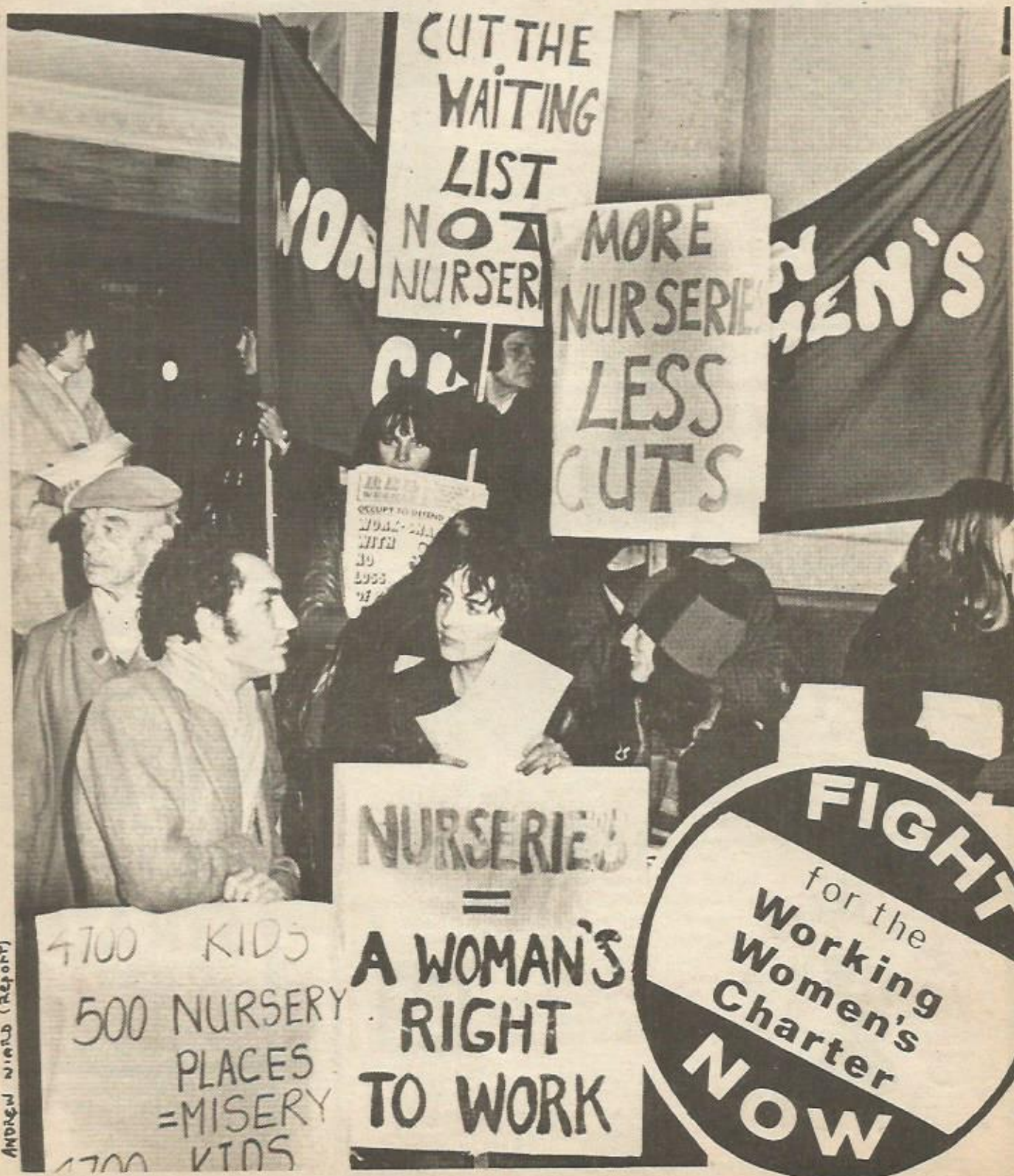


# Socialist Woman

A JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP

SPRING 1976



ANDREW NIELD (Report)



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### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

by Alexandra Kollontai



THEORETICAL JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL TROTSKY GROUP, BRITISH SECTION OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

### INTERNATIONAL

Volume 3 Number 1 Spring 1976  
Double Issue 50p. \$1.50.

