became an acute political problem. As Kollantai reports: 'The Party's indifference ((to the question of women's oppression)) had deep and vital roots in the following: while women were deprived of political rights, the involvement of women in the party politics had incomparably less significance for the immediate success of the Social Democrats than energetic work among the male proletariat. Agitation among women workers was somehow intangible—it was work, not for the present, but only for the remote future. The question of radical reform of the electoral system brought women too into the circle of the political fight. Getting women workers,



these possible future voters, into the Party life acquired a topical interest'.

The main principle around which SPD organised its work in this field was that of separation and autonomy of agitation among women. This was justified on the basis that, although the women's struggle was inseparable from the general working-class movement, it had certain specific features due to the specificity of women's social position. Thus the fact that women were also mothers gave rise to special demands—labour protection of nursing mothers, creches, struggle against prostitution etc. In Germany women at that time had fewer political rights than men (for example, they were not allowed to join political organisations). For women to become politicised required a far more radical break with traditional morals, concepts and customs than was the case for men.

All these factors were seen as demanding a separate structure for agitation among women: commission, bureaux, etc staffed by women. The Central Committee of the Party always had a woman member in charge of this area of work. The Party held separate meetings and educational for women, formed intermediary organisations for them etc. In general it was held the responsibility of women comrades to draw the Party's attention to the interests of women workers. In this way the sexual division of labour operating outside the Party came to be reflected within it, and what appeared at first sight to be purely technical decisions dictated by the realities of the social situation of women, turned out to separate off 'women's work' and leave it to women comrades. The question of women's liberation became a matter of on the one hand a series of economic and bourgeois-democratic demands and on the other a vision for the distant future.

Faced with the persistence of male chauvinism inside the revolutionary organisations, the radical feminist solution is to build an 'autonomous' movement of women. As we tried to show elsewhere¹, this is an incorrect solution.

We have also argued that to expect the revolutionary organisation to be totally free of male chauvinism is to fail to understand the material roots of this ideology. But this does not mean that one *accepts* this male chauvinism. On the contrary, it is necessary to wage a perpetual struggle to make the revolutionary organisation of the working class into an effective instrument for combatting male chauvinism both within its own ranks and within the working class, through conscious efforts and continuous education of its cadres.

The position of women in the countries where capitalism has been overthrown can be analysed within the theoretical framework we have tried to sketch above. WLM literature, when discussing the reasons for the relatively limited political advance made by women in non-capitalist societies, has tended to concentrate on two levels: the economic and cultural underdevelopment of the countries where therevolution has been successful (often coupled with direct imperialist counter-offensive) and the inadequacy of classical Marxism in relation to the complex nature of women's oppression. However, while these factors have certainly played a fundamental role, they are not sufficient to explain the present position of women in these countries. In order to understand 'what went wrong' one needs to understand not only the nature of the contradictions found in societies in transition from capitalism to socialism but also the role of the subjective factor—the revolutionary party—in overcoming these contradictions. Thus the bureaucratisation and the subsequent degeneration of the Russian Communist Party was a determining factor in the progressive degeneration of the first Soviet state—a degeneration which was by no means inevitable.

The repeal in the thirties and forties of much of the Bolshevik legislation that had, after October, laid a foundation for the legal, social and political equality

of women, was an integral part of the Stalinist counter-revolution. Any scientific discussion of the position of women in transitional societies can only be carried out within this double theoretical framework: the general problematic of transitional societies (ruled by the fundamental contradiction between the social ownership of the means of production and the bourgeois mode of distribution and the historical origins and mechanism of the degeneration of the workers' states) One of the great contributions of Trotsky to revolutionary Marxism was to provide a coherent theory of the degeneration, against which he fought from the beginning with the founding of the Left Opposition fifty years ago.

The Fourth International of today bases itself on the historical heritage of the Left Opposition's struggle against the Stalinist counter-revolution (one of whose essential features was the rehabilitation of the bourgeois family). In keeping with that heritage the F.I. places a great emphasis on internal democracy and the revolutionary consciousness of its members. These are intimately linked to a struggle, outside and inside its own ranks against male chauvinism and all the ideological and material factors that keep women in chains.

