

SOCIALIST WOMAN

NATIONAL PAPER OF THE SOCIALIST WOMAN GROUPS March-April 1972

THE BLINDING OF EMMA GROVES How British troops "keep the peace"



Emma Groves, of Andersonstown, Belfast lost the sight of both her eyes when a paratrooper fired a rubber bullet into her face at point-blank range.

The incident occurred on the morning of 4th November when yet another military search was taking place in her area. One group of soldiers had completed their work and left, and then the paras moved in.

Mrs Groves opened her window. She was told by a para to "close your fucking window". She didn't, and so he shot her in the face. The rubber bullet collapsed the bridge of her nose and blinded her for life. Many Catholics listening to their radios heard an army voice say on a walkie-talkie: "I hope we killed the cunt".

The photograph on this cover has never appeared in the British press. At the time it was too busy condemning the tarring and feathering of collaborators to bother about the activities or the role of the British Army.

BLOODY SUNDAY and ALDERSHOT
Two steps on the road to national liberation,
page 11

MINERS WIVES ON THE PICKET LINES
ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI
LESSONS OF THE EQUAL PAY MOVEMENT
THE SOCIALIST WOMAN CONFERENCE

EDITORIAL

At their first national conference on the weekend of 29th-30th January, the Socialist Woman Groups took the decision to initiate a campaign on the slogan "For Equal Pay and Equal Work and against low pay".

Many people, particularly working women themselves, would agree with these demands and would support a campaign seeking to achieve them.

But why launch such a campaign at this particular time, and what does it involve?

Strictly speaking, this is not the first campaign of this nature, although it is the first based on these specific demands. The organisation NJACWER, 1968-1971, was an earlier attempt to mobilise working women on these and similar demands, but mainly around the Equal Pay slogan.

However, the whole basis of this movement was reformist. It believed the stories and promises of Labour M.P.s and trade union bureaucrats, and thought the battle was won in the passing of the Equal Pay Act. They thought that the few skirmishes they had engaged in—the major one being the Rally on May 18th 1970—had won a victory. They forgot what decades of trade unionists had learned, that no one will give you anything without a fight, and to disband your organisation and disarm (metaphorically speaking) your troops on the strength of promises is to court disaster.

Also, what had started as a campaign for Equal Rights rapidly became restricted to a fight for Equal Pay, and the collapse which followed the EPAct was a betrayal of those women not covered by the Act, still struggling against low pay, poor conditions, discrimination at work and restrictions on the right to unionise. The promise contained in the Act successfully split off the better organised, already higher paid women who would benefit from even such a limited piece of legislation, from the millions of women workers whose situation will probably be worsened by this same Act.

Which is why it is important to base any campaign on the three interrelated demands of equal pay, equal work and an end to low pay.

Also, the general economic situation makes it imperative that women workers take an aggressive stand on the question of their right to work and their right to equality at work. As the unemployment figures go up, the tendency is for women to be pressurised into going back to the home in order that the number of jobs for men should be increased. In many cases, the jobs concerned are so clearly labelled "women's work" that no man, no matter how desperate, would touch them. But the pressures are there. And many women will be tempted to give way to them. But why should they? Why should they be penalised because those people who run this society cannot even do it efficiently? Why should they make sacrifices to prop up a social order which has outlived its usefulness?

All workers should be developing the attitude that the boss's worries are the boss's worries and no worker is going to help him solve them.

The worker must concern herself with *her own interests*, as part of the interests of her class—all other questions follow after. So this is what makes the campaign so important. It makes it clear to employers and government alike that the women workers of this country will not help them solve their problems, but will instead force them to justify their claims to political and economic power.

Unless this fight is fought now, it will be too late. Women will once more be isolated in individual households, and their potential power will be broken.

But what exactly is this power, and how does the campaign hope to unleash and direct it?

The power of working women is the same as that of all workers—by uniting and organising they can break down, and at times even reverse, the relationship which exists between the individual worker and the employer. Unfortunately, many women workers do not as yet realise this power exists. They are caught on the horns of the old dilemma. Their job is not so central to their lives that they are willing to fight for a certain measure of control over wages and conditions; on the other hand, their wage is necessary to the family economy, and so they are unwilling to jeopardise it by "sticking their necks out" and being militant.

In many cases, all they need is encouragement, backing, support, and this is what makes the attitude of the unions so criminal. By and large the unions ignore women workers, even in some cases leaving the women to struggle alone, inexperienced and isolated, against the employers. Yet despite this, the percentage of women workers joining the unions in the last ten years has been much higher than the percentage for men. But now many of these women are becoming disillusioned, which is why such things occur as the breakaway from the GMWU to form the Women's Industrial Union.

Many women militants, equally frustrated by the trade unions, recognise this as a short-sighted policy, but can find no more attractive proposition.

Which is what this campaign is intended to provide. The ultimate aim is, while remaining within the ranks of the trade unions, to bypass the trade union bureaucracy and help women workers organise themselves across union lines, and at a rank and file level, to fight for these three demands within the unions, and to use their united strength to help other women workers who are fighting for organisation, for union recognition, wage increases, conditions, against redundancies and so on. In other words, the women will by their activities say to the unions, if you won't help us, we'll help ourselves, and if you won't help us fight the State and the employers for our rights, then we'll take you on as well!

Women must fight not only for these three demands, but for their place in the trade union movement. They fought for it before, but lost it when they moved out of the labour force and back into the home. This time they are fighting not only for that place, but for the right to work, for the right to equality at work, and for an end to all discrimination at work.

To demand any less is to fall into the same trap as NJACWER, and not to demand anything at all is to go back to square minus one.

The women's liberation movement had better realise this fast, or it will find itself sheepishly tail-ending these women workers which it doesn't understand but condescends now and again to support.

SOCIALIST WOMAN CONFERENCE

Report and Assessment

About 100 members and close sympathisers of the Socialist Woman Groups came together over the weekend of 29th-30th January for our first conference, at Imperial College, London. The large attendance more than fulfilled our expectations and indicated the rapid growth of the groups over recent months.

The necessity of such a conference had been recognised ever since groups had begun emerging in towns around Britain. Their growth was naturally presenting them with problems of what relationship to establish with existing or future women's groups in the area and what relationship existed between Socialist Woman and the revolutionary left. This particularly involved their relationship with the International Marxist Group, under whose initiative the first Socialist Woman Groups and the paper *Socialist Woman* were set up.

More urgent was the need to establish a common political basis from which to coordinate the activities of the groups, pass on the lessons drawn from local struggles and further build up the groups. Most groups had already drawn up a local manifesto for the purpose of recruiting, expressing the broad aims and political position of "Socialist Woman" on the question of women's liberation, differentiating themselves from purely feminist and from reformist groupings, and locating themselves within the mainstream of the revolutionary movement.

But these manifestoes were likely to reflect the political and ideological strength or weakness of the comrades in each particular area. What was needed was discussion and agreement on the idea of a common unifying political manifesto, and a session of the Conference was allocated for this.

The Conference was divided into plenary sessions interspersed with small group discussions in order that maximum participation by members would be possible. Linda Smith introduced the Saturday morning session by sketching the background to the women's liberation movement in Britain and giving a historical explanation of the turning point that many women's groups are currently approaching. She explained the limits to which a women's movement can go in isolation from wider political struggles.

This was followed up by a paper presented by Judith White on the relationship between women's liberation and revolutionary socialism.

In the afternoon a woman member of the Irish Solidarity Campaign spoke on women in the Irish national liberation struggle and the objective need for Socialist Woman to take a solidarity position with the struggle led by the IRA for a united Ireland and a Workers Republic.

