

Socialist Woman

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



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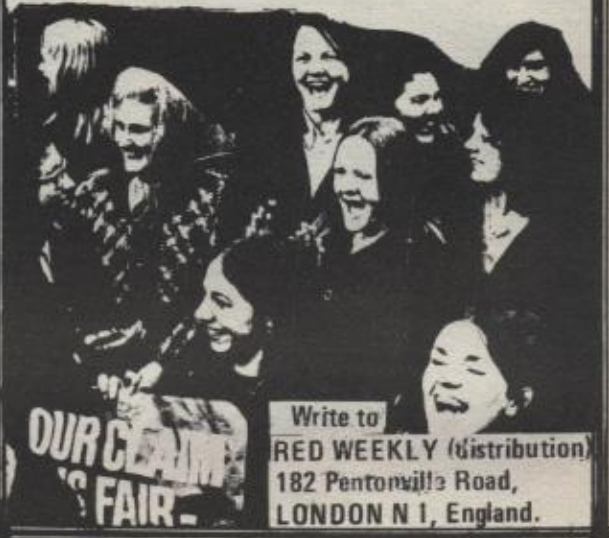
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Free ALL Spanish Political Prisoners!

In Spain, increasing numbers of women are being arrested and jailed. Eight women have recently been charged with the bombing of a cafe in Madrid in September 1974. In this bombing, 13 people were killed and 50 were wounded. Although the left groups have denied, and even condemned the bombings, the Franco regime continues to lay the blame at their doorstep.

Two of the arrested women are EVA FOREST and LYDIA FALCON. Both are well known activists in the newly emerging women's liberation movement in Spain. Lydia Falcon—who has written several books about the oppression of women was the victim of such brutality upon her arrest, that it was necessary to hospitalise her.

Eva Forest is a doctor and a psychiatrist. She has recently written a book about Cuba, and has been an active supporter of anti-imperialist struggles—particularly in the Vietnam Solidarity movement. Forest was subject to similar brutality upon her arrest: she was kept in solitary confinement for 40 days and tortured for ten days.

Now the dictatorship has charged Forest with the execution of Carrero Blanco (former Prime Minister of Spain). Antonio Duran, past leader of the Pegaso car factory strike in '68 and of building workers' struggles in '71-'72 has also been charged.



EVA FOREST

An account of Eva Forest's torture at the hands of the Spanish police was recently published in a French daily. It recounts the systematic beating, the rapes and the insults and obscenities to which she was subjected.

These two comrades, Forest and Duran now face the death sentence. Their fate depends upon the willingness of the working class to mobilise in their defence. For us in the women's movement, this task has a particular seriousness.

An international committee of solidarity has been set up in France. Because Eva Forest is well known in the French women's movement, it isn't surprising that women's liberationists have been in the forefront of organising such solidarity.

Some 500 prominent women activists have signed an appeal on behalf of Forest and Duran. The signatures include such names as Simone de Beauvoir, Francoise Sagan, Delphine Seyring, Michelle Vian.

So far, the campaign in Britain has been led by the London Spanish Solidarity Committee. It is urgent that trade union bodies, student unions, and women's groups throw their weight behind the campaign. Further information about the Committee from the Red Weekly, 01-837-6954.

EDITORIAL



Since Labour has come to office, virtually none of the promises in their election 'Charter for Women' have materialised. Rather than providing 'real opportunities for women, and not making polite noises about equality', the Labour Government has responded to the desperate economic straits of British capitalism with policies which will make the working class pay for the crisis.

Because of women's social position—bearing responsibility for the family and working outside the home for peanuts—they are bearing the brunt of many aspects of this attack.

Three of the major features of the economic crisis affect women particularly severely. Inflation (which is now running wild at over 20 per cent a year) piles up extra tasks at a woman's doorstep, for she is expected to carry out the same domestic duties with less money to do so, and often must take on part-time work to make ends meet.

Women will be among the hardest hit by increasing redundancies. In London we have had a taste of what is to come in the dispute at Hoover's. Here management retaliated against the production workers—mainly women—for supporting a strike by the toolmakers with 100 lay-offs a week. At present the recession is hitting two industries—cars and construction—in which the workforce is predominantly male. Figures of redundancies and lay-offs will vary according to the structure of the workforce but even when industries employing predominantly women are involved, it is difficult to determine the severity of the crisis. For example, *The Economist* recently noted that of all people unemployed, 8 per cent of the men were not registered, whereas as much as 54 per cent of women failed to register.

Another feature of the crisis which affects women in a number of ways is the slashing of the welfare state expenses. According to Chancellor Healy's budget there is to be a 5 per cent cut in public spending. Historically, one function of the welfare state was to ensure the efficient functioning of the family, so these cuts will have a profound effect on the social relations of the family, and, in particular, on women's role in the family.

If the state can't keep up its ends of the stick, if the few nurseries that exist are closed, for example, then these tasks will fall back on the family and into the lap of women. Elisabeth Wilson in 'Women and the Welfare State' argues that the family has consistently been used in the post-war period as a handy institution for shoring up or supplementing inadequate social welfare provisions. She pinpoints a number of examples, beginning with the 1959 Mental Health Act, which laid emphasis on the care of the mentally disordered 'in the community'—meaning, of course, by the mother (since the community provisions of day-centres and work-shops have never materialised).

The cuts introduced by the Labour Government in the fields of health, housing and education have thus added a further impossible burden to the list of domestic responsibilities women already have.

Likewise, the strains to which the family is subjected are

considerable. Take just one example. With slashes in both public and private expenditure cutting back on housing to the tune of over 100,000 homes since 1973, the rate of homelessness is increasing daily. This results either in the physical break up of the family, or in temporary measures which cram an entire family into cramped, one-room quarters. In either case the pressures are immense. They are reflected in such figures as the 110,000 divorces per year; 150,000 children handled by the courts each year following marriage break-downs; or the recent establishment of 17 homes currently opened for battered women in Britain.

This 'crisis in social relations' has not gone by unnoticed by the ruling class. Capitalism depends too much upon the smooth functioning of the family unit. Thus we see report after report commissioned by the Government to investigate how things can be patched up. The Finer Report, for example, emphasises 'conciliation, reconciliation and counselling' before divorce proceedings are initiated.

We also see alliances being made between an anti-working class group like SPUC or the National Front and supposed 'representatives' of the working class, like Labour MPs, in attempts to further restrict the already limited right to abortion. All these measures serve to draw the family together and to ensure that women will be tied even more closely to it.

Thus at a time when the working class is under massive attacks, the family, as always in the past, playing its role as a central institution in capitalist society, is being used as the 'shock absorber' for the ruling class. The way forward in the fight against these effects is not to defend capitalism's 'shock absorber' but to defend the individual members of the family (men, women and children) from the effects of the crisis. This means building a political fighting unity to transcend the social relations of the family and fighting for solutions which ultimately will mean the end of the family, along with all the rest of the oppressive machinery of the capitalist system. With women this means pulling them out of the family by fighting for child-care facilities, free abortion and contraception on demand, etc - all which will serve to weaken their ties to the family.

Socialists in the women's movement must take up the fight against the attack on the living standards of the working class. This means showing our opposition to the Social Contract by organising against it. The Labour Government has called for 'social and economic peace', for a truce on the wages front in return for social concessions. But the ruling class attacks have been directed at the 'social realm' both through an ideological battle and through cuts in social spending.

Through such campaigns as the Working Women's Charter we can draw together women's groups, housewives, tenants associations and trade unionists in a centralised fight on both fronts. We can organise solidarity actions for women workers fighting against redundancies and low pay. And—just as important—we can unite these groups in struggle for nursery facilities, in defense of the abortion law (and for its extension) and against the increasing closure of hospitals which serve women.



DOMESTIC LABOUR



In the past few years, a number of important articles have appeared inside the women's liberation movement—from Margaret Benston's *The Political Economy of Women's Liberation* to the more recent article of Wally Seccombe on *The Housewife and her Labour Under Capitalism*. The central weakness of all these articles has been their *implicit* acceptance at a theoretical level of the marginality of women and the separation of the domestic and industrial lives of women into discreet units.

Bearing this weakness in mind, it is important to look more closely at the relation of domestic and wage labour.

With the onset of the industrial revolution which organised production on a labour extensive basis, women were brought into commodity production. However, with the development of capitalism on a labour intensive basis, and the acknowledgment that the proletarian family was weakening, public attention became focussed on the importance of women's role in the family.

It was in this period of public disquiet—and with the aim of shoring up women's role in reproducing future labourers that the seeds of the modern welfare state were planted. This was done around the ready theme of 'Let us glorify, dignify, and purify motherhood by every means in our power'.¹

Although women remained in industrial production, they did so with their prime function publicly defined as being outside it. Thus they fulfilled the needs of contemporary capitalism both for a cheap and reserve pool of labour and a healthy (comparatively) and stable workforce.

Wally Seccombe, however, argues that with the advent of industrial capitalism men went into industry and women into the home. But the reality is that men went into industry whereas women went into both the home and industry.

Because Seccombe's analysis represents the first serious contemporary attempt to apply Marxist theory into

For the past two years in the socialist current of the women's liberation movement, a debate has developed on the nature of domestic labour and its relationship to wage labour. Beginning with this issue of *Socialist Woman* we will devote two pages to contributions which take up aspects of the debate. ANN FOREMAN starts the series off with a discussion of a weakness in Wally Seccombe's pamphlet *The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism*. She argues against his 'mistake of ignoring totally the ways in which the law of value indirectly impinges on domestic labour and the domestic unit'. All contributions are welcomed and will be considered by the Editorial Board.

this neglected area, we will deal in some detail with it. His treatment of domestic and industrial labour as discreet units drastically affects his analysis of the social and economic function of housework.

He points to the primary characteristic of housework as the fact that it is outside of the immediate exerc-



ise of the law of value. That is, although the labour theory of value can be applied to domestic labour, the law of value does not operate upon it.

By this, he means that only labour working directly for capital—i.e. wage labour, not domestic labour—is subject to the pressure for constantly improved productivity because of the competition operating between capitalists. (This explains the technological backwardness and privatisation of housework).

However, he then proceeds to make the serious mistake of ignoring totally the ways in which the law of value indirectly impinges on domest-

ic labour and the domestic unit.

There are three main areas where this takes place. Firstly, in the demand for female wage labour (an area whose existence and importance is structurally excluded by Seccombe's method).

Secondly, in the development and extension of commodities for consumption and labour-saving devices. And thirdly, in the intervention of the state in the domestic unit and in the reproduction of labour power.

The industrial demand for female labour went hand in hand with the rationalisation of the family unit—and to a certain extent—of the labour performed within it.