The struggle for women's liberation is part of the struggle to break out of the ideological, cultural and social straight jackets of class society—the struggle for a human society. It cannot be seen as 'autonomous' from the revolutionary struggle against capitalism but rather must be seen as integral to it.

This requires both a struggle against the spontaniest 'new' politics of radical feminism in the WLM and a struggle for a consistent position on women's oppression in the revolutionary organisations. It is out of such struggles for revolutionary political theory that the Leninist party can be constructed.

Leonora Lloyd & Laurie White

1. See Tessa van Gelderen's article, p.6

ABORTION STRUGGLE IN FRANCE

The present abortion law in France was passed in 1920; now the Government is considering a new law and all the women's groups are actively campaigning for abortion to be completely legalised. The law proposed by the Government, however, will allow abortion only in cases of rape, incest and mental or physical illness. Only a tiny number of women would be affected by this. The rest will continue to go to back street abortionists, or if they can afford it, to more 'liberal' countries.



10,000 doctors have signed a protest against even the tiny advance proposed by the Government! The powerful catholic lobby has been propagandising very successfully in a group called 'Let them Live'.

The punishment at the moment for breaking the law is very harsh: 1–5 years for the abortionist; if a Doctor is involved he/she is off the medical register for 2–6 years; the woman herself will be fined 2000–5000 francs.

If the new law was passed, many doctors and nurses would refuse to perform abortions, leaving the field wide open for the private sharks.

The demands of the pro-abortion movement are:

- “Yes” to free contraception and abortion!
- “No” to doctors telling woman what to do!
- “No” to being refused contraceptives!

On June 15 and 16 there were two days of action against the “let them Live” campaign and the 10,000 doctors who signed the petition. This was organised by MLAC—the movement for liberty of abortion and contraception—and actively supported by the Ligue Communiste (French Section of the Fourth International).

Information from 'Rouge', paper of Ligue Communiste.

MOZAMBIQUE

The Revolutionary Struggle for Liberation

The national liberation struggle of the colonial peoples takes on a special significance at the present time with the 600th anniversary of the alliance between Britain and Portugal being 'celebrated' this year. Amongst those opposing the celebrations is the British Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea. In Mozambique the group leading the struggle against colonial oppression is FRELIMO, the Mozambique Liberation Front. Conscious that liberation comes out just out of a gun, but also through political struggle, FRELIMO has been holding a series of conferences and study meetings, including the First Conference of Mozambican Women. Below we print extracts from the Communique issued at the end of the conference, reprinted FRELIMO's official organ, Mozambique Revolution.

The situation of women being exploited and oppressed beings is not a phenomenon limited to Mozambique..... Yet it is in countries such as ours, where traditional concepts on women's submission and colonialist concepts have been combined or juxtaposed, that this oppression and exploitation take the most extreme forms.

In Mozambique a genuinely popular revolution is taking place.....inspired by an ideology which puts the interests of the masses of the people before all else, which rejects all forms of oppression and exploitation by any individual, group class or sex over another, and which aims at establishing healthy and harmonious human relations.

The fight to liberate women occupies an important place within this revolution. (The Conference, held in March, was attended by over 80 delegates, many of them members of Women's Detachment. In his opening speech, the President of FRELIMO analysed the origins of women's alienation and the way forward for the struggle to emancipate women).