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# EDITORIAL



The political scene in Britain is dominated by the spectres of unemployment and of social service cuts. Industrial chaos has opened up once again. The motor industry is collapsing, in the textile industry entire factories are shut down for months at a time. Financial empires face disaster. The whiz kids of the 60s whiz no more, Jim Slater being only one of the latest to take a fall. Just now there are no safe investments for get rich quick merchants. Even Gold is a dubious proposition. On just one day, 9 December, the cost per ounce of gold on the London stock exchange dropped by \$1.50.

In short, the news every day is 'crisis as usual'. Every section of the ruling class is obsessed by the need to cut losses and to get fresh investment. There are fierce fights of course about just which capitalists most deserve rescuing, but on one thing they are all agreed: the main burden is to be born by the working class. Cost-cutting by holding down wages and by lay-offs, and new investment by releasing the capital tied up in education, the NHS and the social services — these are the two main methods being used to redeem capitalism.

The main instruments of attack have been the Labour Government and their supporters in the trade union movement. The policy of Wilson and Healey has quite simply been to impose more and more cuts, to hold down wages via the £6 norm, and to kow-tow to the wishes of the bosses. Former 'lefts' like Jack Jones have dreamed up their own parcels of belt-tightening measures. And of course, they have been praised to high heaven by the capitalist press for their patriotism.

For the attack that Wilson, Healey and Jones are leading against the working class is not simply a matter of economic measures but it is also a political attack. Wilson sent a Minister off to Madrid to mourn the death of the old fascist dictator, Franco. Barbara Castle sneaked through restrictions on the right to abortion via the Select Committee recommendations. Roy Jenkins has been hacking away at democratic rights with a will. The Prevention of Terrorism Act, for instance, has resulted in over 600 arrests or deportations in the last year. There has even been an attempt to use it on Pat Arrowsmith—a well-known pacifist!

In the last edition of *Socialist Woman* we emphasised the need for political clarity amongst militants resisting these attacks. Events since then have only confirmed our views. The stream of propaganda in support of the family and traditional morality poured out daily in the press, radio and the telly came to a head recently with Archbishop Coggan's statement.

In one way or another sexism is continually being used to get workers to accept the burden of the crisis, and to have the effects of the cuts passed on women in the family. But the crisis has had its strain—newspaper headlines proclaiming daily yet another case of battered women and increasing attempts to aid these women has brought this to everyone's

attention. The ruling class cannot take the family for granted. It has to fight to re-establish it. It has to win women and the whole working class to its ideas on the family and its political solutions. Socialists in the women's movement must mount the counter-attack.

The Labour Government's moves on abortion have been the main issue facing the women's movement in recent weeks. The recent conferences of the National Abortion Campaign (in London and Edinburgh) have seen the beginnings of an attempt to grapple with a new and more complicated situation now the White Bill has been magically transformed into the Select Committee. Elsewhere in this edition we explain the IMG's positions of the NAC, but one thing remains plain, regardless of the manoeuvrings that are going on in Parliament.

The abortion campaign must enjoy the support of all militants brought into action by the policies of the Labour Government. NHS cuts hit abortion and contraception facilities first and so we should see the DHSS moves against the right to abortion also as yet another attempt to sabotage the health service.

The restrictions on the right to abortion are the thin wedge of the sexist wedge and all the militants of the working class must be lined up to fight on it. This may mean *dragging* in these militants, for political unity will involve a fight also against the sexism that has been institutionalised into the traditional structures of the labour movement.

The fight against unemployment reached something of a high point with the demonstration on 26 November which attracted 20,000 despite the sabotage of the TUC. At the same time there have been a series of factory occupations and strikes which have shown in action the depth of the potential resistance that exists. Time and again it has been women workers who have been in the forefront of such struggles.