The most significant development in this area was the break up of the extended family. The need for labour mobility and greater efficiency in the production of labour power was realised by successive government housing and welfare policies whereby the extended family was physically dispossessed and the care of the aged and sick transformed to the State. Its replacement—the nuclear family—pivots around the husband and wife who are portrayed as acting as a 'team', both partners servicing in their own way, the needs of capital. To make this 'partnership' attractive and compelling, taxation, pension schemes, etc. were introduced which literally took the man and wife as one. Beveridge spells out the conception underlying this measures.

In any measure of social policy in which regard is had to facts, the great majority of married women must be



regarded as occupied on work which is vital though, unpaid, without which their husbands could not do their paid work and without which the nation could not continue. In accord with facts the plan for social security treats married women as a special insurance class of occupied persons and treats man and wife as a team. 2

In short, capitalism destroyed the extended family in order to enjoy it—in its rationalised form of the nuclear family—the better. Family law has been extended from an almost exclusive concern with the property and inheritance relationships of the bourgeoisie to the direct regulation of the family relationships of the proletariat. For example, marriage takes the form of a contract of social and economic obligation which is, if necessary, enforced by law.

In fact this contract regulates the responsibilities of the husband and of the wife much more closely than the contract between an employer and employee; the law that compels a mother to look after her children is almost as harsh as the law which compels the father to provide for his children.

The structuring of proletarian relations outside of production more and more tightly into the relations of the nuclear family has meant that although

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housework has been rationalised in some degree by labour saving devices, pre-cooked food, etc. there has been no qualitative change in its privatised form.

Indeed, the needs of capital to expand the market for consumer goods has resulted in the production of labour saving devices for each individual family unit rather than being geared towards the socialisation of housework.

Although Seccombe deals with some of these points, he fails to do so in a systematic way, and the absence of considering the ways in which, as we have outlined, the law of value affects domestic labour, gives his conclusions an ahistorical form. He can give not reasons why capitalism should retain or abolish housework.

And like Engels and Juliet Mitchell, he puts his faith in the struggle for equality at the work place as the solution to the problem of privatised housework. However, the relation between industry and the home via the reproduction of labour power, together with the ideological appearances of this relation is daily reproduced by the economic and social organisation of the capitalist mode of production as a whole. It is only in the context of challenging all these relations that there is any perspective for abolishing privatised housework together with the nexus of oppression that determines women's inferior social position.

1. quoted in Elizabeth Wilson's *Women and the Welfare State*, Red Rag pamphlet No.2
2. *Ibid.*

NURSERIES IN THE COMMUNITY

The demand for state provision of adequate child-care facilities has always been central to the women's liberation movement. Many women's groups have been involved in fighting for facilities in their locality and have experimented with new methods of collective child care. Here we review the nursery situation as it applies to the community.

The problem with many struggles around nursery facilities has been that the fight has ended with the local authorities making some concessions—a building or the payment of staff—and the lessons learned in the struggle (including any concessions) have not been generalised. In some cases, women themselves have taken on staffing the nurseries, thus, in effect, taking over the job of the state. Of course we want any nursery facilities to be under the control of the community, but this doesn't mean that we must provide all of the resources to run them.

These types of local struggles certainly offer the women's movement the opportunity of raising a wide range of issues with women in a local community and sometimes results in securing concrete gains. But our campaigning for state-provided nurseries should not be limited to either this one issue or demands which are realisable simply at the local level. Of course we want to fight for and win any concessions that can be wrung from the capitalist state, but in the process of the fight, we must also have demands which take the struggle beyond the immediate local situation.

PIECEMEAL

In this way we will avoid falling into the trap of a reformist campaign for piecemeal local changes within the existing system of nursery provision—often at the expense of nursery provision in other areas. What is necessary is a set of explicit demands to change the present pre-school provision in a way that meets the needs of both women and children on a national level.

In this period of acute economic crisis and drastic cuts in social expenditure it is impossible for the ruling class to solve the question of child-care facilities simply in financial terms. Thus in every struggle we launch to meet the overwhelming needs in this situation, we must be prepared to explain the links between the immediate struggle and the struggle for

socialism—in which all social needs will be met through collective planned solutions, and not through the dictates of the profit.

Governmental policy on the provision of nurseries and childcare facilities is well known. In the period of the two World Wars, this was rapidly expanded to free women for work, with 100 per cent grants being given in the Second World War for war-time nurseries.

With the ending of the war, circulars were distributed to discourage the setting up of publically maintained schemes and the grants ended. A further Government circular in 1960 forbade any increase in nursery school plans.

by
Yvonne Taylor

At present, the State offers two types of pre-school provision. Nursery schools, as recommended by Plowden Report in 1967, accommodate children of three years and over, usually on a part-time basis.

The Urban Aid Programme in 1968 created 24,000 full-time places in nursery schools and the Tory Government's 1972 Act 'Education: A Framework for Expansion' created a further 25,000 full-time places.

Day nurseries come under the jurisdiction of the local Social Services Departments and here the emphasis is on the physical care of pre-school children of all ages. There are 23,828 day nursery places at present time with children usually attending full time. Day nurseries are almost totally staffed with nursery nurses and a sliding scale of charges is made to parents.

Both these provisions are inadequate. Nursery schools, being usually on a part-time basis and closing in school holidays are useless to working mothers. Day nursery places are difficult to find and always have long waiting lists.

Neither do they attempt to fulfill the educational needs which nursery schools provide. Women who wish to work or continue their education are forced to turn to high cost private nurseries, registered childminders or unlicensed child minders. It has been estimated recently that there are over 50,000 children in the care of registered child minders and possibly up to 200,000 in illegal care.

EXISTING PROVISIONS

The NUS Women's Campaign calls for nursery provisions in every educational institution and the Working Women's Charter Campaign has also taken up the question of nurseries. These two campaigns provide the basis for drawing in the weight of the organised labour movement to the fight for nurseries.

Generalised cuts in social expenditure mean that, not only is the fight for the expansion of existing facilities going to be more difficult, but in many areas, the defence of already existing provisions is necessary. The cuts in education spending alone—by some £180 million under the last Tory Government—operate across the board and are already affecting nursery schools. In Berkshire, for example, the local authority is closing down some nursery schools and in Birmingham, students occupying the LEA offices discovered contingency plans which included cuts in spending in local authority nurseries.

COMPREHENSIVE

Our demands must be firstly to defend the existing provisions and to call for Local Authorities not to implement the cuts in social service and educational spending. These must be rescinded by the Labour Government. We must also demand a comprehensive system of nursery provision. This should be freely available to all who wish to use it and should be open at all hours to suit women who work or study or simply wish to engage in social activities. All nurseries should encompass education of pre-school children and not separate a child's intellectual needs from its physical ones.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

March 8, 1975, is the 55th International Women's day. 1975 is also International Women's Year. But the origins of these two events are very different. The former was originated and organised by women, in commemoration of struggles led by women. IWY, on the other hand, has been declared on behalf of women by the United Nations.

The origins of International Women's Day are slightly confused. On February 28 1907, women socialists in the USA organised the first 'Women's Day' to demand political rights for working women. In 1910 Clara Zetkin proposed to the second International Conference of Socialist Working Women that an annual celebration of Women's Day should be held. The first one was on March 19, 1911, on the anniversary of an uprising of the Prussian proletariat in 1848.

In 1913, the date was changed to March 8. This was the anniversary of an important strike by women textile workers in New York in the 1880s.

This date took on a new significance in 1917. It was the day that the February Revolution (under the old Russian calendar) broke out, led by working women of Petrograd. The city was in a ferment, but the the social democrats (the revolutionaries) who enjoyed much popular support, felt the time was not ripe for strikes. They knew these would lead to open revolt, which they did not feel the workers were yet prepared for.

But the women were determined to celebrate February 23 (March 8) as usual. The women textile workers struck and called on the metal workers for support. This was the spark that led to the February Revolution and from there to the October Revolution.

In recent years, International Women's Day has once again become a reality, as the growing forces of the women's movement world wide have once again made it their own.

However, the demands of the movement are only slowly becoming accepted, much less realised. It is in response to this that International Women's Year has been declared by the United Nations: '...to promote equality between men and women; to emphasize the important role women could and should play in economic, social and cultural activities, and to encourage their full integration into the life of the community; and to secure recognition of women's increasing contribution to the development of friendly relations and co-operation between coun-



tries and to the strengthening of world peace.'

Of course, any recognition of the fact that women are oppressed is to be welcomed. Women's groups should use the fact that this is IWY as a lever - it will make it easier to force trade unions, trades councils and other bodies to organise women's conferences and meetings, over which it is essential that women activists have control. The liberation of women cannot come as a gift from the UN, a body which represents the very systems that serve to oppress women!



In this country, the Women's National Commission, a Government supported body, is co-ordinating the official 'national effort'. This body is composed only of the traditional women's organisations, although the TUC is represented. As part of the IWY, March 8 is being celebrated - for the first time being given official status. That makes it all the more important that we support the women's movement demonstration for that day - we must not let them co-opt our day.

1975 is the year the Equal Pay Act becomes legally enforceable, and we are also promised anti-discrimination legislation. The co-incidence lies in the fact that these, too, are attempts at co-option - attempts to head off growing campaigns to obtain what is ours by right, not as a gift - and not in the muted and distorted way which will guarantee neither real equal pay nor opportunity.