OPPRESSION

(Reports were given on the various work being undertaken). The Conference noted, however, that there was a psychological factor affecting most comrades which made it difficult for them to carry out their tasks—an inferiority complex. This lay in a combination of the traditional system of education and the colonial system. Indeed, it was noted that throughout their lives—girls are subject to what is known as 'initiation rites' which instill in them a submissive attitude towards men and teach them that their place in society is a secondary one. During the puberty ceremony, specifically, girls are told that their role henceforth is to produce children and to look after their husband and home, all other tasks being forbidden them. Other examples include the 'bride-price' which reduces a woman to a mere object to be sold and bought and makes her a simple object of pleasure and reproduction in the eyes of the buyer—the husband; forced and premature marriages—children often no more than 10 years old are forced to marry. These practices constitute a serious obstacle to women's involvement in the liberation struggle in two respects: they condition women to feel alienated and they confine her to domestic



life and agricultural production at the service of her husband, depriving her of any prospects of taking part in political, cultural or social work.

COLONIALISM

The colonial system subjected Mozambican women to double oppression and exploitation: first the general oppression and exploitation inflicted indiscriminately on men and women alike, in the form of forced labour, compulsory crops, arbitrary imprisonment, racial discrimination etc. And then the other more specific form directed only against women. By separating women from their husbands through forced labour and denying them the means to support their homes and children, colonialism created the conditions whereby women were forced to resort to selling their bodies to prostituting themselves, in order to be able to survive. The colonialists made them into instruments of pleasure.

CONT. on p.16.

STOP BRITISH COLLABORATION WITH FASCIST PORTUGAL

Caetano Get Out!

Support the African Liberation Movement
Solidarity with the Portuguese people

Contact: End the Alliance Campaign,
c/o Committee for Freedom in
Mozambique, Angola and Guinea,
12 Little Newport St.,
London WC2 7JJ.

Phone: 01 734 9541 to find out the
next stage in the campaign.

The conference then went on to examine the strategy necessary in the fight to restore to women their due place and rights in the society. The fight was not against men; it was against the system, that is against the negative aspects of tradition and against colonialism and imperialism, that Mozambican women must direct their struggle. The only road for women to take was to engage in the tasks of the struggle, in the revolutionary process. In this way, they will contribute directly to the victory of the revolution, that is, to hastening the day of their liberation. What is more, by joining the struggle at all levels, they are opening up new prospects for their future, destroying in practice the concepts which relegated them to a passive and voiceless role in society. They are creating the conditions for participating in the exercise of power, taking their destiny into their hands. This struggle must come within the framework of FRELIMO, the revolutionary political organisation which upholds the interests of all the exploited people.

FRELIMO has created an Organisation of Mozambican women, which will act as a broad front with the Women's Detachment as its nucleus and driving force. The Central Committee had declared April 7 as Mozambique Women's Day, in memory of Comrade Josina Machel's death of that date; she had been leader of the Women's Detachment. The conference also celebrated International Women's Day on March 8th.



Comrade Josina Machel

Finally, the Conference adopted as its watchword the words of the President of FRELIMO: *"The liberation of women is a basic requirement of the Revolution, the guarantee of its continuity and a precondition for its victory."*

THE STRUGGLE FOR ORGANISATION

Ruth Newton has recently been involved in organising a Chapel (union branch) in a publishing firm. Here she explains some of the difficulties and relates her experiences.

Organising unions in publishing is uphill work. Publishers, whether small self-made 'liberal' firms or big conglomerates, are large employers of cheap labour, i.e. women. Whilst male graduates can sometimes get into writing or designing jobs via (sometimes dubious) trainee schemes, women often with better degrees have to work their way up via the typewriter and teapot.

After three years of working for a large American company, I was pleased at the prospect of joining a brand new company, even though I had to go as a freelance. Within one month I realised that I was anything but freelance and was in fact operating in just the same way as the lump does in the building trade!

Our contracts seemed highly dubious and two or three of us who were already NUJ members began a campaign on this question to recruit new members; the response was incredible and within 2 months we had more than 30 new members, had formed a Chapel. I was elected Mother of Chapel* (MOC) with a fight for recognition as our first struggle. With our inexperience we perhaps were too hasty to begin this struggle, especially as the union bureaucracy were none too keen to help.