The recent disputes in Sheffield and Merthyr are just two examples. Such experiences strike profound blows to sexism. At the same time, the impact of the Working Women's Charter in various individual unions and at the TUC has made it plain that a set of demands around the rights and needs of women can obtain the backing of militants of both sexes. The will to struggle is there, the demands are being taken up. What remains is to hammer out political unity against the attacks of the ruling class and against the present 'mis-leaders' of the working class—from the Cabinet right down to union branch level. To fight sexism is to knock a weapon from the hands of the class enemy. And there will be no unity in the present struggles unless the fight against sexism is firmly launched.





# DOMESTIC LABOUR

Millions of hours labour are spent every year by women doing housework, yet it is unrecognised as work and regarded as completely irrelevant to economic and political life. Much of the debate on domestic labour has centered on the task of understanding the precise nature

of the relationship between domestic labour (housework) and capital.<sup>1</sup>

Domestic labour does not have the clear and direct relationship with capital that wage labour has. In the latter case, the worker sells their labour power—that is, their capacity for labour—to an employer—a representative of capital, for a wage. The employer buys capital, for a wage. Effectively, they put their labour power on the market as a commodity for sale.

The employer buys the labour power at its exchange value, represented by the wage, and uses it to produce commodities which he will then sell. What is important in this relationship, is that whilst the wage is sufficient to pay the costs of maintaining the worker (more or less, and at a historically determined level) its value is less than the

value produced by the worker through their labour, so that capital acquires the surplus (the difference between the two). This is the source of profit. In this way, the worker is 'exploited' since he or she does not receive back all the value which they have produced.

As a housewife—that is, working in her own home for her own family—the woman's labour power has no value on the market and she does not sell her labour power to anyone. No-one sets her to work on the production of commodities which they will then sell for profit.

What the housewife is doing in her work, is reproducing labour power—by her washing, cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, etc. She enables the worker (herself and/or husband and the next generation of workers, her kids) to work. Her labour isn't all that is necessary. Obviously the commodities that are bought with the wage—food, furniture, etc. are essential, and the labour power of many workers has been expended in producing these commodities.

The significance of this is that, as Marx said, the value of a commodity is determined by the labour-time necessary for the production of that article. This is essentially the 'labour theory of value'. The value of labour power is determined in the same way.

However, it has been argued by some writers on the subject of domestic labour, that the housewife's labour-time does not figure in this because her labour is not 'social labour' because it is not producing a commodity, but only 'use-values'. That is, the food she cooks, for example, is not for exchange on the market but only for direct consumption. What follows from this conclusion is that domestic labour is *not* actually reproducing labour power and has no economic relationship with capital.

It is true that the housewife's labour is not 'abstract, social labour', but neither can we deny that her labour is *necessary* in the production and reproduction of labour power. The commodities which are bought either have to be transformed through her labour before they can be consumed (eg. food prepared and cooked), or maintained by her labour. And in the case of child-rearing, it is certainly her labour which is the main contributor in this process...babies don't come out of factories!

So we have the anomaly that a housewife's labour is essential in the reproduction of labour power and yet her labour does not contribute to the exchange-value of that commodity. In this sense, her labour is not 'productive' and there is no surplus value created.

This is the anomaly that exists in reality, but at the level of theory this anomaly must be explained, otherwise we find that the theory itself can seem to be faulty. For example, if we substituted for the 'free' labour of the housewife, the waged labour of a nanny and housekeeper, we would find that the exchange value of labour-power had risen astronomically even though no more labour-time had been spent on its production. This would appear to make nonsense of the labour theory of value as outlined above.

The clue to this problem can be found in a passage in *Capital* Volume I where Marx explains that the terms 'value' and 'exchange value' are not synonymous, but are in fact distinguishable. 'Value', he says 'is the mere conglomeration of





human labour power'; exchange-value is 'the only form in which the value of commodities can manifest itself or be expressed. We (can) consider the nature of value independently from this, its form'.

Thus, the situation of the housewife is this: although her labour is labour-time necessary in the production and reproduction of labour power; although it is part of the labour congealed in the commodity labour power and *therefore that labour constitutes part of its value*, that part does not take form as exchange-value and is *never realised*. In this way her crucial part in the economic process is *obscured and unrecognised*. This will remain the case as long as housework is privatised and unwaged.