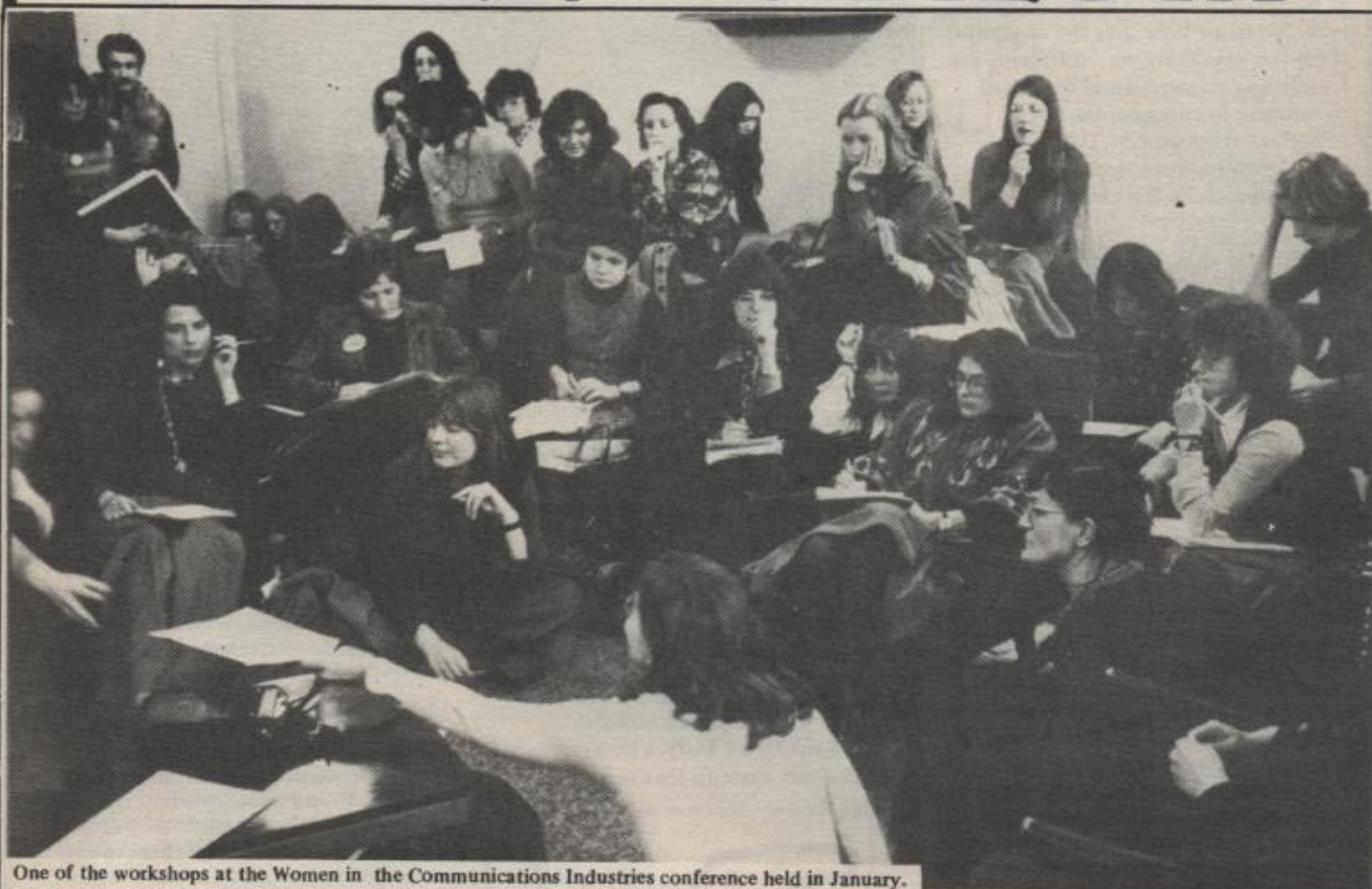
Amongst other things, the TUC is planning to prepare an up to date history of women in the Trade Unions - very welcome news; to advise unions on changes in their rules as they effect women; and to encourage them to organise special activities; they are organising a demonstration in summer; and putting forward a special motion to the women's TUC.

Even so, IWY does give us some opportunities, especially through the WWC, and we should seize them. But if International Women's Day is to become a reality, not just in 1975, but in succeeding years, then the women's movement must turn outwards, to make it truly an international movement.

Leonora Lloyd

* 'International Women's Day' by
* Alexandra Kollantai. From
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WOMEN IN MEDIA



One of the workshops at the Women in the Communications Industries conference held in January.

Both the situation of women media workers and the image of women in the media were challenged by a conference held in London on Saturday, January 18.

The conference, attended by 300 women and a handful of men who work in the communications industries—newspapers, magazines, books, radio, television, the cinema and theatre—was organised by an ad hoc group of women and men in the media unions dissatisfied with the latter's failure to deal with women's situation in a determined way.

Two of the workshops at the conference—books and entertainment—decided to call separate meetings at the beginning of February for all women who work in these sectors; and one of the main decisions of the conference was that women's caucuses or committees should be formed at all levels of the unions, and especially at the place of work.

While the National Union of Journalists and the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians (ACTT) have established women's committees, neither is rooted in the rank-and-file. They consequently find themselves isolated and powerless if they

seek to challenge the union bureaucracy.

Numerous examples were given of discrimination against women media workers. In the theatre, for example, there are comparatively few parts for women because plays reflect discrimination against women in bourgeois society at large.

In television and the cinema, women are virtually excluded from technical jobs, and many avenues of promotion are all but closed to them. Instead they find themselves doing jobs which require secretarial-type qualifications.

DISCRIMINATION

In press and publishing, women are again generally excluded from senior positions, and this is reflected at all levels of employment. A trainee journalist on a local newspaper explained how it is always the male reporters who are given hard news stories to cover, while she is sent out to report on baby shows.

The conference unanimously adopted the Working Women's Charter as a basis of the demands that should be raised in the labour movement,

bringing together the economic and social issues without which even nominal equality at work is ruled out.

ANTI-SEXIST CODE

But most importantly, the conference adopted in principle a code on the presentation of women by the media. This highlights the ways in which the media reinforce women's oppression and exploitation, and their consistent disregard for women's attempts to fight on these issues. The adoption and implementation of this code by the media unions will seriously challenge the ability of editors to pursue their conception of the 'freedom of the press'.

It was also decided to form an ad hoc committee, to encourage and coordinate the initiatives that will now be taken, and to consider the problems involved in implementing the anti-sexist code.

Further information about the ad hoc committee, and copies of conference documents (price 40p) from: Penny Brown, 44a Abingdon Road, London, W.8.

Val Jones

DEFEND THE NHS —

NO TO ANY CLOSURES

The health care of women in North London is threatened by the imminent closure of two hospitals.

The Camden and Islington Area Health Authority plans to shut down both the Liverpool Road branch of the Royal Free, and the Elisabeth Garret Anderson Hospital (EGA) as part of a 'rationalisation' programme. This is happening in spite of the fact that both hospitals meet the needs of women in important respects at present very inadequately catered for by the NHS.

The EGA, set up by a woman doctor 100 years ago, is one of only three hospitals in the country, which is staffed entirely by women, for women. It has 90 beds covering all specialities, and in 1973, 21,600 outpatients attended from all over London.

The hospital provides an essential service, particularly for immigrant women whose religion prevents them from being examined by men. As one patient put it, women doctors 'ask if they can look at your body—the men just dive in.'

The buildings have been allowed to deteriorate to such an extent that it is no longer recognised as a suitable place in which student nurses can gain experience. The expense of replacing them with trained nurses (an extra £73,000) and the supposedly high cost to the Area of running a small hospital, added to the fact that 70 per cent of the patients are not local, are the excuses given for the closure later this year.

Closing the hospital will deny women the choice of treatment by a member of their own sex—something universally available to men, as well as removing already scarce facilities for family planning, abortions, etc.

Future suggestions for the use of the hospital have included a home for 'inadequate mothers' and a place where private beds could be provided for consultants at the nearby teaching hospital when pay beds are phased out of the NHS.

The Liverpool Road Hospital provides maternity care (1000 births a year) and a gynaecological service (2000 operations and 400 abortions annually) for Islington women.

CONVERTED

Over the past year, six wards have either been closed down or converted at the cost of thousands of pounds for temporary use by other departments. It is planned to move all facilities out to the newly built Royal Free five miles away in the next three months. Only the present separate twenty-bed private wing will remain, and this may be expanded until the private beds at the new site are ready for use. Once vacated, it is rumoured that BUPA, who are building up a network of private hospitals, have made a bid for the site.

Closing this hospital will mean that local women will have to tra-

vel long awkward journeys for maternity care. Abortions will be almost impossible to obtain, since the nearest hospital with a liberal abortion policy is in a different district, and is already under pressure.

REDUNDANT

Waiting lists for gynaecological operations will lengthen even further. One hundred and twenty workers, almost all women, will be made redundant, and two thirds of them, who are resident, will become homeless as well.

In both cases, the plans for hospital closure were not even revealed let alone discussed with the workers and patients concerned. Now that the news has leaked out, campaigns are under way to fight the shutdown. Workers at Liverpool Road are holding a series of mass meetings in the hospital, from which they should elect an action committee of all those prepared to struggle around the closure. This will involve the widest possible numbers in the organisation.

The nearby women's centre at Essex Road has initiated a poster campaign and a petition with over two thousand signatures, and a local demonstration was held on January 26.

STREET MEETINGS

The Trades Council was approached to mobilise and through mass leafletting and street meetings, other women's groups, tenants associations and community organisations will be drawn into the campaign.

From these forces a support committee should be set up to continue the campaign in the area. Pressure should be put on the local Labour Council to refuse permission for use of the hospital for private medicine. By mounting pickets at the entrance, any attempted rundown of the hospital by the removal of equipment can be prevented. And the workers are already discussing occupation, should the hospital gates be finally shut in March.



Part of the demonstration called against the closure of the Liverpool Road hospital in Islington, which is used mainly by women.



Part of an anti-abortion rally in Hyde Park, with the Catholic Church well to the fore.

Shortly after we go to press, on February 7, the House of Commons has scheduled the second reading of a bill introduced by James White, Labour MP from Glasgow. This bill will restrict the availability of abortion facilities for women. Below, MARGARET COULSON looks at the political context in which this debate takes place.

In the last few years the anti-abortion organisations have shown that massive demonstrations can be organised against abortion, and they have mounted highly emotive 'educational' campaigns on the evils of abortion and the moral dangers of 'abortionism'.

More recently SPUC, Life and similar organisations have been preparing for the question of abortion to be re-introduced into Parliament. At the same time, they try desperately to preserve their 'non-political' stance.

In the last two general elections SPUC and Life have had poster and leaflet campaigns calling on the electorate to vote for 'your anti-abortion candidate'. This campaign has inspired National Front, as well as Tory, Liberal and Labour candidates to declare their anti-abortion commitments in many constituencies.

Now the campaign to repeal the 1967 Abortion Act has become focused on a Private Members' Bill to make abortion for social reasons illegal and to restrict abortions to within 20 weeks of pregnancy (it now stands at 28 weeks)

This bill has its second reading in the House of Commons on Friday, February 7. That the bill is sponsored by a Labour MP must give satisfaction to anti-abortionists who have carefully cultivated a non-sectarian, non-party class image (while remaining well within the control of a thoroughly reactionary leadership).

Like other attempts to proclaim that problems are above class and politics, the effect of this has been to mobilise considerable numbers of working class people, especially women, against their own interests and in support of reaction.

The success which the anti-abortionists have had in attracting such support is not difficult to explain. There has been virtually no tradition of understanding or support within the labour movement on the question of abortion and contraception and of its significance for the rights of women.

In part this is indicative of the residual hold of Catholic and other churches over sections of the working class. In addition, there has been the determined evasion of the Labour Party to take any position on abortion¹, and the economist tradition of the trades unions has ensured that such 'private matters' were excluded from their agendas.