When we were refused recognition we walked out for an afternoon and the next day gave notice of a strike to start the following day. Suddenly the inexperience showed, the majority of the chapel panicked and reversed the strike notice. The much-relieved management offered to re-negotiate, but have now again refused recognition. As a result the chapel looks in danger of completely collapsing. One bright spot in this sad story is the discovery that the best organisers and the ones

WOMENS ACTION GROUP – OPEN MEETING

On Tuesday 19 June Oxford Women's Action Group had a public meeting, followed by a social, which attracted strikers from Cowley, students, members of the Gay Action Group, and others from local labour organisations and revolutionary groups.

It was the Group's first meeting for a year that was open to both men and women and was called to explain the WLM. After a general introduction several members gave their own views e.g. a radical feminist said that women could lead a social revolution, a member of IMG said that only in the context of a general revolutionary struggle could women achieve liberation, but this necessitated an independent women's movement, concentrating on the specific features of women's oppression, whilst realising its relationship to working class struggles. The final speaker pointed out that because the movement unified around campaigns, it was possible for these two contradictory opinions to exist together. She said too that the influence of the WLM was much greater than its numbers.

Several films were shown – on schoolgirls, the media, miners' wives, the I.R. Act – revealing the diverse nature of women's oppression. The I.R.A. film created a lot of discussion, especially amongst the 50% men present. Two Cowley shop stewards related the difficulties in getting women to union meetings and a member of OWAG had to point out the difficulties (hours, no creche, ideas women had about their role, etc.) The meeting was reasonably successful and so hopefully will be attempted again in the future.

least likely to panic were the women members (who made up about 50% of both staff and membership).

Ruth Newton

**Mother (or Father) of Chapel: name given when union organisation had to be kept secret, still lingers on throughout the print trade.*

FAMILY ALLOWANCES



On Tax Credit

Although the Family Allowance Campaign has been taken up enthusiastically by womens' groups around the country, the womens' movement has still not really come to grips with analysing the whole Tax Credit System in terms of the strategy of the government and the political implications that flow from this. The article in the last *Socialist Woman*, whilst putting the discussion on the widest political basis was full of misconceptions about the nature of campaigns, legislation, revolutionary and reformist demands, and did not really contain any ideas for our way forward.

While not attempting to make a full analysis of the Tax Credit System etc., I hope in explaining some of the misconceptions made by Nellie Gate, to throw up other ideas about current policy of the government as regards to tax etc. and the importance it has for the working class.

Purpose of Tax Credit System

When discussing the political implications of the tax credit system, it must be seen as part of the whole strategy of the government against inflation and its attempts to alter the balance of class forces. In order to halt the decline of profits it is necessary to decisively defeat the working class. In order to isolate the less well paid workers from the more militant sectors, Heath is arguing that wage increases which go mainly to higher paid workers do nothing to help low paid workers who do not have the same bargaining power. According to Heath, this in fact worsens their position because high wage increases cause inflation which hits hardest at the lowest paid. In this way he hopes to win over the lower paid.

Heath's strategy can be summed up in two parts

- 1) Introduction of legislation and other measures to curb working class militants.
- 2) Bash militants – offer crumbs to lower paid in face of rapid inflation in order to convince them that the Heath government is acting in their interest.

What are these 'crumbs'?

NOT wage increases for the lower paid, i.e. national minimum wage, as that would make inroads into the employers' profits, BUT tax credits, family incomes supplements and housing rebates.

Where does this tax come from?

Most taxes are drawn from the incomes of workers, therefore higher paid workers are subsidising lower paid workers. In fact they are having to be responsible for the inability of capitalism to provide even bare minimum living standards for sections of the working class.

It is in this way we must look at the Tax Credit system. The introduction of the tax credit system serves the interests of the ruling class not just because it's a rationalisation of labour and a streamlining in administration though clearly this is an important factor (the Green Paper para 7 says 'the proposals for TCS as outlined in this Green Paper would enable an eventual saving of some 10-15,000 civil servants to be made. It is hoped that these reductions in staff can be achieved to a larger extent through the process of natural wastage').