We can see, though, how capital benefits from this anomalous situation. If domestic labour were to become socialised and therefore waged, this exchange value of labour power would rise and capital would have to pay out a larger proportion of the value that workers create, in its costs for labour, and thus capital would be able to expropriate less surplus-value.

So we can see that capital has an interest in maintaining the family in its present form with the woman as housewife. And at the present time we can actually see capital using this anomalous and obscured situation, for as real wages are being cut, so the housewife is being encouraged, via the media, to do more work in the home to compensate for the loss of income.

Have you noticed the increasing number of articles in newspapers and magazines, aimed at women, about how to make do with less? They all have one thing in common—they involve more work by the housewife—more time spent shopping for bargains, food home grown, meals cooked from scratch rather than using prepared foods, remaking old clothes, etc.

In this way, waged labour, in the form of commodities is replaced with the 'free' domestic labour of the housewife. Thus, the blow of lower wages is softened, making it easier for capital to cut wages and realise more surplus value.

The housewife is also *forced* to do more work in the home by such things as the closing of nurseries. So because of their anomalous situation, women can be made to take on a large part of the burden of the economic crisis without anyone even noticing it. What is also clear from this analysis is that the struggle of women against their exploitation and oppression is inseparable from the struggle of the working class as a whole, particularly at this time when the working class is being 'asked' to pay for the crisis, for which they are not responsible.

The answer to the problem of the unrecognised and unrewarded labour of housework is not to demand 'wages for housework'. This would implant



women all the more firmly in the home reinforce their role as housewives (which remember is also used as a rationalisation for unequal pay and opportunities) and would allow the housewife to be under the scrutiny of the State employer—making her home even more like a factory.

Rather the demand should be for the socialisation of housework so that the tasks are shared across the sexes and across family units, and be alleviated by the introduction of improved domestic technology which is precluded whilst housework is privatised. Furthermore, this would end the isolation of the housewife.

This demand also challenges the role of 'housewife' itself, which is essentially an oppressive one. We can begin to make this demand concretely even now, in the context of the present situation. For example, we can demand more nurseries and 24-hour nurseries, free state laundries, and so on.

Another demand we should be making is for the recognition by the state—for example, in taxation and social security—of women as individuals in their own right, not as dependent appendages

of their husbands. Thus we should demand, for example, that women not working outside the home should be classed as unemployed and receive full benefits—regardless of whatever financial support they are theoretically receiving from their spouses. This demand is a good one, not only because it challenges the enforced financial and legal dependence of women by the state, but also because it contains the principle that ALL WOMEN have the RIGHT to work. At the same time, it would guarantee housewives an income of their own.

This demand can be made realistically and taken up actively NOW because it challenges the sexism and discrimination by the state at a time when it is claiming to be stamping out sexual inequalities and discrimination.

In these ways, we can begin to take forward our struggle against the dependent, oppressive and unrewarded role of domestic labourer.

Footnote:

1. Terms such as 'capital', 'productive', and 'exploitation', etc. are used in the Marxist sense.

BY ANN CHESTERTON



Unemployment has once again become one of the central issues of the class struggle. It now stands at 1.2 million people registered as unemployed. Of those registered, there are 300,000 women. The table below gives the rate of increase of the number unemployed in the period from November 1973 to May 1975—for the population as a whole and for racial minorities.

| GROUP           | % INCREASE |
|-----------------|------------|
| All             | 65         |
| All male        | 60         |
| All female      | 89         |
| All minorities  | 156        |
| Male minority   | 138        |
| Female minority | 254        |

In other words, blacks and women are getting laid off quicker than white men. The conclusions are very simple on a general level. Women and racial minorities are being made to perform the same role in the labour force as they did in the last major capitalist crisis—that of the industrial reserve

setting this are a number of important specific factors—especially when we look at the present situation of women workers.

In particular, we must note that the traditional methods of containing women's contribution to the work force has suffered in recent decades. For example, it is not longer the case that an exceptionally high proportion of women are used as temporary and part-time labour. A survey in the Department of Employment states:

*'The incidence of female temporary employment by occupation is similar to that of female employment in general and this is reinforced when one examines the industries in which the workers are located.'*

At the same time, DEP figures also note that while the involvement of all women in the work force has risen by about 7% since the early 50s, the proportion of married women within the aggregate of women workers has increased by 25%.