A woman comrade from the Danish section of the Fourth International followed this with a greeting from that organisation. She reported on the setting up in January of a socialist women's group in Denmark (with the same political perspective as those in Britain) in response to the inward-

looking, feminist, anarchistic movement that had grown up during the previous six months. The basis of the groups is recognition that women's liberation cannot possibly be achieved on the basis of the existing strategy of the Danish movement—i.e. outside of a total revolutionary perspective.

Conference split up again to discuss women's struggles in the context of the class struggle, and to develop the morning's discussions.



Margaret Coulson from Lancaster Socialist Woman Group opened the next full session on the need for Socialist Woman to initiate an industrially orientated campaign for Equal Pay and Equal Work against low pay. She stressed the point that the Equal Pay Act did not envisage or legislate for the raising of the position of most working class women above the level of low-paid workers. What is needed to make the fight for women's liberation dynamic and fruitful is a campaign exposing the real nature of the Act to be an attempt by the ruling class to defuse the women's liberation struggle and isolate it from the class struggle while fostering reformist illusions among working-class women. This means a campaign demanding equal work with men, not just equal pay—i.e. no relegating of any work to women as a separate category—all jobs to be open to men and women indiscriminately at the same rates of pay, regardless of marital status, etc., and this must be a two-way process of levelling up and in no case levelling down.

EDITORIAL BOARD: Margaret Coulson, Jacky Freeman, Leonora Lloyd, Roberta Manners, Wanda Mariuszko, Pat Masters, Vicky Robinson, Linda Smith, Felicity Trodd.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent editorial opinion.

Such a campaign would link our struggle with the on-going class struggle, outside of which it is doomed to failure. Clearly women have to make this part of the campaign against low pay and redundancies for *all* workers, particularly in the present context of the generalised attack of the ruling class upon the organised working class.

Pat Sturdy, who has initiated an exclusively women's trade union, the Women's Industrial Union, attended the conference as an observer, and brought up the thorny problem of how women militants can overcome the frustrations encountered in the existing male-dominated and extremely bureaucratised undemocratic unions.

It is hoped that the brief discussions that took place on this will be continued and developed within the groups during the coming period. This discussion is particularly relevant to the working out of a strategy for the Equal Pay/Equal Work campaign.

The question of the specific oppression of black women in the West Indies, the USA and Britain, the way in which the West Indian brand of colonial culture has entrapped women within the family, was analysed by Althea Jones of the Black Panthers, another guest to the conference.

She stressed the continuing necessity for oppressed sections to organise themselves independently and separately from the existing working class and revolutionary organisations, in view of the prevalence of racist and sexist attitudes within these.

Again, a number of key problems were raised which require a lot of thought and discussion in the Socialist Woman Groups.

On Sunday morning, after an introduction by Leonora Lloyd of the West London Socialist Woman Group on the strategic tasks imposed by the Equal Pay/Equal Work campaign, a panel of sympathetic trade union militants answered questions and commented on the problems and difficulties encountered in trying to unionise and politicise working class women, particularly in badly organised sectors.

The progress of the Nightcleaners Campaign in which the Socialist Woman Groups have been involved since the beginning was reported by May Hobbs, a leading militant in the struggle. She stressed the need for women's groups to keep the pressure up especially where women are organised.

Problems of union organisation and tactics for meeting bosses' attempts to blind with statistics, etc. were outlined by Steve Lynch of the GMWU. Experience of fighting in the UPW and in the Jewellers' Union on the question of equal work, equal pay, organising women, etc. was conveyed by Vicky Robinson and Jo Gilbert.

The last session was spent mainly in discussion of the draft manifesto presented by Felicity Trodd of the North London Socialist Woman Group. Since agreement on the exact text was not established, the Conference voted to accept the general line expressed in the main section of the draft which should be clarified and expanded, and to take the rest of the draft back to their groups for further discussion.

The Editorial Board, which was elected by Conference, will publish the final version of the Socialist Woman Manifesto as soon as it is established.

Linda Fryd

TUC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE 16/17th MARCH BOURNEMOUTH

Not only was it the first time that active members of the women's liberation movement (including three from Socialist Woman Groups) were among the trade union women attending the 42nd Women's Conference; it was obvious that the ideas of the women's liberation have begun to permeate the working class movement. This was particularly evident in two of the most important debates.

In the discussion around the report from the Women's Advisory Committee on training and opportunity, entitled "Roots of Inequality" it was accepted that attitudes towards sex roles and functions begin at birth and are influenced by many things including the media and their relentless manipulation of women for profit. However this point was obviously overlooked by some of the speakers in the other debate on whether separate Women's Conference was desirable when we were claiming equality with men. Those women who had "made it" in the male-dominated trade union world felt that what they had done could be done by many others and had little patience with the difficulties of the average woman worker in fighting prejudice and her feelings of inadequacy. Only 50 women out of over 1,060 delegates attended the 1971 TUC, and Christine Page of USDAW promised us that abolition of the Women's Conference would not result in one extra woman delegate. Many speakers claimed that the subjects discussed at the Women's Conference should be of interest to all trade unionists but of course that is not to say they would get onto the TUC's already crowded agenda. Delegates were perfectly aware that the conference was used as a sop to the women but still felt it was useful for formulating policy on which the women could go back to their organisations and fight and for helping women to gain experience and confidence. (Delegates voted to keep Conference).

The Conference was notable for the high proportion of young delegates although many speakers emphasised how many years they had been coming—during which time little progress had been made in certain fields, notably equal pay. In the debate on this subject we heard of slow progress in various industries, of the dangers of job evaluation, and somewhat condescending advice from the teachers on how to get equal pay. However, only one or two delegates mentioned the need for *action*, and one of our speakers also emphasised the need for the unions to give a vigorous lead if equal pay (i.e. men and women as a whole having the same average wage) was to become a reality.

Other debates concerned the vital problem of recruitment and participation of women in trade unions and the question of "facilities for working women", particularly childcare.

The biggest disappointment was that the opportunities to exchange experiences with other delegates were so limited. Quite a number of delegates bought SW and it would have been good to be able to discuss it. However on the whole, we came away with the view that the calibre of the average woman trade union activist is quite as high as the men's.

Leonora Lloyd



MINERS' WIVES - ACTIVE SOLIDARITY



Calverton

The recent miners' strike was significant not only because of the militancy and determination of the men on strike in support of their wage claim, but also because of the *active* solidarity shown by miners' wives in many parts of the country. In Kent, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, wives joined the picket line to demonstrate their support of the strike. They also developed militant forms of protest against local shopkeepers who put up "no credit" notices or refused to lower prices, and against the meagre pittances allowed to strikers' families by the Social Security.

The picketing, boycotts and occupations were a slap in the face for press propaganda, which has consistently attempted to divide the working class on sex lines in order to weaken the ability of striking men to stay out. This propaganda persuaded housewives that their interests as wives, mothers and consumers was opposed to the interests of men as workers. Attacks on their living standards in the form of price increases were blamed on militant trade unionists demanding higher wages.

However in the case of the miners' strike, this propaganda backfired! The local press which was confidently predicting a "sex strike" was forced to record quite a different response from miners' wives in Nottinghamshire. They were perfectly aware of how much or rather how little their husbands earned. As the ones who have to manage the household budget, they also bear the brunt of the whole range of Tory attacks on working class living standards, so they were eager to make the strike 100% effective. In fact the first active response came because wives in some areas felt the pickets weren't "effective enough". Mrs. Gillian Burton who organised wives to join the picket line in Langwith did so because "the men did not seem to be doing enough to stop the deputies going in, so we thought we would try."