SUBORDINATION

The subordination of women's rights to population policy as regulator of the availability of abortion and contraception in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has meant that no clearly motivated political commitment to women's rights to control their fertility has been established in those societies, to which reference might be made.

Thus the mystery, guilt and ignorance which have for so long surrounded questions of sex and reproduction are rarely clearly challenged within the labour movement.

The situation is even more confused, by the re-emergence of reactionary support for contraception and abortion. The idea that contraception and abortion—as the means of controlling population size—will solve the problems of poverty and underdevelopment in the third world have been peddled for some time (both as theory and unsuccessful practice.)²

CRISIS

The social, economic and political crisis now disturbing the countries of the advanced capitalist world have brought variants of these same arguments back onto our own doorsteps.³

Keith Joseph has most clearly articulated the political relevance and practical implications of the 'scientific' work of the new eugenicists—Shockley, Eysenck etc.—in arguing that the 'cycle of deprivation' (which he believes drains away the resources of the welfare state) could be broken if 'social classes 4 and 5' could be 'persuaded' not to reproduce.⁴

Given this state of apparent confusion in which reactionaries are lined up both for and against contraception and abortion on demand, it is important the political basis of these demands is clarified. Within the labour movement it is essential that the right of women to control their own bodies—their fertility and their sexuality—is the underlying understanding on which these demands are fought for. The winning of this control is one necessary component in the struggle for women's liberation.

UNDERSTANDING

This political understanding, which has for long been taken for granted within the women's movement, is beginning to gain wider acceptance as the inclusion of the demand for con-

traception and abortion in the Working Women's Charter illustrates.

The possibility of generating wider positive political commitment to this question has been opened up further by the campaign which the Abortion Law Reform Association launched in early January for abortion on request' up to twelve weeks of pregnancy with risk to the women's health as the only basis for refusing a later abortion.

The statement of aims of the campaign sets it clearly in the context of women's right to control their fertility, and recognises (if only sketchily), through demands for improved state assistance to mothers through better family allowances and more adequate housing provision, that the availabil-

ity of contraception and abortion alone will not provide most women with a real possibility of choosing to have a child or not to have one.

The campaign is sponsored by six women Labour MPs (Helene Hayman, Gwyneth Dunwood, Renee Short, Joan Maynard, Jo Richardson, and Joyce Butler). This sponsorship enables us to take up the campaign in local Labour Parties, and in conjunction with the Working Women's Charter Campaign to press for active support from the labour movement. The coming period is likely to see a sharper polarisation of the forces for and against abortion which provides important opportunities to press forward for the right to abortion on demand and to clari-

fy and popularise the political basis of this demand.

Footnotes:

1. *Contraception, but not abortion is discussed in the 1972 Labour Party Green Paper Discrimination Against Women; these topics are ignored in the Labour Government's White Paper Equality for Women.*

2. *This is fully analysed by Bonnie Mass in the pamphlet The Political Economy of Population Control in Latin America.*

3. *See for example the material produced by Population Countdown.*

4. *Speech by Keith Joseph in Birmingham 19.10.74.*



(Cont. from p.9)

Hospital closures like these reflect just one of the ways in which the deepening crisis in the NHS is hitting at women, both as workers and as patients.

The Labour Government, despite its infamous social contract has no intention of putting more money into the welfare state when big business is crying out for financial help in the face of the collapse of international capitalism.

And private medical enterprise stands poised in the wings, eager to exploit the growing deficiencies in

the health service at the expense of the working class.

The demand should be raised that the Government make available the extra money needed to keep the hospital open, as part of a massive injection of funds into the NHS budget—which should from now on be on a sliding scale of NHS expenditure to keep up with inflation.

The issue of hospital closure should be used as the focus for a workers' enquiry into the state of ALL the health care facilities in the area, involving all sections of the comm-

unity. It is vital to fight any cut-backs in the NHS with united working class action, particularly when the rights of an oppressed section, such as women, to adequate health care and especially abortions are threatened.

It is only by taking these steps towards a workers' solution to the crisis in the NHS that it is possible to win the fight for decent health services not only for women, but for all the working class.

By Ruth Rowley



WOMEN

more about it, after having driven the British out and having made gains towards our socialist republic, we may well find that our comrades believe that their wives ought to be cooking the dinner.

What explains the lack of any strong women's liberation movement in the North of Ireland is that women have come to the fore and have played such a part in the national liberation struggle. And it's bound to take its effect. It has forced organisations to change their attitudes, but what I am saying is that there is still a lot of work to be done. Revolutionary women, political women play an equal role with political men and that itself has changed the nature and outlook of organisations on the women's question.

Maire Drumm has said that the major difference between the current war and previous campaigns the IRA has waged has been the involvement of women. The reason it has carried on for so long and with at least comparative success has been due to the involvement of women.

I think a fundamental mistake is being made there. What I'm saying is that we must ensure that when the history is written in say 10-20 years from now that women's role does not disappear. Looking back at every aspect of the struggle in Ireland, women have played their part and have played a valuable part.

You had Cumann mBahn in 1916; Betsy Grey and her women's group, but they all seemed to disappear. None of them made the national hero grade. It is up to women to ensure that having played the part that our role and our rights are not forgotten.

In what way can the question of women's liberation be integrated into the national struggle?

Because of the level of the crisis here and given the division of labour for those of us active in the broad struggle, we simply do not—I know many women criticise me for saying this—have the time to devote to a purely women's struggle that the more liberal organisations have. But in our day-to-day activity it is necessary to ensure our rights; to ensure that the political education of women members is equal to that of the men.

In the day-to-day things like in my coming to the meeting today...I have a three and a half year old child. Now

One of the most important developments in Ireland is the increasingly central role played by women in the anti-imperialist struggle. The internment and imprisonment of many male Republican activists has in numerous cases forced women into the front lines of the struggle.

This has led to a more general questioning of the position and role of women in Irish society. As yet, this has not produced a women's liberation movement of the sort that exists in Britain, which is integrated into the national struggle. And within the organisations leading the struggle the question of women's oppression has never been seriously considered.

Following is an interview with BERNADETTE (DEVLIN) McALISKEY of the Irish Republican Socialist Party—a revolutionary group which has recently been formed out of a split from the Official Republican movement. Although there are many points raised in the interview with which the Editorial Board disagrees, we are not replying in this issue, but welcome correspondence to continue the debate on this vital aspect of the Irish revolution.

What has been the role of women in the struggle in Ireland?

Many people imagine that because we have had women internees and the Price Sisters, women are equal in the Irish struggle. And that is not essentially the case. There is no revolutionary organisation that treats women members as equal in the struggle. The classical mark of the Provisionals was: 'We don't need to send our women out to fight', which caused a great uproar from their women members.

It's true that women have been involved in the forefront of the battle,

but it would be a mistake to assume that they are treated as equal by the male members of the organisation or that gains have been made in society as a whole. Because we have the Price sisters, Liz McKee and Mary Kennedy and Evelyn Gilroy, it doesn't follow that the woman in the street and the woman in the factory have made the same bounds forward. Nor that any of the organisations have made any great effort towards the women's position or about re-evaluating the women's position.

Women have exerted themselves in the struggle. They have played an equal role. Unless we do a great deal

IN THE FRONT LINE

all the men coming to the meeting do not have a problem because somebody else is looking after their kids. I don't see why at political meetings there shouldn't be somewhere for the kids.

If we are going to have a creche in factories, we badly need a creche for political meetings. A very minor point, but that would enable a lot more women to come to meetings. More and more women would be free.

Do you think the IRSP will in any way be involved in taking up the question of the role of women and women's liberation in a more positive fashion than this has been done in the past?

The women in the organisation intend to ensure that it does, mostly because those of us who are involved in the founding of the organisation and at national executive level are in fact all married women with children and it is, as far as we are concerned, a practical problem.

We have very frequent meetings and we must travel to Belfast, Dublin, Wicklow, Tipperary wherever. We're going to have to take our kids with us and our male counterparts will have to get used to it. It's not the done thing for Irish political meetings.

Some of those involved in the women's movement in Britain accuse the Irish women of relegating the role of women's liberation—

I don't think we do. We will demand our rights as women and the rights for our sex within the class struggle. But with the level of the crisis here I am not interested in liberating middle-class women. I have a fight on my hands, fighting middle-class men. I'm very sorry for my sisters, but why should I liberate them to go and fight against the working class. Let them sit at home. Liberate working class women but let the middle class liberate their own women.

Obviously the whole weight of the Catholic Church over here and of Catholic ideology on questions like abortion and contraception will make it a harder and more difficult struggle on these kinds of questions than in Britain?

Yes, much more so, and that is true for both Catholic and Protestant sections of the community. Socially, they tend to be conservative. As the situation changes economically and socially individual wo-

men and families will see the need—their own personal need—for a change in their attitudes.

You see very much in Ireland at the minute, women's attitude on the question of contraception, for example, has changed in a most peculiar fashion in that if you ask them they will still trot out the Church's position, but then if you ask them honestly do they take the pill they will say yes.

How widespread is that?

I'd say that it is very widespread in the north and the south, because there is a personal, rational need to regulate their families or to have no further children. An economic necessity determines that they take the pill and the hangover of the moral issue means that they are simply justifying it to themselves. You know, they say it's still wrong for everybody else, but I'm different, and that attitude will change.

Would you say in Ireland that male chauvinism and sexism are even more rampant in Ireland than in Britain?

I don't know, and wouldn't like to say. It differs in a lot of areas. If you take an area like Derry, particularly in the Bogside where so many men are unemployed and the women go to work, it's a peculiar situation because the dominant partner in that set up is a woman, and the person who makes all the regulations and rules and imposes them is the woman. Nonetheless she also combines the two roles in that she goes to work and does the housework and washes the dishes. They say the situation is in fact different in Belfast.

I don't think you can generalise. On a liberal basis, I can understand that Irish men are reputed to be worse to their women and better to their family than English men but that may be because we expect less of them or something. On a principled basis I couldn't say whether Irish men are better or worse. There is a real problem and personally I think it's a problem of misguided brothers as opposed to the American position where it's almost a position of the enemy of the oppressive class.

You are suggesting that there are a whole number of reasons which makes the task of liberating women in Ireland more difficult?

Yes, I think that for many different reasons the nature of the struggle has to be different, and I don't see it as worse but fundamentally better that the struggle for women's liberation stems from the class struggle in Ireland—very much more so than it does in Britain or in America. And is much more closely related to the class struggle than it has been in Britain.

Why should it be more related to the class struggle?