In other words, it is far less the

the Sex Discrimination Act, etc.

While these will in no way liberate women, they can certainly pose additional difficulties for the bourgeoisie—particularly insofar as they have become the focus of many fight-backs against the attacks of the Labour Government. They were introduced to ensure that the radicalisation of women workers does not get out of hand. But their consequence has been to solidify women's place within the workforce. The wave of equal pay struggles at shop floor level surrounding the Act meant that the Equal Pay Act didn't simply acknowledge the increased numbers of women workers, but also attempted to cope with their increased militancy and consciousness.

It would be a mistake however to think that all problems on either side of the situation have fundamentally changed. A few more facts ought to kill off any ideas that the position of women has changed so much that they can't be returned bag and baggage to

# WOMEN AND UNEMPLOYMENT

army. It is these groups that are pulled into production insofar as there is a shortage of labour—and then at lower wages. In times when there is no such shortage, they will be pushed out of the labour force to become a pool from which any other labour that becomes too expensive (ie. demands decent wages) can be replaced, or threatened with replacement.

In this respect, it is no accident that it is black women who have experienced a 254% rate of increase in lay-offs. And it is because racism and sexism are so prevalent in society as a whole that the industrial reserve army can be accomplished with such ease.

Even within minorities groups there are differences. West Indians, for instance, are substantially harder hit than Asian workers. And, as is obvious from the above, sexism has become a strikingly potent weapon in 'managing' black workers.

However, this is only a general statement and we see only very general underlying trends from it. Off-

case now than it was before the war that marriage takes women out of the workforce. The use of the home to control women's participation in the workforce is no longer the force it was. And the main reason for this is that the welfare state provisions introduced in this period made a life with two jobs (one at home, one in the factory) somewhat more tolerable than it was in the 30s.

This last point is important for two reasons. First, it means that getting women out of the workforce involves a far bigger push than was the case previously. This can involve an ideological offensive in favour of traditional virtues and 'family life'. Secondly, an attack on the place of women in the work force can't be separated from the project of dismantling the welfare state. So the ruling class is faced with a more complicated task than it had in the 30s.

In addition, we can note the impact of the women's movement since the last 60s which has resulted in some legislation—the Equal Pay Act,

full-time domestic slavery—and used as replacements for the social services.

Other factors re-inforce the basic trends outlined above. First of all, the integration of married women into the workforce has certain features. The analysis in the Hunt Report show that women are more likely to be employed if under 25 or over 40 years of age. It is still usual for married women to leave work for ten to fifteen years to have children.

The same report shows that in 1965, 84.7% of women workers received no training of any kind. Fifty per cent of all women employed were either in clerical/secretarial positions or involved in 'personal services' (such as hairdressing, chiropody, etc.)

In short, the position of women workers is one which still situates them at the bottom of the industrial pile, still determined by domestic responsibilities. A more recent study comments

*'In the end, then, women do have higher turnover rates than men. More over women, who leave jobs are more*



likely to leave the labour force altogether. ...Survey data seem to show that personal reasons such as marriage, pregnancy, and child care, dominate the mobility decisions of women...'

The fields in which women are employed are the least productive and most vulnerable sectors of the economy. The most dramatic example is the textile and clothing industry where the problems of productivity are now being solved through closing whole factories for months at a time.

Finally, the Equal Pay Act has encountered significant resistance from managements. Its provisions are weak enough to start with but as even as a report from the Department of Employment—reeking of white-wash—is forced to admit:

'Sixteen percent of the employers with manual workers likely to be affected by the Act and 12% of those with no manual workers likely to be affected had made no moves towards implementing its provisions....there is evidence that many employers believe that they have either introduced equal pay or have phased plans for introducing it may not have grasped the full implications of the Act for their companies.'

The present employment situation is inextricably linked up with the attacks under way against the welfare state. A fierce social struggle in which a whole range of questions—from 'for whose benefit do we work' to 'is women's place in the home'—come up for answer. The outcome of the struggle is dependent upon the politics of the situation.