But the TCS also represents the current strategy of the government towards low paid workers: the attempt by the government to pose as the provider(?) of the lower

paid family against inflation caused by militant trade unionists. This will take the form of benefits to the lower paid. Family allowances, at the moment a non-means tested right will be replaced by a wages-tied means tested benefit from the TCS. The Housing Finance Act as well as putting rent prices back on to the open market means that the rent of the lower paid workers will be subsidised by that of higher paid workers. The Family Incomes Supplement used at the moment to supplement families with an income of £15 or less *may* be increased if necessary. The bourgeois press are approaching this line enthusiastically. *The Sun's* main headline on Friday, 7th July reads 'Heaths Helping Hand-out' and talks about the increased aid in the forms of family incomes supplement for lower paid families. *The Guardian*, 7th July says 'the clear signs last night were that ministers had agreed at yesterday's cabinet meeting to grit their teeth and soldier on with stage 3 counter inflation talks with the TUC and the CBI in the hope that interim action would not become necessary before the end of stage 2 in Autumn.'

If they are forced to give an increase, family incomes supplement is the quickest, cheapest and simplest method of protecting the poor. This means that although the government is hoping some form of agreement will be reached by the TUC and the CBI because of rapid inflation which could result in militancy from the lower paid it may be forced to act. Then it will do this in the form of more hand-outs by means-tested benefits to the lower paid.

Tax credits will be tied to wages, this means that people not earning will not receive credit. Unsupported mothers, strikers wives and families among many will have their family allowances, which they now receive as a right replaced by a benefit which may be withdrawn at any time. Obviously this has important implications. The same system which says the housewife must now be completely dependent on her husband, also tries under the new TCS to force unsupported mothers to seek

dependence on some man. As regards strikers' wives and families, they will now become completely dependent on social security. This is all part of an attack on militants to remove their only source of survival during a strike. Apart from the intimidation it causes to potential strikers, it also has the potentially reactionary aspect of reinforcing the division between a striker and his wife, between the point of production and the home. The psychological value of removing family allowance will have the effect that HIS ACTION at work will determine what happens to HER MONEY.

Nellie Gate takes up the point of organising in the home as follows:- 'the attack on our housing conditions and living standards in the home represent attacks where we are least organised. That is why the government and big industrialists have suggested this because they think they can get away with it! If our wages and living standards are being taxed in the home where we are most vulnerable, then it is here that we must organise.'

Of course we must organise wherever attacks are made and this means in almost every area of our life. But this does not mean we completely by-pass the trade union movement. It is essential that the working class organise not simply at the point of production but also in the community around questions of housing, nursery and launderette facilities, prices etc. But the organised labour movement *must* begin to take the responsibility for fighting back in all areas of essential life and in other aspects of the class struggle, particularly from the point of production. *Organisation at the point of production has far more essential weight* — quite simple because *there* profits are affected — and that is what counts! Of course there are legitimate forms of struggle such as rent strikes, occupations, etc., — but if we actually examine the rent strikes against the Housing Finance Act not *one* of them was successful. What can tenants do if the police move in and take off the militants. Compare their relative helplessness to the



successful defence by the Longannet miners or the five dockers by the threat of industrial action. This does not mean that tenants, housewives and community associations should sit back and wait for the labour movement to do something for them. On the contrary *only* when they start to organise and fight can they then draw in support of the organised labour movement. The 50 Hackney social workers and Nalگو members who refused to implement government policy over squatters are a good example of strong trade union organisation and community action, etc. One of the ways in which we can carry on the family allowance campaign is to contact the government officials who are actually implementing it – obviously it is in their immediate interest to support it in view of the rationalisation of labour and redundancies involved.

With the increased intervention of the state in *all* areas of social life more and more strikes lead to direct confrontation with the state e.g. police and courts – the Industrial Relations Act. But no strike is in *itself* revolutionary or reformist. Nellie Gate says 'looked at in *isolation*, the family allowance campaign could be as reformist as the campaign around the anti-discrimination bill. Trying to influence government legislation, when most of us don't believe in voting, when nearly the whole of the Trade Union movement walking through the streets did bugger all against the Industrial Relation act, is a fairly depressing and crushing occupation.'