Probably again in relation to the national struggle and the history of the national struggle. That's just the way it has been. The development of the women's movement in Ireland has right from the beginning been very much class-oriented, and working class women have dealt with working class women's issues more so than in Britain or in America. I think that one of the reasons for that is the gulf between the working class woman and the middle class professional woman.



A catholic community action group making meals in a minority area of Belfast during the reactionary Ulster Workers' Council strike last May.

CHARTING



Photo: Chris Davies (Report)

International Women's Year will see a spate of phrase-mongering and resolution passing by the official leadership of the trade union movement as it throws a smokescreen around its total inactivity on the problems facing working women.

On March 8, International Women's Day, the South East Regional Council of the TUC has called a conference to be addressed by Len Murray, Shirley Summerskill and Marie Patterson (Women's Officer of the TUC). This council is the body that replaced London Trades Council when it was dissolved last March, shortly after the conference where the Working Women's Charter first saw the light of day. Despite the opposition of the Trades Council to *doing* anything around the demands of the Charter, since that meeting a significant campaign has developed.

PAGEANT

Trades Councils in Sheffield and Manchester and Salford are also organising activities to 'celebrate' International Women's Year — including a pageant in Manchester on July 12! It is no accident that this drum beating comes in a year when wom-

en workers will be particularly hit by rising prices and attacks on wages and the social services. For activists in the Charter campaign it is necessary to see how these conferences are being organised so that we can attempt to use them to take the campaign forward.

Dodie Wepler

Not surprisingly the South East regional Council conference is under firm bureaucratic control. They are aware of the campaign launched for the demands of the Charter. But rather than call a conference on *how* women have been organising, and *how* to take the campaign forward, they have decided on arrangements that prevent real discussion.

The speakers invited are not interested in building an effective campaign. Len Murray will use the occasion to boast about how much the trade union movement has done in the fight for women's rights. Patterson will say the TUC Women's Committee is doing it all for us — the innumerable reports prepared for the

Labour Government on pensions, maternity benefits and so on. And Shirley Summerskill will talk to us about affairs that the trade union leadership feels are none of its business but which the Labour Government can sort out — women in the community.

A few minutes will be allowed for 'discussion', the conference will be restricted to trade union delegates, and so nothing disrupts this cosy set-up there will be no resolutions. Trade union branches can, however, submit discussion documents. The conference will probably attract a certain number of rank and file trade unionists but it will not lay the basis for an organised fight back against the attacks being launched on working class living standards.

POLITICAL GROUPS

By comparison the London Trades Council conference of last May was open to all political groups, women's groups and anyone interested in the fight for women's rights. This could have laid the basis for building a campaign to unite *all* groups and individuals prepared to organise activity. However this was something the leadership of the Trades Council violently

A COURSE

opposed, so this task was left up to individual militants who attended the meeting.

In stark contrast to the jamborees being organised by the official trade union leadership are the meetings conferences and pickets organised in local areas by trade unionists, student unions and women's groups around the demands of the Charter. This has given a firm basis for building a national campaign. In some areas work around the Charter developed in the first instance by setting up support committees for women workers on strike against low pay or for equal pay—both demands of the Charter.

NATIONAL RALLY

In Manchester a national rally was organised for women workers on strike for equal pay at Salford Electrical Instruments. Since then some of these women have become active in the Charter organising committee in Rochdale. Similarly, in north London, the Brent Charter Campaign supported women workers locked out at Hoovers, and the women said they were interested in joining the campaign once their dispute was over. In other cases, the Charter Campaign organising committees themselves launched local campaigns around particular demands in the Charter. The planned nursery campaign in Birmingham is a case in point.

PRECONDITION

It is these sort of actions which will guarantee the success of the Charter campaign. The importance of the Charter is not that it is some perfect document, totally detailing every aspect of the oppression of women workers. Of course we need full discussion about these demands, to clarify *why* and *how* we fight for them. But the writing of the 'perfect document' is not a *precondition* for organising action around the demands. Rather we should see the Charter as a weapon, a springboard with which we can begin to help organising the fight of women at work both inside and outside the home.

In a period of deepening social crisis the trade union bureaucracy will try to keep the lid on these developments. They will attempt to accommodate the activity of work-

ing women by passing paper resolutions. We can exploit these token gestures of the bureaucracy to develop the campaign inside the unions. But this means preparing the groundwork carefully *at the base* of the trade unions. It is no good trying to get a Trades Council or trade union executive to adopt the Charter if we haven't first got the support of the membership.

In London, an effort was made to build this kind of support by organising a meeting on the Charter at a large architectural firm employing several hundred women. Although the meeting itself only attracted 20

people, it provided the initial impetus for a nursery campaign which has since been planned. The Charter campaign has also been active in supporting existing women's groups struggles such as that launched by the Essex Road Women's Centre to keep open Liverpool Road Hospital in north London. This hospital caters particularly for the medical care of women.

It is through the development of more actions of the type outlined in this article, actions which begin to win the support of the organised strength of the working class, upon which the success of the Charter campaign depends.

CHARTER IN BRENT

The Conference on the ten-point Working Women's Charter, jointly organised last November by the Brent Women's Centre, Brent Trades Council and Brent Federation of Tenants Associations passed a series of resolutions to take the Charter Campaign forward in this area.

This included a resolution to grant practical support to all struggles involving women both locally and nationally. Just at that time two disputes were in process at a local level at Hoover Motors and at Associated Automation towards which the Charter Campaign immediately orientated itself. Neither struggle was specifically concerned with issues of equal pay and opportunities or any other demand relating directly to the Charter, but there were large numbers of women employed at both factories.

We were able to publicise and gain support for the women involved in these struggles both locally, and at a national level—that is, at the Women in Socialism Conference on the Working Women's Charter held in Leeds which resulted in a considerable response from Charter Committees in the way of messages of solidarity and donations sent to these factories.

While not belittling the efforts involved in doing this, it is important to stress that the role of supportative actions alone by the Charter Campaign is not a sufficient perspective to bring the Campaign forward. We actually found ourselves in a difficult position in the case of Associated Automation when asked to address a mass meeting of women workers on behalf of the Brent Working Women's Charter Campaign. The Charter itself did not, and could not, be the main focal point in such a struggle. We should not commit the mistake of making such assumptions. Rather, we should, in the course of support work, attempt to introduce wider aspects of our work on women's oppression into the labour movement.

In the course of the two struggles mentioned above, the Charter Campaign was able to make contact with a number of women who expressed interest in working with the Charter Campaign, especially on the question of nursery provision.

A nursery campaign has now been launched in conjunction with Brent Federation of Tenants Associations. A great deal of the necessary groundwork was done a couple of years ago by the Under 5's Campaign who have made this information available to us. The objective of the present nursery campaign is to attempt to get child care provision on each of the twenty-five council housing estates. We hope to involve the local labour movement in this. By bringing their industrial weight to bear on such a campaign for nursery facilities a further step would be taken in helping to demolish the false division between women in the home and in the workplace.

The Brent Charter Campaign succeeded recently in forcing the Trades' Council to take a position on abortion in relation to James White's Private Members' Bill to restrict the 1967 Act. Resulting from an appeal by the Charter Campaign the Trades Council wrote to local Labour MPs urging them to vote against the Bill. It also wrote a letter of protest to Barbara Castle, and agreed to circulate the petitions which had been drawn up to protest against the Bill. The fight for free abortion has gained a great deal of support in the area—at a recent public meeting held in the area sponsored by the local Labour Party to mark the beginning of activity for International Women's Year, the discussion centered around the question of abortion.

Ingrid Falconer

NEWS... NEWS... NEWS...

Lack of training opportunities is one of the key factors in women's discrimination at work, and an important step in combatting this has been taken by women members of the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians.

At the initiative of two rank-and-file members, ACTT sponsored a one-day film workshop in December at which 60 women who work in TV were able—many for the first time in their careers—to learn about the equipment which transforms sounds and images on to film and tape.

While training is clearly the responsibility of the employers, the experience of the workshop, which is likely to be repeated shortly, showed that such initiatives undertaken by unions can be crucial in giving women confidence to demand training facilities and opportunities.

The ACTT workshop was run almost entirely by women—many of them the only qualified practitioners in their respective fields—and this had useful repercussions. Many men in the industry, it seems, say that they couldn't bear to see women humping a camera around, to which Linda Dove, who was mainly involved in organising the workshop, replies: 'Don't look'.

Joan Churchill, who shot *Punishment Park*, told the workshop students that their muscles would soon adjust to the weight of the equipment. It was, Linda says, 'very positive learning from women actually doing the jobs. The workshop enabled the students to ask questions they had never liked to before, and the questions were answered in an unpatronising way.

'The industry is beginning to open up to women because of our pressure and organisation,' Linda explains. 'Women have got together over the past two years both inside and outside the union to discuss how to force our demands through. Yet it has become clear that without facilities like paid maternity leave and creches, all women, whether they intend having children or not, will be held back because they might be tied down with family responsibilities. Solidarity is not just right, it is necessary.'—*Geoffrey Sheridan.*

Working Women's Charter groups will soon be asked to help with a campaign for abortion on demand.

The campaign, called 'A Woman's Right to Choose', demands that every woman should have the right to abortion within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, and should only be refused abortion after that time if there is an unacceptable risk to her health.

In support of the main aim, the campaign call for NHS outpatient abortion services to be set up throughout Britain. At present, women in Northern Ireland are not even covered by the 1967 Abortion Act, which requires the agreement of two doctors before an abortion can be performed.

The campaign organisers want abortion clinics to be backed up by an unbiased counselling service to tell women what an abortion involves, to help her if she wants to keep the child, and to give contraceptive advice. Free contraception, sterilisation and pregnancy tests are also demanded for all fertile women.

The eighth demand of the Working Women's Charter is for free contraception and abortion on demand, and the campaign organisers hope Charter groups will support them by pressing for better abortion services in their areas.



Pickets in action at the Hoover factory in November (see News story).

But before any steps can be made towards abortion on demand, a threat to restrict the present Abortion Act must be warded off.

On February 7, James White, Labour MP for Glasgow Pollok, will introduce a Bill to prohibit abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy—the limit is now 28 weeks—and to forbid abortions on social grounds.

Anyone who wants to offer help with or get information on the new campaign should contact 'A Woman's Right to Choose', 186 Kengs Cross Road, London WC1X 9DE (01-278-4575)

The Hoover Workers returned to work at the Perivale factory in West London early in January after a three month bitter struggle.

The dispute between 150 skilled tool room men and management had resulted last October in the lay-off of 2000 production workers, many of whom were women.