The most solid response came from the miners' wives of Calverton, a mining village in North Notts. Here the wives decided to picket after a much publicised incident at "Coal House", Regional NCB Headquarters in Doncaster, where pickets were given bad press reports when they tried to stop female clerical workers going in to work. They felt they would have more impact on the blacklegs if they picketed. They travelled over from Calverton in coach loads every day to NCB Regional Headquarters at Edwinstowe and maintained an extremely effective picket.

The numbers going in to work rapidly dwindled. From the time they decided to take action, Calverton wives held weekly miners' wives' meetings with the local Strike Committee to discuss their actions. Members of Nottingham Socialist Woman Group were invited to attend these meetings.

The women also decided on a boycott of all shops in the area who would not lower their prices to striking families. The Strike Committee agreed to organise bulk buying of food for the community. The women intended to picket the shops also, but the boycott was so effective that they did not need to. They will continue to boycott certain shops now that the strike is over.

Their militancy on the picket lines drew a not unexpected response from the Coal Board and the press. Describing them as "petticoat pickets", a local NCB official commented, "We deplore the fact that there are these people. They are doing no service to the miners or anyone else. We are sure the NUM does not want this outside interference. They are making the situation worse." They were also attacked for their "unfeminine" "unwomanly" behaviour. These attacks designed to intimidate the women only had the effect of clarifying the biased role of the press. The women as well as the men also began to see clearly the role of the police during the strike. Iris Cockayne, spokeswoman for the pickets at Edwinstowe, said, "At the beginning of the strike, there were some nasty incidents when they arrested two young lads and ill-treated them. They have been reluctant to lay hands on the women except for a bit of pushing and shoving. But we have been abused by those going into work and in some cases physically assaulted and they do nothing about that. The press are the same—they only show one side of the picture."



Members of Nottingham Socialist Woman Group picketed with the wives at Edwinstowe, and the physical and financial solidarity, through collections and poster sales in Nottingham and the information on Social Security benefits to strikers from the local Claimants Union were well received, as was the support given in other areas by Socialist Woman and Women's Liberation Groups.

The example of the miners' wives and of the Brannans strikers shows that working class women, both as housewives and workers, are becoming increasingly aware of the current attacks on working class living standards and organisations, and are prepared to respond in a militant way. Now housewives in Derbyshire are organising to fight the rent increases on council houses. As the crisis of capitalism deepens, we can expect that more and more women will move into action against the system which exploits and oppresses them.

Nottingham Socialist Woman Group

Keresley

An excellent example of working class solidarity in action, and a lesson in how to organise such action, was given by miners' wives in the recent miners' strike.

Keresley Miners' Wives United from Keresley, Coventry, proved that women can be a force to be reckoned with during such a crisis. After attending the miners' demonstration in London on February 14th, the Keresley women returned home more determined than ever to show their solidarity with the miners. They formed a committee of nine women from their first meeting, and approached the miners' strike committee with offers of help.

At this point a certain amount of male chauvinism was to be seen in the miners' decision not to let the women on the picket lines. But this did not discourage the women in any way.

They supplied the men night and day with soup, food and hot drinks. Using their own initiative, the women asked to appear on the Frost show on the miners' strike. But they received what can only be called "a very polite letter" from Frost, refusing their request.

An example of capitalist "generosity" came to light at this stage. The women applied to Heinz, Crosse & Blackwell, Cadbury Bros. and Oxo for food supplies for the strikers and their dependents, and were refused. A "let the workers starve" attitude to the nation's workers on the part of the great food manufacturers.

Positive action came from the Keresley women when they organised their own attack on the country's biggest strike fund, the Social Security. The women cooperated in this action with the single claimants who, until this point, had received no payment at all. After great arguments with the local bureaucrats and threats from the police, the Keresley women achieved a victory over the Social Security by getting the single miners their payments.

This effective organisation of women has shown, throughout the country, that working class women can play a valuable part, not only in the fight for recognition and self-awareness, but also in the class struggle as a whole. They are capable of making their contribution to the struggle of the whole working class against capitalism.

This example given by the miners' wives shows clearly the way in which women not immediately engaged in a struggle can play their part in winning that struggle, and the way in which women can take their part in the major struggle to overthrow capitalist society.

Coventry Socialist Woman Group

LETTERS

Comrades,

I'm hoping that it's not too late for the inclusion of a few lines in the next edition of *Socialist Women* about the National Women's Liberation Conference.

The Conference will be held on March 25/26th in Manchester. It will be informal with opportunity for everyone in the movement to discuss opinions with others during group discussions and small workshops.

People wanting more details about the Conference should contact me at the above address.

Best wishes,

Maggie Mackay,
Flat 4, 372 Wellington Road North, Stockport, Cheshire.
SK4 5AA.

Editor,

We came across something pretty bad which I think should be made known. In the 1971-72 "NUS Discount Directory" are three large advertisements for abortion clinics which grossly overcharge, and all of which have names misleadingly similar to The Pregnancy Advisory Service which is a respectable non-profit organisation who charge £65 all in.

I asked my researcher Georgie to phone each one saying she was pregnant and how much would an abortion cost? In each case she said she couldn't afford what they asked, could they do it for less?

Here are the results:

1. PREGNANCY ADVISORY CENTRE (Kensington Laboratories), 124a Brompton Road, S.W.3. (581 0391). £150. Friendly, persuasive woman, lost interest when Georgie said she couldn't possibly afford that much.
2. PREGNANCY CONSULTATION SERVICES (Mortimer Laboratories), 40 Mortimer Street, W.1 (580 9001). £120; eventually came down to £90 which they said was their absolute minimum.
3. CENTRAL PREGNANCY ADVISORY CENTRE, 48a Wicklow Street, W.C.1 (278 5976). The man laughed when Georgie said she could only afford £70 and said as she was hard up she could have it done for £130.

A further warning is that these associated and other commercial pregnancy testing services recommend clients with positive results to expensive clinics, presumably on commission.

The best thing to do is fully covered in *Alternative London*, pages 195-197, but my best brief advice is to go to the FPA at 27 Mortimer Street, W.1 (636 7866) between 11 and 3. They do really reliable pregnancy tests while you wait for £1.50 and if it's positive there's someone to discuss it with who can put you in touch with good people to help you out, whether you decide to keep the baby, have it adopted or have an abortion.

Nicholas Saunders,
Alternative London, 65 Edith Grove, London S.W.10.

OCCUPATION AT FISHER BENDIX - Interview with a Shop Steward

On January 5th, a mass meeting of 800 workers at the Fisher Bendix works in Kikby, near Liverpool, voted unanimously to occupy their factory. This decision was taken after the threat of further redundancies and the proposed closure of the works in May 1972. The occupation lasted a month, after which the redundancy notices were withdrawn. A Socialist Women representative spoke to Mrs. Melville, a woman shop steward and a member of the strike committee, in the third week of the occupation.

Cath Young: We understand that about 800 workers are involved in the occupation. How many of these are women?

Mrs. Melville: There are about 50 assembly workers and cleaning staff. The catering is done on a contract basis, so there aren't any catering staff involved. Obviously, the wives of the men workers here play an important role. They are a bit apprehensive about the insecurity, but most of them are behind the action we are taking. Some of them come to the meetings, bringing their children. There are no nurseries in this area.

—Are the women workers in the union?

Yes, we have 100% unionisation. They are either in the AUEW or the T&GWU. I've been in the union for 11 years now. It's often difficult to get women into unions, and so they suffer greatest from redundancies.

—What are the conditions like for the women?