There are two points about this. Firstly struggles are revolutionary, reformist or reactionary according to the context in which they occur, e.g. fascism uses very militant forms of struggle. So revolutionaries are not opposed in principle to voting or using petitions, although we would never make these our primary methods of struggle.

To take up Nellie Gate's 'IMG's line on Women' – the IMG says: 'the Womens Question is really secondary to proletarian struggle.' This is so bizarre and full of straw arguments that it clearly warrants a serious reply. However I must assume that Nellie Gate has read and digested very little of IMG's analysis and strategy on the question of women (male chauvinism is actively fought against in the IMG and she shows her ignorance of how the IMG operates in the cartoon which says that 'IMG women are still waiting for a line from their men,' which shows that backwardness on the 'women's question' is not totally confined to the straight left) and tries in a few sentences to outline our ideas which have been put forward many times at conferences (Marxist women's conference in Birmingham), and in our literature, (Choice before us, perspectives for the women's movement), all of which seems to me to be totally unrecognisable from Nellie Gate's version of the IMG line.

The IMG does not say the struggle for the liberation of women is either subordinate or separate from the class struggle (if sisters or brothers would like to question this and provide evidence to the contrary they are welcome to do so - one of the characteristics of 'left bashing' at womens' conferences is a singular lack of *concrete* criticism).

As Leninists we recognise that oppression does not stop at the factory gates; that as *revolutionaries* and not as *militant trade unionists* we must understand *all* forms of capitalist oppression and that we must struggle in all areas of society both at the point of production *and* outside it. We also believe that we must forge links between all sections of the working class, and that it

is not enough to confine agitation to boss bashing or Tory bashing but agitate over all examples of oppression as it effects personal, family and social life.

As Lenin says (What Is To Be Done?): 'This oppression falls on the most diverse class of society since it manifests itself in the most diverse spheres of life and activity ... is it then not obvious that *we shall not fulfil our task* of developing the political consciousness of the workers if we do not *take upon ourselves* the organisation of an all embracing political arraignment of the ruling class?'

This is how the TCS should be taken up. Not in terms of explaining to the women that it means the loss of their family allowance, and to the TUs it means rationalisation of labour under the current strategy of the government against militants, but explaining in a *rounded way all* the implications of the TCS to the working class and for women whose interests lie with that class. It is an excellent way of taking up the question of the family in the TU movement. This has already been done in Leeds in the Nalگو Action Group. We should not confine our discussions on the question of women to family allowances (though obviously we approach them initially on that but attempt to explain the wider political issues posed.'

The coming national conference at Bristol must come to grips with these issues in order to offer a way forward, not only the campaign but a better political understanding of sisters in the womans movement.

LONDON WOMEN ON TRIAL

The occupation was in protest against the Heath government's proposals to replace the family allowance system by the Tax Credits System.

Though what surprised many onlookers in the Post Office was the violence of the police against the demonstrators (one eye witness saw a policeman approach a demonstrator who was lying on the floor, and deliberately stand on her breast) it is the women who have been charged with assault, and/or obstruction.

The trial, which is starting at 10am Bow Magistrates Court, on July 11th, may continue for some time, so anyone who is interested should find out if they still have time to attend the pickets which will be taking place outside the court while the women are on trial inside.

As we go to press, the trial begins of six women and one man arrested when they occupied the Trafalgar Square Post Office at the end of the International Women's Day demo on March 10th.

FINED FOR FLYPOSTING

While women were marching in London on International Women's Day at the end of March, eight people were arrested in Lancaster for protesting against the tax credit system.