During the first eight weeks of the dispute no hard feelings were shown towards the craftsmen by the production workers. Attempts were made by the bosses during this period to use the women to turn the workforce against the skilled men by saying that they would not be out of a job if it were not for the strikers. The women made it clear that they were not going to be fooled. 'These men have supported us in the past in the fight for equal pay and we support them now', retorted Margaret Thompson, a GMWU steward in reply to the personnel manager.

Unfortunately this feeling of solidarity broke down with the advent of craftism rearing its head. This came when the AUEW executive made the toolmakers strike official. The attitude of the craftsmen changed then and they got 'illusions of grandeur' one militant told *Socialist Woman*.

The skilled men formed their own separate picket line, told the production workers, some of whom had been on the picket line every morning for eight weeks, that they could clear off, that *they* the craftsmen would man the picket line now, it was their strike and their decisions, etc.

'I can't understand it' explained one woman picketer, 'We've been together up to now, united in one fight. The management have been try-

...NEWS...NEWS...NEWS...

ing to split the workforce for weeks, in an attempt to weaken us. The bosses must be laughing their heads off, now that the craftsmen have succeeded in doing that. The girls from the canteen have been doing a great job keeping everybody cheerful on the picket with cups of tea—all that's stopped now too'.

The toolmakers withdrew from the joint bargaining machinery in the factory because they felt that they could win higher wages if they did not have the production workers who were in a weaker position dragging them down.

At Christmas, the management began to sack production workers and threatened to continue sacking 100 per week until the toolmakers ended their strike. Eventually the production workers were forced into accepting a guarantee not to chase the toolmakers' settlement.

This acceptance was the only way out of breaking the deadlock between craftsmen and management. The toolmakers won a rise from £42 to £57 per week, leaving the production workers a paltry £3 per week beginning only on 1st August this year!

Instead of attempting to win an across-the-board-increase for all workers regardless of grade, one section of the workforce had allowed an alarming widening of differentials.

A woman worker from Hoover spoke at a Working Women's Charter Conference held in Brent in November, and the Conference—attended by over 300 women—pledged its support to the Hoover struggle. This was backed up by the Brent Trades Council, and Charter supporters regularly joined the factory picket.

In conjunction with the Trades Council, Brent Charter Campaign organised a speaking tour for Hoover shop stewards at 14 local factories. The campaign was also instrumental in raising the issue of nationalisation under workers' control with the Hoover shop stewards committee—a demand which the committee supported—and arranged for Hoover workers to speak at an Institute of Workers' Control meeting held during the Labour Party conference.

Ingrid Falconer



Three of the women who took part in the demonstration explain what happened

'THOUSANDS OF MEN were waiting for us. As soon as we arrived they saw us and started running and screaming: 'Here they are. Let's get them!' Then they jumped on us, and after a struggle destroyed all the posters we were carrying. Then they undressed the ones who were masked, and we heard all sorts of insults: 'Women are only good in bed', 'Go home and do your cooking'; 'Burn them'...and so on. Some of us managed to escape, but the others really had to fight. The worst treatment was reserved for a black woman militant. And this lasted for more than two hours!

This is how one woman described what happened when a group of women in Lisbon decided to organise a small demonstration to mark the start of International Women's Year.

'We were no more than 15 when we left home. We were dressed in different ways to symbolise the position of women in this society—a bride, a pregnant woman (with a poster saying: 'Children yes, but only if we want them!'), a typical sex object (with long eye-lashes, a violet wig, high-heeled red shoes, etc.), a housewife, and one dressed in a sheet on which was drawn a naked body with prices on various parts just like a cow. Others carried posters with slogans calling attention to job discrimination against women, sexism, etc.

'We also had ten children with us—the youngest one was only three!

They were supposed to burn toys whose purpose is to impose a sex role on children (dolls, little pots and pans, irons, etc., for girls; guns, tanks, 'action man' types etc. for boys).

The brutality of the response knew no bounds: 'Later we found out that they had also beaten an old lady who had brought a broom to burn, as well as undressing a young girl of 17' who was probably just coming from a school nearby.

But the forces of 'law and order' turned a blind eye. 'There were about five or six thousand men, and only about two hundred women at most. We called the police several times, and even the CopCon (a special military unit which is supposed to 'maintain public order'), and finally they said that if there were many people involved they couldn't come!

Despite the overthrow of the Caetano dictatorship in Portugal in April, the final victory over reaction is still very far from assured. And the survival and perpetuation of reactionary ideas on social questions such as the family, the position of women, and so on, threatens the ability of the working class to launch a united struggle in defence of its interests.

The militant concludes: 'The only way of being able to do something in Portugal is with international help. We ask you, please, to give all the publicity you can and if possible to demonstrate and picket the Portuguese Embassy and other government offices.'

This appeal must not go unheard. The implications of what happened on that demonstration in Portugal are too important to be ignored by the workers' or the women's movements in Britain.

NUS WOMEN'S CAMPAIGN — don't rely on the Broad Left!

The NUS executive has yet to provide any perspective for the Women's Campaign. Virtually nothing happened with the campaign between the Leicester conference and the conference of the NUS held at Margate.

Indeed, the executive are stalling on calling another women's conference before next year—they no doubt fear that activists will put forward initiatives at such a conference that could go beyond the limits they have set.

The measures proposed at Margate to put some backbone into the campaign at a national level—to fully recognise the autonomy and self-organisation of women's groups in the colleges and to allow the women's conferences to mandate the Action Committee on specific initiatives within the framework of the campaign as established at national conferences—were solidly opposed by the Broad Left majority on the executive.

However, while the executive stalls and appeals to its sacred constitution, militants in the colleges are organising a campaign with some teeth.

In London, women students have set up the Socialist Women's Action Group on the basis of agreement with the Working Women's Charter and of disillusionment with the NUS executive's 'leadership' of the campaign.

This type of regional organisation best meets the needs of the campaign in this stage of its development, and should be encouraged all over the country.

As the cuts in social expenditure give college authorities less and less room to manoeuvre, a campaign built on areas will be an effective way to fight.

The issues taken up in the campaign include not only the lack of nursery facilities, but also the lack of abortion and contraception facilities, the cuts in discretionary awards which especially affect women students, and the fight for autonomous women's groups on campuses.

We must also recognise that the cuts affect working class women—when nursery building plans are scrapped and when clinics providing abortion and contraception facilities close, it is these women who are really hit. These common problems create the potential for an alliance which can be built in action.

Such united action can be strengthened by drawing in all organisations committed to the demands in the Working Women's Charter—and this in turn will strengthen the Charter campaign itself. For, despite the understanding of the Broad Left on the NUS executive, the job is not well done merely by getting the Charter adopted at the level of the bureaucracy. The Charter campaign has real meaning only if it is based on the activity of both women in unions—student and trade—and those women not members of such organisations.

Although campaigns like those on nursery facilities and grants which advance the material position of women students are an essential aspect of the campaign, there is another important issue which cannot be forgotten: that is, the fight against sexism in the student unions and in the NUS as a whole. Both the Broad Left and the International Socialist have totally ignored this

side of the campaign. The IS has done so by seeing women simply as 'baby machines'. They have argued for a campaign which simply takes up the issues of nurseries, abortion and contraception. The Broad Left has done so by undermining the position of women's groups in the colleges. In refusing to give funds to women's groups, they have allowed sexist ideas to predominate in student unions.

The women's groups have a vital role in fighting within the student unions against sexist entertainment and for the involvement of women in the NUS—a role which is essential if the campaign is really going to fight against the oppression of women in the colleges.

But although there has been an increase in college women's groups and some useful initiatives are being taken at a local level, the failure of the Margate conference to provide a way forward for the campaign means that it is essential to have national co-ordination. And in the absence of the NUS organising a women's conference, the initiative of a local or regional body to organise one itself would be an important step in the right direction.

by Ann Foreman



Dear Sisters,



I am bewildered—this issue is filled with readable and politically relevant articles, with the shrieking exception of Hilary Wainwright's review of *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. Maybe I am wrong, but I was under the impression that your paper is aimed at a wide readership—including women working in all areas.

If so, I wonder how housewives react or how women working in factories react, when they buy a copy and open it to find an article reviewing, in an intellectual fashion, a book on such an abstract issue.

I found Juliet Mitchell's book totally unreadable—yet as a student I am used to reading theoretical stuff. To me it seemed to be full of unnecessary jargon and written in a heavy academic style. Far from enlightening women, surely it only serves to mystify us further—that is, if we even manage to decipher more than the first few pages.

I hope *Socialist Woman* is not going to fall into the same trap as Juliet Mitchell and so many writers of the feminist movement—and the left generally. Surely the important thing is to communicate with each other—with the mass of people, not to compete for approval in academic circles. Yours in sisterhood, Marianne Craig, Edinburgh.

There are two points to untangle in reply. If the point that Marianne is making is that the style of the book or the review (or both) is too intellectual or abstract, to be understandable, then that is one which could be corrected.

However if the point is being made that to include such a review of such a book, no matter how well written, is a waste of time because it doesn't relate to the experience of women working in factories, then we must disagree entirely. That there will be no revolutionary movement, without revolutionary theory, is as true today as it was when Marx was alive. His work was not the most readable, yet where would we be today if the common attitude had been 'This is too abstract to relate to workers'?

Juliet Mitchell has been in the forefront of developing a theory of women's liberation in Britain and her work is therefore worthy of examination. Psychoanalysis is one area of treatment of so-called 'mental illness' or instability, which has been very much neglected or dismissed by the revolutionary left. To say that the subject is irrelevant to working women, is to ignore the fact that for better or worse, many doctors and social workers base their explanations of women oppressed by their family drudgery and isolation on Freudian principles.

Many of Freud's ideas are implicit in contemporary literature and it could

be said that Freud's theories are now ingrained in the common consciousness of most people in modern capitalist society. How often do you hear phrases like 'subconscious fear'?

If this is so, surely it's desirable that we examine the validity or otherwise of such theories, especially in the light of how it hampers or contributes to a better understanding of the oppression of women, as Juliet Mitchell has tried to do in her book.

We might be able to criticise her on the grounds that she doesn't make the importance of her findings explicit enough and that our reviewer also failed to do it for her, but we can not use the argument that the task wasn't worth attempting. That way lies the position that theory is unimportant.

Incidentally, we do not see the readership of *Socialist Woman* as being predominantly working class women. We have a series of pamphlets planned for the increasing numbers of women becoming radicalised, but who are inevitably unfamiliar with many of the ideas and assumptions of the women's movement. Hopefully this will solve some of the problems you have raised.

—Editors

As you know, we are publishing *Liberation News Konomichi-Hitosugi*. And many women here are very interested in what is happening now in the American and English women's movement.

If you have any interesting news, please send it to us! We would be very happy if you will do this.

Please send articles to the Lib Shinjuku Center, 410, Toto Residence, 28-5, Yayoyit-chome, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo, Japan.