Already massive fights against redundancies are taking place. Already forces in the labour movement are organising against the cuts. But two problems need to be confronted at once.

The first is the need to group the resistance around an overall programme that actually tackles the problems. Simple militancy is not enough. The rise of unemployment is the result of the continuing inability of capitalists to market their goods—they attempt to cut their losses through cuts in labour costs. The workers' movement must insist that the bosses bear the burden of their own crisis.

For this reason, demands must include work-sharing with no loss of pay, nationalisation of all bankrupt companies, a national minimum wage for employed and unemployed alike, a 35-hour week, and a sliding scale of social spending to match unemployment benefit, social security payments and other social service provisions to the cost of living. Socialists in the women's movement must be in the forefront of a specific fight to raise the demand for the

John Sturrock (Report)



Women and blacks—a common sight on the dole queue.

right of women to work.

The second problem is that the present leadership of the working class is not only unable to lead such struggles—but is already lined up on the other side. It is a Labour Government that is implementing the cuts, and it was the General Council of the TUC that tried to sabotage the 26 November unemployment demonstration. Only if those forces now in struggle and those prepared to join them come together against the present leadership of the working class, will there be any measure of success.

There is one final, vital point. The ruling class, along with Wilson and Healey will be only too happy to make use of the continued confusions in the workers' movement about the family and the position of women. So it is absolutely vital that the forms of struggle that we under-

take—such as factory occupations—are based on a full consciousness of what is implied for women in them. There must be creches, non-employed wives and husbands of strikers must be fully involved and there must be a consistent struggle against male chauvinism amongst workers. It is no accident that so many of the recent struggles have been led by women workers. It will be no accident if male chauvinism precipitates defeat.

MARTIN O'LEARY

The figures in this article are taken from the following sources: *Department of Employment Gazette*, *The Hunt Report*, and *The Role of Women in the Economy* (OECD, 1975)



# WOMEN IN NALGO

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**NO CUTS**

Within the wide range of services covered by Nalgo—gas, electricity, local government and the NHS—women have formal equality in their conditions of service. Equal pay has been established for many years. However, the real situation of women in these services demonstrates that equality on a formal level is no guarantee against various forms of discrimination.

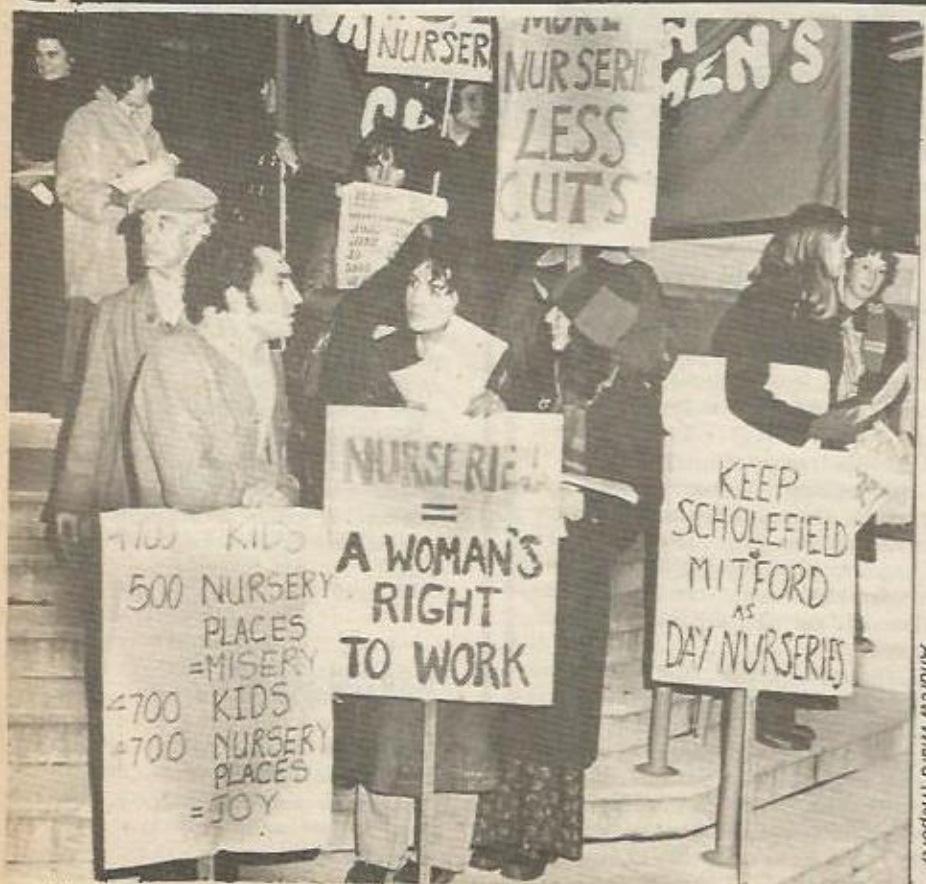
Women in these services suffer from low pay—35% of women in Nalgo falling below the TUC low pay target of £30, as opposed to 8% of men. Low pay is predominant among typists, clerks, nursery nurses. These tend to be 'women only' jobs where women's wages cannot be brought up to the level of a male counterpart. However, on higher professional grades, women do not even require equal wages as they are generally located at a lower level than men within the same grade.