All the women work on one shift. We don't have equal pay and work on a productivity basis, but the women are reasonably happy with their wages. Most women here are in their 40s—the youngest girl we have is 25—and they find it hard to get jobs around Merseyside.

—What sort of support have you had? Is there any chance of a sell-out?

Oh, yes, we've had great support from the trade union movement—donations, and the blacking of goods. We've also been backed by our higher officials—we haven't had any financial assistance from them, but they've declared the

strike official. I don't think there's any chance of a sell-out—Hugh Scanlon is too perturbed about unemployment on Merseyside.

—How has the day-to-day running of the occupation been carried out?

All decisions are made at the mass meetings, where the proposals must come from the floor. The women have taken over the catering—well, we all know how to cook—and the men keep the place tidy; it's cleaner here now than it's ever been. We all muck in together—there aren't any men and women here, only trade unionists.

Such solidarity of the workers at the plant, both male and female, is an essential prerequisite for a successful industrial action. It is for this reason that we must encourage and work towards full unionisation of women workers. As the most unorganised section of the working class is that of women workers, they have less security of employment and get paid, on average, half as much as men workers. While we recognise the limitations of working in these male-dominated, bureaucratic organisations, we must also recognise that to achieve advances in their working conditions, women need the support of the labour movement, whose only organisational expression is through those unions. In an article in *Socialist Woman* No. 1 1972, Nina Thomas made this very point:

"It is then the nature of the present trade unions that is at fault, rather than the principle of unionisation."

The successes of women who have made the unions work for them—such as the London and Lancaster cleaners—have borne this point out. So, too, did the occupation of Fisher Bendix show that men and women working solidly as *trade unionists* form an irresistible force against the plans of the employing class to boost profits by lowering the living standards of men and women workers.

Cath Young

EQUALITY ON WHOSE TERMS?

"Our fight for equality is for better opportunities, better conditions, better pay for women ... and for men!"

The Anti-Discrimination Bill was "talked out" of the House of Commons early in February. The Bill aimed to forbid discrimination against women in employment on the grounds of sex where a job is available and the person is qualified for it.

Even if we don't think that laws like this will achieve equality for women in work, we'd support *this aim*.

BUT the Bill would also end discrimination *in favour* of women in some circumstances; it tried to establish that women must be employed on "like terms" and in "like conditions of work" with men. So the existing "protective" clauses in the Factories Acts which restrict night shift and 3-shift working by women would have to go. (Even now employers can get the restrictions lifted in some circumstances).

That's not the sort of equality we are interested in. Factories are organised into shift systems so that machinery can be in use for 24 hours each day and maximum profits can be made. Shift work damages people's health and disrupts their

social life and ability to take part in trade union and political affairs.

We are against a system which puts machinery and profits before people.

Wherever women have gained some protection or advantages compared with male workers—another example would be retirement age—we should demand that these apply to *all* workers; and *not* that women should give up these small advantages in order to be "equal".

We demand equal pay and equal work for women, an end to all discrimination *against* women.

In this struggle we have to be aware that changes in the law which appear to be about greater equality may actually leave women worse off than before.

STOP PRESS: The Bill has now been passed by the House of Lords and so the whole question is to be reopened in the Commons.

Alexandra Kollontai was born 100 years ago this March. She played an important part in the international revolutionary movement at the beginning of the century: large crowds in the USA, Germany, England, and the Scandinavian countries came to her meetings. She worked in close contact with Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, the Liebknechts and was considered by the Bolshevik Party their authority on the problem of Finland and by European socialists as one of the main writers on the "woman question".

During the first years of the Russian revolution she was, because of her association with the "Workers Opposition" which championed the power of the trade unions, relegated to diplomatic work; and the exile that had begun in 1908 under the Tsar continued almost without interruption until her retirement in 1945.

Both within the Soviet Union and in Europe she was forgotten or mentioned in a couple of lines either as the woman revolutionary—beautiful, charming, and always impeccably dressed, or as the supposed advocate of "free love" and the idea that sex should be as easy as drinking a glass of water.

In the present situation of revolutionary struggle when all categories of oppressed people are finding a voice, Kollontai's insistence on the right of every person to control his or her own life should be heard and heeded. Her analysis of women's position under capitalism and of the struggle by which women can achieve liberation is already recognised as relevant.

For many of the problems that concerned Kollontai and the women's movement of which she was part are those which we face today.

Like most women who become involved in the contemporary movement, Kollontai was a member of the privileged classes. Her father was a general and she was brought up in comfort and given the education befitting her status. It was through a realisation of her personal oppression, of the inferior status offered women in society, that she was drawn to politics. Dissatisfied with the life of an engineer's wife and wanting independence and education, she left her husband to study in Zurich.

It became clear to her that the Marxists, with whom she was associated from this time on, were paying too little attention both in their theory and in their activities to the problem of women. They were prepared to pay lip service to an analysis of society that showed women's inferior status to be the result of her exploitation, but were, in the main, content to reason that there could be little improvement under a capitalist system. All would be won when a socialist society was established. Kollontai repeated again and again that the question of

ALEXANDRA

women's place was fundamental in the fight for socialism and that its discussion could not be waved away as "diverting from the class struggle".

Neither was it sufficient to point with vague hopefulness to the increased introduction of women into the labour force. This process could not be appreciated except in the context of a woman's life as a whole. This meant an understanding of the origins and workings of the family.

Kollontai argued that in early societies women, because of their biological make-up, had been more often left by the hearth to cook and carry out the less arduous and usually subordinate tasks in production.

With the rise of property relations and the definition of people by their accumulation of property, women, who were at a disadvantage in this game, came to be seen as inferior.

The smallest social unit of society, the family, was now also the primary economic unit. Women concerned themselves with the internal affairs of the family; their status outside was determined by their position within the family, and this gave them little opportunity to become involved in matters that reached beyond the home walls.

The family is thus the social unit within which a woman experiences her life, and which expresses and reinforces the repressive nature of society. Women must therefore come to understand that the family is not a sacred unchangeable institution but one that adapts to the prevailing economic conditions. Then she will see how family and society are changing about her and how she can best act to make the world a better place for all people to live in.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Written in 1920 for working-class women in post-revolutionary Russia, this agitational pamphlet by Alexandra Kollontai, Minister of Social Welfare in the first Bolshevik government, gives a vivid account of the origin of International Women's Day and the militancy of the mass working women's movements on the eve of the First World War, leading on March 8th 1917 to the Petrograd women's demonstration which sparked off the Russian revolution. Confronted with this, the European bourgeois governments attempted to integrate women into bourgeois parliamentary politics—they offered them the vote. Now, as then, our answer should be:

"Mr. Bourgeois, sir—it is too late!"

First translation into English by Alix Holt; a Socialist Woman Special produced by the North London Socialist Woman Group. Price 5p (+ 3p postage) from 182 Pentonville Road, London N.1.

KOLLONTAI

HER LIFE



Women can never take part in social and political life while they are tied to housework and the bringing up of children. Kollontai insisted that the organisation of women around these problems was central to the revolutionary movement.

There were other problems that could not be left undiscussed. Because woman's contribution towards production led to her subordinate role within the family, where the emphasis was on reproduction, she was oppressed and used in personal relationships. Kollontai does not hesitate to discuss women's sexuality and to analyse the confusion in a changing society of attitudes to love and sex. She knew from her personal experience the difficulty of establishing oneself as a human being in one's own right and could write with sympathy and insight of the psychological problems that faced individuals, particularly women.

"Perhaps man has never in any age experienced loneliness of the soul with such pain and persistence.

"In our desire to escape this loneliness we love; and in such circumstances our human feelings cripple and exploit. Man's whole psyche will have to be changed so that he becomes capable of love."