We have set up a study to investigate the occurrence and treatment of rape, and as an important preliminary to our research we would be interested to hear from any doctors who have encountered this problem. We would like to know how far doctors consider rape as a medical problem and what advice and information they offer. We are interested to learn how the potential physical consequences of rape are managed e.g. possible VD and non-venereal genital infections, pregnancy, psychological effects (both long and short term).

Anyone who would be interested in co-operating, please write to us for a short questionnaire.—Rape Medical Study Group, 26 Talfourd Road, London SE 15.

ADVERTS ADVERTS ADVERTS...

One day Women and Socialism conference on *Perspectives for Building the Women's Liberation Movement as a Mass Movement*. March 23 at Queen Mary College, Mile End Road, London E1.

Further details and information from Ann Fainder, 2 Cobs Cottage, Bishops Sutton, Alresford, Hants.

Working Women's Charter Campaign

Badges and Posters available:

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Badges, white on red, 10p each, 8p each for orders of 20.

Contact S. Handley, 24 Vicarage Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham 14.

The Women's History Research Centre is being forced to disperse its collection through lack of funds.

This Center maintained an International Women's History Archive and a Topical Research Library of 2000 files documenting the position of women: past and present, in many countries, organisations, and events. Some material has been micro-filmed. Further details from: Women's History Research Center, Inc., 2325 Oak Street, Berkeley, California, USA, CA94708



socialist revolution

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In the current issue (no. 21)

Eli Zaretsky, "Male Supremacy and the Unconscious,"
Michael Lerner, "Putting Socialism on the Agenda,"
Selections from the Australian Communist Party,
with an introduction by Dorothy Healey.

In Recent Issues:

Stanley Aronowitz, "Food, Shelter and the American Dream" (no. 20)

Mina Caulfield, "Imperialism, the Family, and Cultures of Resistance" (no. 20)

Andrew Feenberg, "The Future of the French Left" (no. 19)

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REVIEWS REVIEWS.....

Women and their Sexuality in the New Film by Joan Mellen, Davis-Poynter, £3.50.

Jean-Paul Sartre said in his book *What is Literature?* that it would be impossible to write a great novel which was anti-semitic. Doesn't the same apply to the equally oppressive ideologies of male chauvinism and sexism? Yet how many writers have questioned to any great extent the oppressive image of women presented in the realms of popular culture? And more importantly, what can be done to change it?

An attack on sexism is beginning to take place inside the media—in publishing, journalism and television for example—with the code against sexism presented at the Women's Media Union Conference held in January. The ideas in this important book could point to the beginnings of a critique of the ideological role that much of the contemporary cinema plays in maintaining and intensifying women's oppression.

The core of the critique is spelled out in the first sentence of the book: 'One searches in vain in the contemporary cinema for a new perception of women which assumes their capacity and value.' But Mellen's is not a feminist critique—she clearly relates the state of portrayal of women in the cinema to the development of late capitalism.

She argues in a fascinating thesis that the Hollywood films of the 40's, in the characters of Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Katherine Hepburn, etc. presented an image of independent, self-reliant women of self-esteem, which contemporary cinema has not surpassed.

REGRESSION

Mellen argues that there has been a regression. Such an image of women in the 40's coincided with the Second World War and the need for women to work in the factories. 'The needs of capitalism in temporary crisis required of women those qualities which were crushed during more stable times when, as passive property, they would return to sustaining the family and conditioning the young.'

After that brief interlude, Hollywood reverted to form, with the presentation of women as 'simpering, dependent hysterics or undulating sexual manikins, epitomised by Marilyn Monroe.'

But as well as being firmly in opposition to capitalism, she attacks quite correctly the films of the workers' states, particularly China, with its glorification of the regimented struggle of the impersonal woman, which serves simply to cel-

ebate the wisdom and virtue of the bureaucracy. For Mellen (and for us):

'The governing ideas of both the so-called socialist and the capitalist nations are bourgeois. They focus on the family as the primary social institution and define women in relation to the nuclear family presided over by a strong patriarch. This persistence of bourgeois values and institutions in the film art of the countries claiming to be socialist precludes the development of a liberated image of women.'

One keystone of her approach in this book to the theory of a cinema which portrays the liberation of women is that it must depict that liberation as part of a process of enlarging choices. The second lynch-pin of her approach to the problem is that only if films relate the sexual activity and mental state of women portrayed, to the corrupting society which surrounds them and conspires to limit and suppress them, can the possibility of change and a real alternative become apparent.

DEPICTING

By simply depicting female neurotic misery and sexual and social debasement, no matter how sympathetic, is not enough. Without the accompanying potential of change and rebellion, such traits implicitly remain eternal 'natural' characteristics.

Searching desperately for films which begin to tackle this task, Mellen commends Makavejev's *WR: Mysteries of the Organism*. This film, in spite of its anarchic and undisciplined technique, asserts that '...human beings, both men and women, will be incapable of free, unrepressed responses to each other until a revolutionary change transforms the institutions which stifle them from earliest childhood.'

On the other hand, she viciously attacks one of the so-called masters of the cinema, Ingmar Bergman, who is traditionally and stupidly praised for having some special insight into women. Her bitter critique of one of the latest films of this much venerated director *Cries and Whispers* is one of the finest concrete analyses in the book:

'Far from being his 'favorite people' as one feminist critic supposed, Bergman exposes himself once again to be one of those film-makers most hostile to a vision of women as free, creative, autonomous, self-sufficient, productive, satisfied or even gentle. His women are rather chained to bodies which leave them little freedom or opportunity to transcend the jices, demonic drives and subordination peculiar to their gender...*Cries and Whispers* in fact provides one of the most retrograde portrayals of women on the contemporary screen... Bergman has made

victims of his women precisely at the moment when they are rapidly rendering obsolete his vision of their natures'.

In her chapter specifically on female sexuality in films, she shows by an analysis of films, such as *Klute*, *Carnal Knowledge*, and *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* that women are most often presented as a) seductive mother-figures b) castrating bitches or c) passive, childlike recipients of male brutality. If they transcend the social norms in sexual terms they are often confused, disorganised neurotic (Alex in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*). Most contemporary directors, whose films relentlessly, if increasingly subtly, work to drive women back into the stifling clutches of the family, by depicting the supposed horrors of independent life outside it.



A scene from Nichol's *Carnal Knowledge*, which Mellen analyses in depth.

The main thesis of Mellen's book, which I have attempted to outline, is developed in the first three sections. The rest, though fascinating, consists of essays of different directors or films, written at different times which only occasionally amplify her main themes.

Mellen includes, however, a crucial chapter on the depiction of lesbianism in the cinema, which is central to her argument and ends with a look at the consciously devised counter-revolution in the cinema, with the film *Up the Sandbox* which unsuccessfully attempts to debunk and undermine women's liberation and radical movements in general.

This is, despite the fragmentary quality of the later passages, a brilliant readable and committed critique of modern cinema which anyone wishing to understand the ideological role of popular culture should read.

by Carl Gardner

Daughter of Earth, by Agnes Smedley, Feminist Press, £1.10

Daughter of Earth was first published in 1929. Together with Agnes Smedley's other works it went out of circulation during the US's post-war anti-communist hysteria, and has now been reprinted by the Feminist Press of New York.

The book is a largely auto-biographical novel dealing with the first part of Smedley's life up to her departure from the West in 1928 and before her long stay in revolutionary China. In factual terms the story tells of the childhood of Marie Rogers in a poor farming family in Missouri. She tells of her family's endless wanderings as her father searches for some kind of fulfilment, moving from one job to another, and Marie's own grasping at wider experience, education and ideas as she grows into adulthood, to save herself from the disintegration she sees most of her family members undergo.

The story develops against a background of extreme poverty and exploitation (imposed by the great mining monopolies the urban American socialist movement with its often sterile intellectualism, the struggles of the International Workers of the World, and the anti-war movement, and the intense and dangerous activity of exiled Indian nationalists organising against British rule.

PERCEPTION

All this is presented with great power and perception. Marie Rogers describes herself as one who always 'felt and acted first and thought afterward', and throughout the book the reality of every situation comes over on all levels of experience—physical sensation, colour, texture, atmosphere; an incredible awareness, in herself and other people, of nuances of consciousness, associations and relationships; the recognition of huge social and class forces at work; and Marie's own ability to give to an ordinary scene a visionary quality beyond the readily explicable. 'I was never clear,' she says. 'What was truth and what was fancy I could not know'.

Goaded on by her 'desire to know everything in the world even if it hurt', she painfully learns the realities of society when she finds her hard-won superiority in class and 'beyond the tracks' counts for nothing at the birthday-party of the doctor's daughter:

"Her father hauls bricks and she lives beyond the tracks and she says her father can lick my father!' Clarence piped.

"That doesn't matter, dear, that doesn't matter! Now just eat your ice-cream.' But I saw her eyes rest disapprovingly on me and I knew it did matter."

As an adult, she brings a similar openness to bear on her relationship with the New York Socialists, who, faced with a real member of the working class, 'automatically extended a hand, but their eyes were on someone else and they were speaking to others. I might have been one of the chairs they were gripping in passing . . . They left in me a feeling of confusion, of impotence, of humility, and even of resentment. I did not know how to learn the things they knew, and they had no time or interest to tell me how.' Still she passes no judgment; she merely notes the difference between their realities.



From childhood, Marie's observations of the degraded position of married women arouse strong feelings of shame and disgust in her, and provide what is possibly the most powerful motivating force in her struggle for personal independence. While recognising the psychological price paid, she maintains a deep pride in her beautiful aunt, Helen, who prostitutes herself to buy clothes for her sister, Marie's mother, thus retaining a kind of independence.

Early in life Marie overhears an exchange which sums up for her 'the true position of the husband and wife in the marriage relationship', and which permanently festers in her consciousness:

"Give back the clothes I bought you!' demands the husband of his now pregnant wife. 'Damn it kid, you know I

love you!' she begged through her tears—for now she could not go back to work even if she wished."

Marie's resolve to have nothing to do with sex and love, as weaknesses leading only to personal subjection, is too deeply ingrained in her being to be denied when she finds it in conflict with the more sensitive expectations of her middle-class first husband, Knut: 'There was a merciless war being waged within my own spirit, a war between my need and desire for love, and the perverted idea of love and sex that had been ground into my being from my first breath.'

POISONED

Marie comes to understand that it is in part her inability to resolve this conflict—an inability forced on her by society which poisoned her attitude to love and sex—which wrecks her close second marriage to the Indian revolutionary Anand; having been raped by a comrade of the movement, she can only feel guilt and Anand himself cannot come to terms with the implications for himself of public discussion of the subject amongst his comrades. Again it is Marie who sees the elements of the situation clearly enough to make the only possible decision to give up both love and her long involvement in the Indian nationalist movement.