## LOW PAY

This problem of low and/or unequal pay is linked to the fact that women are located within occupations which correspond to the traditional caring, responsive role which capitalist society has foisted upon them. For instance, women form a large proportion of the workforce in social services, their highest concentration being found in the lower grades where face to face contact with clients is required. Meanwhile, the more highly graded administrative posts within social services are predominantly a male preserve. The low proportion of women occupying such posts demonstrates how the maintenance of a traditional conception of women's role is society creates unequal opportunity where nominally it is supposed to exist. It also reinforces the maintenance of areas of work for 'women only' Within Nalgo services and explains such facts as the high concentration of women as nursery workers and their extremely low pay and conditions.

## WOMEN'S GROUPS

Women in Nalgo have become increasingly aware both of the anomalous situation and the need for them to organise *within* the union. Women's groups have been formed in a number of areas. In London, the local groups are linked



Andrew Ward (Report)

Islington Council Social Services Committee Meeting being picketed against the cuts.





John Sturrock (Report)

to an all-London organisation: Women in Nalگو.

Within branches of Nalگو, women have taken up the fight for the adoption of the Working Women's Charter. It has gone through a number of local branches, and has now been adopted nationally by Nalگو. The fight for abortion on demand has also been mounted within various branches and at the national demonstration earlier this year in favour of abortion and against the James White Bill, a significant number of Nalگو branch banners were present.

As a result of the growing organisation of women within local branches a motion was passed at the 1974 National Conference of the union—for an investigation to be launched into the development of equal rights and opportunities for women with special reference to Nalگو.

The resulting report is unambiguous in pointing out where discrimination is occurring and in making concrete proposals to combat them. Some of the proposals are very far-reaching

### NALGO PAPER

(and in fact imply social revolution) like the idea that education, in its content and structure, is an important influence in determining sex roles in society. Others are immediate reforms to be carried out like equality in pension schemes, adequate nursery facilities, NHS abortions on demand, etc.

The proposals made for maternity leave are in fact more advanced than those contained within the Working Women's Charter. Also included in the report are appendices, that give the result of a survey taken of Nalگو members. These reveal that discrimination exists in the union itself: meetings at times single apprentices and most women cannot attend, predominance of men in union posts, women on executives doing 'secretarial work'.

However, the existence of this report and the adoption of the Working Women's Charter nationally—although important steps—by no means imply that the struggle of women in Nalگو has been won. A number of events have occurred which point out that the union is neither prepared to take action which will implement the proposals of the Equal Rights Report or conduct a campaign for the implementation of the demands contained within the Working Women's Charter.

### CONFERENCE

This summer the national leadership of Nalگو took the excellent step of calling a conference on Equal Rights. The Conference had no power to make recommendations to the NEC however. It was organised during July and August when most branches don't even have Executive Committee meetings let alone full branch meetings. Delegates were therefore self-appointed or picked from minority groupings and could not come to the Conference with motions that had been discussed and supported by branch members.