We therefore find in Kollontai's writing much that speaks for us today. But we completely misunderstand her if we quote her in defence of middle-class self-pity and self-analysis.

Kollontai is important to us just because although she sees so clearly the oppression of women at an economic, social and psychological level, she always connects the position of women with a view of the society as a whole, and the changes of women's lives with changes in society.

Only when production is run on socialist lines will the economic base disappear upon which the different levels of the "woman question" have been built up. Thus Kollontai wrote and campaigned against those middle-class organisations who were failing to tackle the problem at its economic roots. Since only the working class is in the position to effect this change, Kollontai saw her main task as agitation among and organisation of working women.

This is still the main task today.

Alix Holt

REVIEW: *Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Woman*—A. Kollontai. (Orbach & Chambers, 1972)

A danger to be faced by the new wave of women involved in any aspect of women's liberation is that they are liable, in the search for the "role of women in history" to go overboard on the idea. Consequently they lose the critical analysis of past events and so develop false ideas. This is not to say that this search should not go on but in doing so we should be conscious of the criteria which it is essential we use.

An example of the dangers involved can be better seen if we look at this book quite critically. With an introduction by the "emancipated woman" Germaine Greer and with such a provocative title, it is obvious that this book is meant for the women's "movement" in the States and in Britain. (It also strikes me that the title could be one that is meant to appeal to any sexist who has never heard of A. Kollontai and who is interested in finding some sort of titillation to their own sex drives!)

Alexandra Kollontai—born 1872—died 1952: Member of the Menshevik Party during the early 1900s; joined the Bolshevik Party around 1914/16; member of the first Bolshevik government in 1917; a leading member of the Workers Opposition 1921; resigned 1922; Soviet diplomat until 1945; lived in retirement in Soviet Union until her death in 1952. Today she is hardly known in the Soviet Union. Many of her speeches and pamphlets are to be found in the Party archives and libraries but little if anything of hers is published. A few of her speeches and pamphlets are being published in English, plus, for some strange reason, *this*, her official autobiography, written in 1926 and covering all of 45 pages (including all those passages which she herself removed before publication in Moscow in the mid-20s.

It may sound disparaging but I can find little reason for the publication of this enlarged pamphlet other than that 1972 is the centenary of her birth and it is an appropriate piece to publish with an introduction by Greer on the front and a postscript by Iring Fetscher. Included too is the essay *The New Woman* written in 1922.

But the autobiography is meant to be the key writing in this volume and it hardly merits attention. There are almost no political ideas contained in the book: no discussion of political developments or analyses of events. Anything which she in 1926 thought was controversial or critical was carefully self-censored out. It ends up being a text which gives a skeleton view of her own *life* up to 1926 and explains or analyses nothing.

Key events or developments in the politics of the Soviet Union in the period from 1899 when she joined the Russian Social Democratic Party are either ignored or veiled by meaningless sentences. She does not explain for what reason she left the Menshevik Party. She refuses to develop any reasons for resigning from the Commissariat of Social Welfare in 1918: "Now began a dark time of my life which I cannot treat of here since the events are still too fresh in my mind. But the day will also come when I will give an account of them." She says nothing about the part she played in the Workers Opposition.

Any criticism, however slight, that she made of the Bolshevik Party in the first draft of her autobiography was deleted by her own pen. For example, she deleted: "For our Soviet marriage law, separated from the Church to be sure, is not essentially more progressive than the same laws that after all exist in other progressive democratic countries." Why she removed this, one is unsure; probably in Stalinist

Russia the fact that the Soviet laws were being compared unfavourably with other countries may have been the motivation. (It would have been better had it been because her classification of bourgeois democratic countries i.e. Scandinavia etc. as "progressive democratic" was an incorrect one). However, to understand Kollontai's autobiography one must look at her political development.

Born in 1872 of middle-class parentage, she grew up when the Marxist parties were gaining increasing importance. By 1899 she had joined the Social Democratic Party after having studied in Zurich for a short time. She participated in the revolutionary upsurge of 1905, and it is apparent that by this time she had developed a strong, indeed an overriding, interest in the "woman question".

She had started to work with women workers, organising them and agitating amongst them. She was then a member of the Menshevik Party (although her reasons for joining the Menshevik Party are very sketchy in her autobiography) where she "was even branded as a 'syndicalist' by my Party comrades." Until 1908, when she was forced to emigrate due to police pressures on her, she spent most of her time working with the organisations of workers. Then she moved to Germany. While she was abroad she worked with Russian emigrants e.g. with Lunacharsky, Gorky, Bogdanov, Trotsky and Chicherin: agitating, writing articles and organising women.

By 1915 she had developed a revolutionary defeatist position on the war and while working in Germany with Liebknecht and Luxemburg, she was "moving rapidly towards the Bolshevik Party".

In March 1917 she returned to Russia and was used by the Bolsheviks as one of their first political agitators—others being Trotsky and Lunacharsky.

After the Revolution she was made Commissar of Social Welfare and gradually developed differences with the Bolshevik leadership, which had crystallised out by 1921 when she and Shlyapnikov led the Workers Opposition.

By this date she was arguing that the management of the national economy should be a function of the all-Russian Congress of Producers organised in industrial unions, which should elect a central body to run the whole of the national economy. She was opposed to the Party control of the trade unions and denounced Lenin and Trotsky as militarists of labour and promoters of inequality.

The Workers Opposition wanted to fight the increasing bureaucratisation of the Workers State and were demanding that the Bolsheviks trust the fate of the Soviet Union to the "working class which had raised it to power". The demands put forward included immediate satisfaction of workers' needs, equal wages and rewards for all, for supply without payment of food, clothing and lodging to all workers, and free medical attention, travel and education.

Obviously these were Utopian demands in the Soviet Union in 1921 which could do nothing but divide and divert the Party. Lenin and Trotsky both argued that this was a deviation towards Syndicalism and Anarchism, and that such demands could only be met in an economy of plenty, i.e. under full communism. 1921 Russia was not that!

By 1922 she had left the Workers Opposition and in fact had withdrawn from the political debate. It was then that she opted out of revolutionary politics, accepting instead a diplomatic post in Norway, and in effect staying away from Russia until 1945.

For the whole of this time she remained silent. She never made any public statements about the Bonapartism of

Stalin, the erosion of the fragile gains made by the women of Russia after 1917, or even the wholesale slaughter of all her old comrades of the Bolshevik Party. Not one word. She had turned her back on all her revolutionary experience and ideas.

And it cannot be claimed for her that she was ignorant of what was occurring in Russia. She had enough contact with the Russian leadership, even though she was in Scandinavia. She could read innumerable foreign languages, and the foreign press were reporting developments in the Soviet Union. She knew: and *chose* not to speak out.

It is salutary to read her last deleted sentences from her autobiography: "No matter what further tasks I shall be carrying out, it is perfectly clear to me that the complete liberation of the working woman and the creation of a new sexual morality will always remain the highest aim of my activity, and of my life."—A sentence deleted because of the desire for self-preservation and the self-knowledge that by 1926 her words were only words.

Obviously Kollontai played an important part in developing ideas about morality and organising women both before and after the revolution, and her writing on the position of women is still important. *But* she was unable to grasp the fundamental importance of the ideas of the Bolsheviks, particularly in the crisis period of 1919 onwards. She retained many of her illusions of what would be possible after the revolution and was unable to fit them to the grim realities of a country facing extreme economic difficulties. When she did fight for her ideas and was defeated, she gave up everything and was unable to continue fighting the developing bureaucratisation of the state. This surely is one of the most important lessons to be learnt from Kollontai's example.