On the night before the march Polly McDonnell, Alistair McKie and Kingsley Dawson were picked by the police for flyposting six leaflets about the family allowance campaign on the windows of the shopping precinct in the town. All three were charged with five offences - but in the end only the 'defamation of public property' charge stuck. The arresting officer, P.C. Hogg perjured himself in court by saying that when he picked up Polly, Alistair and Kingsley they were standing by a wet poster and were covered with paste. In fact when he made the arrest all three of them were running out of the precinct, nowhere near a poster. And other policemen testified that they were not covered with paste on arrival at the station. Despite that, they were each fined £60, ordered to pay £20 for each poster, and £7 for actual damage to public property. A total of £307. The Women's Centre in Lancaster pointed out that last year the Labour Party were charged with a similar offence when they flyposted the shop windows with Labour Party propaganda leaflets - in the same court they were fined 50p!

However, the story of harassment in Lancaster doesn't end there. On the actual day of the march about 40 people went into Mothercare and began distributing leaflets about family allowances to shoppers. They had been there about a quarter of an hour when the place was invaded by about 20 policemen and five police women. Terrific scuffles ensued - several people were injured including one of the town's probation officers. Nigel Todd, who was kicked several times by a policeman. One woman who was there with her baby was forcibly restrained while another threw her pram plus baby out of the shop. Luckily the child suffered no injuries, but it was a potentially dangerous situation.

Five people were arrested as a result of the campaign in Mothercare, and charged with assault and riotous assembly.

They were each fined £30 plus £10 costs and damages. A total of more than £200.

None of the men and women involved in the arrests have the money to pay the exorbitant fines. So the Lancaster Women's Centre are launching an appeal for contributions. So far they have raised £60 from discos, and other people's contributions. If you feel you can help in any way, please contact the 'Women's Centre, 59 Grasmere Rd, Lancaster. (Tel: Lancaster 67648).

Rosie Boycott (Reprinted from Spare Rib)

gay lib demo

The Great Northern Hotel, Wellington Street, Leeds, was known for years as a Gay pub. But with the advent of a new manager some months ago, things began to change.

After re-decorating the pub, the manager began to refuse to serve gays and anyone with them. When the gays refused to move out, but instead brought along more friends to give them support, the police were called, and the 'offenders' evicted.

As a result a picket was put on the pub on Saturday July 7th and leaflets given out explaining the situation, and demanding that the ban on gays be lifted. As the picketers, including Gay Lib, Women's Lib, International Marxist Group, and Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists, were standing quietly distributing their leaflets, the manager rushed from the pub, and physically attacked Martin O'Leary, one of the Gay Lib members. Martin pushed him off, but he came back, and attacked him again, so other members of the picket went to Martin's assistance, and the manager retreated into the pub with a cut above his eye.

Soon after this the police appeared, and after consultation with the manager inside the pub, they emerged and arrested Martin, and one of the members of Women's Lib, charging the girl with obstruction, and Martin with assault!

The police then informed the picketers they had best move on as they had no right to picket there and were breaking the law. Eventually the picket disbanded.

The Leeds comrades involved would ask you to take this up in three ways.

- Write to Henekeys (the owners of the pub) demanding that the ban on gays be lifted, and informing them of the violence used by their manager.
- Picket and leaflet any Henekeys pub in your area.
- Send donations and messages of solidarity to:-

G.L.F., 153 Woodhouse Lane, Leeds2.

RICK HATCHER

F A day of action

Pushing prams decorated with balloons, posters and stickers, members of WL, GLF, IMG and ORA marched into the shopping precinct in central Leeds on Saturday 7 July to hand out leaflets on the family allowance campaign.

The response to the leafleting was good, and more than 2,000 leaflets were given out, but the demonstrators found it difficult to sell pamphlets on the campaign to busy women laden with shopping, so they are planning to go round housing estates in the near future as a continuation of Saturday's activities, and hope to hold a public meeting to discuss family allowances and the tax credit system.

Prior to Saturday, the Leeds comrades have leafleted Post Offices, sent letters to Trade Union branches, put on street theatre at a local Labour Club, and won the support of the Yorkshire area NALGO action for their campaign.

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