As Marie Rogers, Agnes Smedley draws no tidy political conclusions. She readily and actively identifies with the struggles of the exploited and oppressed, and the declaration of a Socialist friend that everything cheap and ugly in the people of her origins was made so by 'the system' comes back to her repeatedly, though, she says, 'I did not know exactly what he meant by the "system"'. In her quest to find out she finds herself more at home with the workers of the IWW than with the intellectuals of the Socialist movement, and although she diligently studies Indian economics, finds a more lasting meaning in the being of her teacher.

In the maybe inevitably rather arid atmosphere of revolutionary politics in Britain, Agnes Smedley's painful honesty to every aspect of her own experience is perhaps the most important message of the book for the left and for women's liberationists in particular.

The book's Afterword calls attention to Smedley's fusion of the personal and the political, but appears to downgrade this by speaking of the importance of 'feelings and enthusiasm' in a radical movement. I personally would approach Smedley's method not as a welcome extra, but as an attempt at what must be a basic precondition, on both the individual and collective level, for the successful making of revolution.

—by Felicity Trodd.

REVIEWS REVIEWS.....

Revolutionary Dynamics of Women's Liberation by Sabina Roberts, League for Socialist Action pamphlet, 15p.

The problem in reviewing this pamphlet is that Sabina Roberts seems confused about at whom it is aimed. On the one hand, she gives us an account of the issues of women's oppression, apparently designed for a new comer to the movement. Certainly, anyone already in women's liberation will have read it all before. She largely ignores the current debates taking place over the connection between production and the reproduction of labour power. The reason for this is that, in her account of the women's movement, she also totally ignores the development of the socialist current, the place where this debate has been developed.

But the new comer to the movement would be somewhat mystified by many aspects of the pamphlet, especially in the way in which it deals with groups in the left. Whilst condemning them all as 'sectarian' she falls into the classic sectarian habit of dismissing other groups with one all-embracing adjective—in the case of the IMG and the International Socialists—as 'super-proletarians'. No where does she attempt to justify or even explain the basis of this description.

COUNTERPOSING

Sabina Roberts condemns the IMG for 'counterposing' the Working Women's Charter Campaign to the women's movement, but fails to mention that women's conferences and groups have been active in taking up the campaign and working around it. Whether she likes it or not, the campaign extends well beyond the International Marxist Group.

It is proposed in this pamphlet that the way to build the women's movement is through a 'single-issue campaign'—such as abortion and contraception. In this proposal two things are ignored—First, the experiences of the American women's movement, where hundreds of thousands of women were pulled into such a campaign, only to disappear when their objective was gained. The campaign was not such as to convince millions of women of the need for total emancipation.

Second, the development of theory by the women's movement (even as outlined in the pamphlet) have shown us the total inter-relationship of all aspects of women's oppression. We shall be doing women a disservice if we rely on campaigns that ignore that totality. —by Leonora Lloyd

The Economic Basis of the Status of Women, by Isabel Largaia, Warwick University Communist Party pamphlet, 10p.

The Economic Basis of the Status of Women



Isabel Largaia's pamphlet makes a serious attempt to extend the Communist Party's analysis of the family in the light of the vigorous and wide-ranging debate that the women's movement has thrown up internationally.

However, her serious approach to uncovering the economic basis of women's oppression belies a partial and therefore misleading analysis. Her discussions of the deterioration of the position of women in the wake of the industrial revolution—and more seriously, of women and socialism—smack dangerously of economic determinism.

In considering the effects of the industrial revolution and the dynamics of a capitalist economy she looks at the split between social reproduction—in industry—and the reproduction of labour power—in the family. She shows how this split relegates women primarily to a servicing role and to giving birth to the next generation of workers. As she states usefully 'the concept of femininity comes closer to that of servitude!'

ECONOMIC BASIS

The title of the pamphlet suggests that Largaia is most interested in tracing the changing economic basis of women's labour. However, her failure even to indicate the response of either the working class or the socialist movement makes the changes seem like a plot of the ruling class which everyone else simply acquiesced to historically.

In fact, during the twenties, an alarming number of working class men fearing for their jobs and their position in the family were accomplices in this 'plot'.

At the same time, a significant number of women defended their right to work in even skilled trades. During this whole period, the socialist movement was thrown into disarray with its theoretical equipment sadly lacking. Although some sections of the socialist movement defended the right of women to work, they did not link this to practical demands of the position of women in the family.

IMPERSONAL

It is when Largaia considers women and socialist that the flaws in her method and analysis become most apparent. To put it bluntly, when she talks about the tendencies in the development of socialism as an impersonal economic development she is absolving the Communist Party in the Soviet Union from the 1930s onwards.

She is overlooking its failures to put its measures on the family and women in the context of the struggle for women's liberation. For there is no such inevitable and secure march in the USSR or any other worker's state, towards women's liberation, as Largaia suggests.

In the '30s, legal abortion was abolished, divorce made more difficult and homosexuality outlawed. In fact, many of the gains made after the revolution were completely overturned. The women's organisation within the CP that had been key in educating both men and women in the ideas and demands of women's liberation was disbanded in the period preceding these measures.

Although some ground was won back in the 50s after the Stalin era, they were made in the context of making the strains of the Russian family more tolerable to women, and not in the context of sexual liberation.

SOPHISTICATION

Despite the sophistication of Largaia's analysis, she basically rationalises these developments. For example, she accepts the orthodox view of the family. Although we may attempt to excuse her and suggest that she has a very broad conception of the family to include all inter-human relations the reality is that she supports the idea of a 'liberated' nuclear family.

Unfortunately, the effect of this pamphlet will be, I fear, to place the existing practice of the Communist Party on a more theoretically accepted basis, rather than to extend the activities of the CP to support the women's movement or the gay movement.

—by Ann Foreman

Wedlocked Woman by Lee Comer, Feminist Press, £1.50

'This book lays no claims to analysing the oppression of women. But I have tried with the help and understanding of the women's liberation movement to describe the subjection of women, particularly as they experience it in the family, in their roles as housewives and mothers.'

So begins *Wedlocked Woman* by Lee Comer. It is in the power of this description that the strength of the book lies—but it is in its lack of analysis that the account falls down.

Lee Comer attempts to tear away the stone which covers the position of women in the capitalist society. She takes a microscope to the many ongoing aspects of women's existence, which permeates the darkest corners of her life as a housewife and mother.

We have exposed to us the 'self-fulfilling prophesy' by which girls—through identification and approval—acknowledge their 'destiny' as passive rearers of children, and loving, sexually attractive wives to men.

The oppressive tedious housework, the isolation of the housewife and the time-consuming tensions of caring for young children without support are legitimised by the supposed natural affinity of women for childcare and domesticity and her alleged 'inferiority in affairs of the mind'.

Comer uncovers all these aspects in a sensitive and often illuminating way. She explores what she describes at the 'mystique of motherhood'—referring to a spate of recent biological and psychological material on the question of motherhood.

She shows where societies' strict commitment to this ideal has left babies to be battered in homes of women who have rejected their role and abandoned them; how women are being beaten and they have no alternative to the marriage trap; where monogamy becomes a 'safety net for loneliness'.

This account could be recommended as an easily readable introduction to some of the ideas of the women's movement for women beginning to search for an independent life, free from the oppression of the monogamous family described in the end of Comer's book.

However, for women in the movement seeking answers to questions about the reasons and nature of our op-

pression in capitalist society; how we can achieve liberation, and the relationship of the struggle to the class battles in the near future of the working class as a whole, the book has little to say.

Lee Comer acknowledges this—but unfortunately overlooks that a lack of an adequate analysis of women's oppression and their position in the family severely distorts the impact of much of the description which at times seems exaggerated, abstract and simplistic.

IMPLICIT

In fact, Comer does have an implicit analysis of women's oppression, but this is either in the background without being coherently and consistently verbalised, or else appears in sweeping generalisations and unsubstantiated assumptions like:

'Society depends for its life-blood on the small privatised nuclear family'

'Capitalism needs to enforce a vice-like hold on the nuclear family. Without it, the system will simply grind to a halt'

Thus, the section on the family—although useful in its detail, contains at times an inconsistent assessment of the primary functions of the family in capitalist society. In one section, it appears that the monogamous marriage serves to swallow up the social conflict between women and men, where marriage is a private safety valve for public conflict.

'Perhaps the most basic struggle (in the family) is over power, for it is here that marriage serves society most usefully. Magically the power that is vested in the man in all spheres of life is somehow supposed to be neutralised in marriage, thereby justifying its legitimacy outside the home.'

In another section the nuclear family serves as a safety valve not for the conflict of women against male power and dominance but against the opposition of men (as husband and breadwinner) to the employer, through strikes and lays the basis for a mobile and docile workforce. Here she seems unable to decide as to whether the family is primarily a safety valve against a sex war or a class war.

In yet another section, she stresses the importance of the family as a consumer of commodities.

'If the cars, lawn mowers, telephone, etc. were shared amongst several families, the market for capitalist over-production would crumble around its monstrous head.'

This wrongly analyses the economic significance of the family. For although commodity consumption in the home is important it is being overtaken in monopoly capitalism by the expansion of the market for capital equipment as a means of accumulating profit.

Without pursuing this point in detail, it does serve to illustrate a fundamental weakness in Lee Comer's approach. By isolating the family as a unit of analysis and using this as a starting point for the study of women's oppression, she fails to come to terms with the relationship between the family and the capital/labour relationship in the economy—showing how the particular form of the family in our society and the oppression of women within it is structured by the former.

But perhaps the most serious weakness of Lee Comer's book is the strategy offered for fighting against the oppression which is so vividly described. She argues that the fight against the material basis goes 'hand in hand with a radical overhaul of the ideology...which now separates women from men and women from themselves'.

SOPHIST

In itself, this statement is not incorrect but we must determine what the material conditions are. For Comer, they appear to be located primarily in the family—and when she considers the class structure of society, this is seen as just one of many locations. The implications of this for her political strategy are profound:

'Until the doors of every family are opened, until the inner conflicts played out in each one and exposed for joint examination, the barriers between the sexes and the classes will not be torn down.'

But the only example of such a strategy in practice is to 'subvert the family ideology' through communes and community forms of living. Because in her analysis she isolates the family from class society (looking at the family and class society as separate entities rather than the relation between the two). She implies an isolation of the struggle against family relations from the struggle against class relations. Although she mentions the necessity for revolutionary changes in society, she nowhere shows exactly how she understands the relationship between the liberation of women and the seizure of state power.

by Celia Pugh

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