She gave up fighting for her ideas not only about workers democracy but also for those ideas for which we remember her—on the position of women. Most of the advances which the Soviet women gained from 1917 to 1920, she allowed to be weaned away without a murmur. The adulation of such a revolutionary must not be permitted! This "official" autobiography is the nail in her coffin and is interesting only for that.

Jane Porter

1st All-Russian Congress of Working Women and Peasant Women 1918



BLOODY SUNDAY

& ALDERSHOT -

two steps on the road to national liberation

On 27th February, the Derry Women's Action Committee and the Northern Resistance Movement organised an "illegal" march through the Bogside to commemorate Bloody Sunday, when 13 unarmed civilians were shot down on the streets of the city. (This statement is, of course, "illegal" too, since any comment on the Derry massacre is "sub judice" until Widgery's tribunal makes public its findings!) 3,000 people joined the march, to protest against internment and Westminster's hastily contrived legislation to "legitimise" the British Army's policy of repression in the Six Counties.

According to a report in the *Times*, one soldier was knocked unconscious when a crowd of 50 teenagers broke away from the main body of the march and started to stone troops at the William Street barricade, and the Army fired rubber bullets to disperse them. At the junction of William Street and Rossville Street, cannisters of CS gas were thrown, but the Army denied having fired them. "Youths attacking our barricades threw CS gas cannisters at soldiers," an Army spokesman said.

He made no comment about the effects of the gas on his brave troopers, or the fact that tens of thousands of these cannister have been indiscriminately hurled at the nationalist minority, men, women and children alike.

The bomb attack on the officers' mess at ALDERSHOT on 22nd February, for which responsibility has been accepted by the Official IRA, resulted in the tragic and inadvertent killing of five women canteen assistants. Although it was a technical error which led to the bomb exploding at the wrong time, the placing of the bomb was a deliberate act of military retaliation for the cold-blooded murders in Derry, and it must be seen in this context.

In DERRY, the British Army callously opened fire on a large crowd of peaceful civilians, killing 13, in the hope of frightening off the mass support which the civil rights movement has won. The British government and its Army remain both unrepentant and self-righteous about the killings. Aldershot was an attack on a military target—the quarters of the officer corps of the barbaric Parachute regiment—and after it the IRA publicly expressed its regret for the deaths of civilians.

The "regret" of the British ruling class stands in sharp contrast to its actual record. It is a class with centuries of blood on its hands, not only in Ireland, but also in Cyprus, Aden, Africa, and in numerous parts of Asia—everywhere, in fact, where the insatiable arm of British imperialism has been bitten. It has no regrets about its own past or about its present behaviour in the Six Counties. It has no concern for

the social conditions under which waitresses, women cleaners, or any other members of the working class have to live and work.

But the explosion at Aldershot must also be seen in the context of the kind of war which is being fought in Ireland. The nationalist minority is confronting the military might of half the fighting strength of the British Army. The circumstances force the IRA—the minority's armed vanguard—to operate underground, to acquire arms and explosives where it can, and to use them in the most effective way possible. No doubt the IRA would be delighted to hand over half its home-made bombs in exchange for a few dozen helicopters and a few hundred automatic weapons. But meanwhile it is forced to use tactics which "outrage" the ruling class and its press, who admire megaton bombs dropped discreetly from fast planes.

If you would like to join the Irish Solidarity Campaign, which is building up a movement in Britain in support of self-determination for Ireland, and for victory to the IRA, write to: ISC, 22 Duncan Terrace, London N.1.

Hilary Brazen

On the weekend of April 29-30, ISC is holding a conference at Oxford to bring together all those organisations and groups which agree with its demands, though not necessarily with its analysis of the Irish struggle. Irish immigrants in Britain, trades unionists, radical women's groups, and students all have a central part to play in building a movement which can take the issue to the place where the ruling class least wants to see it: the factory floor.

If you would like to attend the conference, and especially if you would like to help mobilise for it, please write at once to the address above. The current issue of the *Irish Citizen* contains a manifesto, outlining the stages of the struggle in Ireland and the reasons for ISC's demands, which will be presented at the conference. It is available from the same address at 3p.



EXPOSING THE HIDDEN UNEMPLOYMENT

EXPOSING THE HIDDEN UNEMPLOYMENT

We know that married women tend not to register on becoming unemployed, but to what extent is the true situation revealed by government statistics on unemployment?

Figures published in February, relating to last June, show some interesting facts. Registered totally unemployed on June 14th 1971 showed:

Men : 589,100 Women : 98,100

But in June 1971, 289,800 fewer men were in jobs than in June 1970 (when male unemployment was 450,000), and the comparative figure for women was 86,800 fewer jobs (with 73,400 women registered wholly unemployed in June 1970).

So, according to the unemployment register, between 1970 and 1971, male unemployment increased by 131,100, and female unemployment by 24,700.

But the number of jobs lost was just over twice that figure for men and more than three times for women.

Only in Professional and Scientific Services was there a substantial increase in employment among women of 62,300.

Some more figures on unemployment:

On January 10th 1972, out of 997,563 unemployed in Great Britain, 127,604 women were unemployed (including 49,518 married women) and 22,230 girls. Figures for Northern Ireland: out of 46,045 unemployed, there are 10,190 women (including 5,923 married women) and 867 girls.

EQUAL PAY : PROGRESS CONTINUES BACKWARDS

Latest published figures, covering October 1971, show that women's pay continues to regress compared to men. Hourly earnings were:

Men : 69,190; under 21 36,400. W
Women : 41,910 (part-time 39,250); girls 26,910

Weekly earnings (full-time manual workers):

Men : £30.93 Women: £15.80



REVIEW - "WOMEN WORKERS IN BRITAIN"

SOCIALIST WOMAN HANDBOOK ON WOMEN WORKERS

There is a very simple lesson that the women's liberation movement ought to learn from the Equal Pay Act: employers are past-masters at minimising the consequences of any legislation which might lean on their pay rolls. Although the percentage differential in men's and women's pay is marginally narrowing (by around 0.6 per cent a year), the cash differential is increasing in practically every occupation, even in those such as teaching where women are meant to be on equal pay already.

The wide range of statistics on women's earnings and conditions which have been compiled by Leonora Lloyd and published by the Socialist Woman Groups as "Women Workers in Britain: a Handbook" reveal that no reformist solution will solve the problem of unequal pay. Women's inequality at work is structurally determined by an economic system which has always used women as a reserve pool of cut-price labour. Hence the necessity for linking the struggle for equal pay with the right to equal work, and the enormous rift in work opportunities cannot be legislated away.

But if women must fight for their rights, where is the struggle to take place? Although a third of women workers belong to a union, they have scarcely any representation in the bureaucracies, and this has led to considerable confusion in the women's liberation movement. If women have to fight the bureaucrats before they can get to grips with the bureaucrats, why bother with the unions?

The answer to that is to be found in the history of the fight for unionisation, and by considering the problems of un-unionised workers and what can happen when the state completely smashing the power of the unions, e.g. Nazi Germany.

Therefore, women must find a way to make the unions fight for the demands, and support their struggles. This is why the S.W.G.'s campaign for equal pay, for equal work and opportunity campaign proposes to women workers that they organise within the unions but without the bureaucracy, and develops a sense of strength and solidarity among women workers.

This handbook provides women workers and those who might assist them in the struggle, with the relevant facts and figures, and is a must for any serious militant.

WOMEN WORKERS IN BRITAIN: A HANDBOOK

Detailed information on all aspects of women's employment in Britain today—their jobs, earnings, conditions, training, unionisation. Assessment of the Equal Pay Act. Many tables and illustrations.

Single copy 25p (+ 3p postage); one-third discount on bulk orders (10 minimum) if paid within 2 months.

A SOCIALIST WOMAN Special, from 182 Pentonville Road, London N.1

LESSONS OF THE EQUAL PAY MOVEMENT

The campaign for equal pay started in force with the Ford women's strike in May-June 1968, although sporadic attempts to form equal pay committees, etc. had been made before that. The campaign reached its height in early 1970 and, to all intents and purposes, died later that year with the passing of the Equal Pay Act, although the corpse was not buried for another eighteen months.

This article is intended to serve partly as an account of that campaign; to place on record at least some of the activities that took place; in fact to ensure that a little bit of our history does not pass away unrecorded. But it cannot be a complete history, partly from lack of space, partly because the campaign was fought all over the country and many pieces of the story are missing.

In addition, an analysis of what happened to the campaign is attempted, a look at its victories, a survey of its failures and shortcomings, in an attempt to learn from the campaign and apply the lessons learnt to our own campaign today.

THE FOUNDING OF N.J.A.C.C.W.E.R.

The strike at Fords aroused a great deal of interest, and one of the organisers, Fred Blake, a district official of the National Union of Vehicle Builders (now amalgamated with T&GWU), felt that a basis for a campaign existed. The first meeting, mainly of union officials, etc. who had written to NUVB, was a flop. But another, held shortly afterwards, in October 1968, at the House of Commons and advertised in the left press, was attended by about 200 people.

Volunteers for a Committee were called for, and 50 gave in their names, including a few of the Ford women who remained on the committee to the bitter end. The Joint Chairmen were Audrey Hunt, a member of ASTMS and author of *A Survey of Women's Employment* (1968) and Christopher Norwood, an M.P. who had presented a private member's bill for Equal Pay and was a part-time official in USDAW. (He has now retired from Parliament and did not stand at the next election). Fred Blake acted as Treasurer and Secretary, assisted by his secretary, Doreen Lane. The organisation was known as the National Joint Action Campaign Committee for Women's Equal Rights.

It was decided to work through the establishment of "Corresponding Secretaries"; when someone wrote in to the campaign, they would either be asked to become corresponding secretaries for their area, or be put in touch with the existing C.S. Meetings of the General Committee were held, generally bi-monthly, in London, and a smaller working party, elected from the G.C., met in between the general meetings. C.S.'s and others who contacted NJACCWER were invited to come to the general meetings, which were sometimes attended by as many as 50 people, overwhelmingly women.

Early in the campaign a six-point charter was discussed, but the second point, dealing with protective legislation, was dropped before the charter was adopted. The other points were:

1. To demand the removal of sex discrimination against women in employment, education and public life.
2. To demand the inclusion of equal pay for work of equal value in all agreements between employers and Trade Unions.
3. To demand that Members of Parliament enforce equal legal rights for women through Parliament.
4. To demand that the T.U.C. leads and co-ordinates a national action campaign for equal pay and opportunities in industry, in accordance with their decision at their 1968 Conference.
5. To demand immediate Government ratification of the I.L.O. Convention 100.

In practice, the campaign concentrated on point 2, in spite of a promise in the leaflet that NJACCWER "will keep on fighting until the women of this country have full rights in every sphere". The campaign won a tremendous amount of support very rapidly: many union branches, Trades Councils, women's organisations, M.P.s, etc. became supporters. The IMG was a supporting group and a member, Toni Gorton, was a member of the General Committee and organiser of the first meeting to be held outside London, in Nottingham, on 30th January 1969, with Audrey Wise as speaker.

WEAKNESSES

Several weaknesses in the method of organisation were evident right from the beginning. The volunteers who had given their names at the first meeting mostly disappeared from sight, leaving a depleted committee, but the newcomers who began to turn up regularly at meetings, including corresponding secretaries and, where they became established, branch organisers, had no status. In fact, for the first four meetings, voting at general meetings was indeed general, everyone present taking it for granted that it was "their" campaign.

Another weakness was the fact that organisations did not "affiliate", but merely "supported"; no regular financial commitment was required, no delegates called for. As branches became established, an opportunity to institute individual membership was passed by. No rules for branches were laid down and the whole thing was very ad-hoc, so that right from the start a feeling of impermanence was able to make itself felt.

The aims of the campaign were to be promoted in a number of ways. Corresponding secretaries were to organise support in their own area. Post-cards were produced for sending to interested organisations calling for support for the main activity of the campaign, a Rally on May 18th 1969. Equal Pay badges were produced and proved very popular. Preparations for the Rally included lobbying the special TUC meeting (on the Labour Government's Trade Union legislation) on February 27 and poster parades, including one in Oxford Street.

As the Rally came nearer, the biggest weakness of all was shown up. The campaign had not been able to organise women in large numbers, had not succeeded in mobilising them and developing their militancy. The method of organising the campaign went right against any such development. The nearest to grass-roots organisation were the local NJACCWER committees, many of these were set up, some with considerable success in local campaigns for better pay etc. However, considering how many of the committee were careerist trade union officials, it is not surprising that no attempts were made to set up factory committees. In fact, the local NAJACCWER branches were

set up as a result of local initiative, not because of encouragement from the general committee.

The nature of the committee was shown up when the first big dispute arose. This was over the question of wording for the posters on the May 18 Rally. Banners from TUs and political groups were allowed, but posters had to be in line with the five point charter. Women from the Women's Equal Rights Campaign (originally the London NJACCWER, from which the trade unionists quickly left, leaving mainly those who are now in Women's Liberation Front) wanted to have posters supporting "the heroic women of Vietnam", but this was turned down by the press officer, Julie Jacobs, a member of the Communist Party. Challenged by Toni Gorton as to the action that would be taken if such posters were brought on the Rally, Jacobs threatened to ask the police to remove anyone carrying them. Uproar! Another CP member, also a man, reproved Jacobs, not only for his sentiments, but also for the chauvinistic way in which he had expressed them.

It was at the meeting after this that for the first time it was mentioned that "visitors to meetings must refrain from voting". On May 1 a meeting was held at the House of Commons, from which a number of suggestions were made, which had they been vigorously taken up, might have resulted in a much stronger campaign which could have continued beyond the point it in fact did. These suggestions included selecting factories with a majority of women workers and conducting campaigns for Equal Pay in them; organising factory gate meetings; and lobbying the TUC and annual LP conference.

GROWTH

The Rally duly took place in pouring rain, attended by about 1,000 women mainly from unions and mainly from outside London. Interest in the campaign continued to grow and the next activities planned were a meeting at Brighton for the Labour Party conference in early October and an "Equal Pay Day" on September 12, on which nation wide meetings, rallies, etc were to be held. These were planned at the first General Committee meeting after the Rally, and three other important questions came up: support for women's struggles was raised by Toni Gorton, in particular a strike then taking in Ramsgate (for which ten pounds was donated). The idea of having an AGM at which a new committee could be formed was raised, but no decision reached, and Fred Blake resigned. By the closing date for nominations to take his place only one valid nomination had been received from Leonora Lloyd, who was nominated by Doreen Lane, Fred Blake's secretary. At the following general meeting the Chairman Chris Norwood declared nominations reopened, and nominated himself. The majority of people at the meeting (over 30) were not entitled to vote, and only 18 people voted, resulting in the election of Chris Norwood.

DECLINE

By this time, the Equal Pay Bill had been drafted and the necessity of a really strong campaign forcing changes in the Bill was now greater than ever. A process of education and propaganda on the other points in NJACCWER's Charter should have been started at this point, too. However, it is from this point in time that the decline of the organisation can be dated. It would be ridiculous to put the view that it was the election of Norwood that caused this decline. His election was only possible because of the nature of the organisation; its lack of internal democracy; of any contact between the committee and the branches in any real sense; its methods of campaigning.

From this time on, little came from the committee. Minutes were no longer generally circulated (previously this had been the main communication between the committee and local activists). A promised constitution turned out to be even more undemocratic and bureaucratic than the previous non-organisation, and the previous rapid growth in local groups and supporters dwindled to practically nothing. There was a short burst of renewed activity when Jean Watts replaced Norwood as secretary, but the impetus had been lost, the undemocratic constitution remained, the same methods as before were followed and the organisation finally wound up in 1971.

This account has necessarily missed out what was really the most vital part of all—the local activities that took place. Even if this information was available, there would be no space to give representative details).

LESSONS OF NJACCWER

NJACCWER was an umbrella organisation. It reflected the male-domination and lack of democracy in the trade-union movement. The committee was dominated by Stalinists and their supporters: other members of the committee on the whole just did not have the same experience and were unable to counteract this domination. But the failure and rapid demise of NJACCWER were caused above all by the lack of any attempt to involve women workers in their place of work. In some cases, local bureaucrats used the campaign to further their own career as happened in Glasgow, for instance. In other cases, trades councils and TU branches did get involved in the campaign to some extent, for example in several areas of London. But compared with the women's movement, which during all this period was coming into being and growing rapidly, the decline of NJACCWER cannot be explained simply by saying that the passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1970 left the organisation with no *raison d'être*. All the problems that led to the formation of NJACCWER apply with equal force now, as was shown in the article on Low Pay in our last issue.

The main lesson to be learnt from all this is the importance of by-passing the union hierarchy and of mobilising the women themselves at the base. This is not to say that we should not be putting pressure on TUs—far from it. But this pressure cannot come from a small self-appointed committee it must come from women workers, organised in their place of work. We should be calling for women to form committees within the factories, etc, along the lines of shop stewards committees (i.e. cutting across union boundaries); campaigning for, amongst other things, the demands of women workers to be placed high on the agenda of the unions; fighting against male prejudice in the work-place and union; against complacent union officials; against the attempts of management to divide work and evade the E.P. Act—we should be fighting for equal pay, equal work, equality of training and promotion, etc. etc. Such a committee would have as its main task the mobilisation of the women in the factory in support of such a programme, to educate them in the facts of the situation (just what differentials exist in pay, what jobs are closed to women, etc) and to make links with other women workers in their area and with women in the same industry.

This is the way forward. At its height NJACCWER showed itself, with all its weaknesses and short comings, capable of arousing a lot of support for its programme. Such enthusiasm largely evaporated, but can be aroused again, and ten-fold. NJACCWER has a place in the struggle of women for their rights, and as with all such struggles we must learn the lessons and go on to build a fresh.

Leonora Lloyd

*with honourable exceptions, notably Fred Blake, Doreen Lane and Audrey Wise.

FAMILY LIFE - A Review

REVIEW: FAMILY LIFE

"Marx said: under all circumstances a negro has a black skin but only under certain socio-economic conditions is he a slave. Under all circumstances a man may get stuck, lose himself, and have to turn round and go back a long way to find himself again. Only under certain socio-economic conditions will he suffer from schizophrenia."

"Dilemmas abound. If I do not destroy the 'family', the 'family' will destroy me. I cannot destroy the 'family' in myself without destroying 'it' in them. Feeling themselves endangered will they destroy me?"

"Until one can see the family in oneself nor any family clearly."

These quotations from Laing's Book *Politics of the Family* indicate some of the most important things contained in *Family Life*.

This film is about a girl who cannot get on with her mother, who cannot become a socially mature and responsible adult woman, who cannot adjust to society. It is about a girl who breaks down, who is mentally sick, who becomes schizophrenic.

This film is about a society where people must be processed so that they will fit in, so that they'll be good workers, will respect authority, develop a proper sense of decency and responsibility, and will accept that things cannot be other than they are.

This film is about traditional methods of psychiatric diagnosis and treatment and about modern progressive methods. It shows the girl talking about her feelings to the Laingian psychiatrist, and in a group of fellow patients in the informality of the progressive/experimental wing of the psychiatric hospital. After this wing has been closed by the hospital authorities it shows the girl undergoing electric shock treatment and becoming progressively institutionalised under more traditional care within the hospital.

It is a film about family life, about psychiatric hospitals, about British society in the 1970's. It is a totally depressing film. It shows us with cruel and sometimes amusing perceptiveness the way in which "normal" family relationships are a means of processing people for conformity within this society. Family relationships are oppressive relationships, a preparation for an oppressive society. Those who resist—in the isolation of the family at least—are likely to get hurt or defeated. Schizophrenia is seen as a response to oppression.

At the end of the film the psychiatrist responsible for "her case" produces the girl as a specimen of catatonic schizophrenia for his class of psychiatry students. In his view this is an example of a girl who has had a happy, healthy, untroubled childhood in a loving family. Suddenly in late adolescence she begins to develop symptoms of schizophrenia—to leave one job after another, to challenge and reject her parents, and particularly her mother's authority and love, to recognise a conflict between the person she sees in herself and the person her mother insists that she is, to mix with bad company, to begin to do bizarre things.....The psychiatrist has taken over the mother's view of what has happened to the girl. He hoped through the electric shock treatment and hospital care to

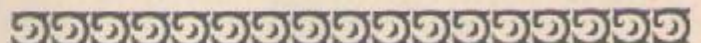


be able to return the girl to her family—and society—with her desire to be a good worker, a good citizen, a good daughter fully restored.

The girl resists this by retreating further into her schizophrenia. The girl is engaged in a struggle to establish and integrate her personal identity and independence, but all her attempts to become herself are challenged and undermined. Her struggle is one against her mother who so sincerely believes that she knows what her daughter is really like, against the psychiatrist, against the whole power structure of society. The girl has some allies, but they are weak. The progressive psychiatrist who treats her first, tries to help her understand the struggle and to strengthen her resistance and develop her independence. But his appointment is not renewed by the hospital authorities and he has to abandon his patients. The girl's older sister tries, too late, to rescue her from her family; the sister's defiance of her mother is built out of her own marriage and family which may only become a subtler version of the same story. The student boyfriend is on "her side", wanting her to leave home, to be herself, to have fun, trying to rescue her from the hospital. But when the hospital officials come to take her back he offers no resistance.

And so overwhelmingly this is a depressing film. It is a story of total defeat not because the mother wins—she does not get "her" daughter back—but because there appears to be no alternative. There is no way in which the girl could escape.

This isn't a review of *Family Life*. Rather it's a list of some of things the film is about. It's a superb film and an important contribution to understanding the family to-day. The relationships which are explored—personal and social—are sensitively and realistically drawn. I accept all that is portrayed here as a general statement about relationships between people, especially women, families and society in Britain—except the inevitability of defeat.
Margaret Coulson



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The paper *Socialist Woman* was established in early 1969 in Nottingham on the initiative of the IMG (International Marxist Group) with the aim of establishing Socialist Woman Groups around it. Members and sympathisers of the IMG in Nottingham and other parts of the country distributed, wrote for and supported the paper, and have taken the initiative in setting up Socialist Woman Groups in many different areas.

At the first national conference of the Socialist Woman Groups held in January 1972, the Groups agreed on a national manifesto stating their political position and aims, and voted to make their central activity for the next period a campaign for equal pay and equal work against low pay. Overall responsibility for coordination between the Groups between conferences is taken by the editorial board, which was elected at Conference.

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