With regard to the Charter, despite its adoption as Union policy, Audrey Prime, who is a Nalگو member on the TUC General Council, spoke against the Charter's clause in favour of abortion at the TUC Congress. This lack of unified support for women's rights is by no means restricted to the upper echelons of the union, but permeates all levels of the membership. At the national conference of the union this year, in the evening following the debate on equal rights, a stag party was organised for men only which included as part of its program, a stripper.

Women must not let the Nalگو leadership off the hook or cease to struggle within their branches on questions affecting women. This is particularly important at the pres-

ent time as the Crosland 'nil growth' proposals on public expenditure will mean reductions in services and staffing which will reinforce existing discrimination. These cut-backs will not only affect women in Nalگو in their capacity as employees in services where public expenditure is cut back, but also as women in a general sense.

As employees, redundancy poses as much greater threat to women as men are traditionally seen as the breadwinner in the family. Also as a woman, the cut-backs in services will thrust an increasing pressure—within the family situation—to take on more and more tasks which in the past have formed part of the services provided by the welfare state.

For instance, care of the sick and aged as a result of cuts in the NHS will thrust increasing burdens upon women in the family to care for them.

Women in Nalگو therefore have a dual responsibility to fight against the cut-backs in public expenditure. An exemplary struggle on this basis has already taken place within Tower Hamlets social services, where women forced the majority of social workers taking strike action against the Council's policy of non-filling of vacant posts in the department. The strike, organised democratically within mass meetings of those taking part was successful in gaining its objective. Struggles like this with women at the forefront are likely to increase in the future as the cut-backs begin to bite.

Women in Nalگو must therefore go onto the offensive if the gains made within the union over the past few years are to exist in reality and not just on paper. Not only must a fight be conducted within the union for equality and adequate representation but also against the cuts in public spending with their accompanying threat of increased discrimination.

This must be linked to a struggle for the implementation of the demands of the Charter which imply an increase in public services and spending—both to improve women's conditions of service and to provide the social facilities of nurseries, free abortion on request, etc.

Without these, equality in real terms cannot be gained. The forthcoming London conference of the Working Women's Charter against the cuts in public expenditure, planned for the end of February 1975, should have the full support of Women in Nalگو. They are strategically placed to fight back as both employees employees within the public services and as women who require the extension of such services in the fight for more than formal equality at work.

June Whitfield.



# EQUAL PAY NOW!

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* The following interview is with Silvia Greenwood, Convenor of Easterbrook Allcard in \*  
\* Sheffield, who was on strike for Equal Pay. The workers have returned to work \*  
\* pending negotiations, the result being that a few days later their demands were granted— \*  
\* wage rises between £5 and £7. \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

## What sort of firm is Easterbrook Allcard?

It's a small tool firm mainly dyes, taps, seamers, and so on. It's a privately-owned firm based purely in Sheffield. We have a few storage places around the country.

## How is the workforce made up?

It's made up of 60% females, 40% males. At one time it was slightly more but it seems to have been moved down now in favour of the men.

## What sort of job do they do?

The females are machine operators; the males are machine operators and setters.

## Are the female workers mainly involved in less skilled work than the men?

We have got female workers who are setters equal to males. We have got females that work to blue-print drawings, and work with gromiometers, and all kinds of very complicated equipment.

## How were the unions built here - they include the AUEW, T&G and the ETU don't they?

Three years ago we started to organise, and the real making of the unions was when they sacked me for union organisation. At that particular period, we started a work-to-rule in order to try to get the males' rates of pay right and the next morning at quarter to eight he sacked me. As a result, we had a four-week strike that we won and maintained union organisation.

## How strong are the unions now?

The unions are 99%; the shop-floor itself is virtually full trade union. But the office workers aren't. I once did get a meeting with all the supervisors to organise them in the union but they backed out because they were frightened of losing their jobs.

## And you are the Convenor here?

Yes, I'm the convenor of an all-male shop-stewards committee. Because we haven't got the facilities within the firm and whoever's a trade unionist within this firm or a shop steward, an active member comes under tremendous pressure and a lot of our females don't feel they're up to this particular sort of pressure.

## Is it also because they've got very heavy responsibilities in the home?

Yes, if you've not facilities within a works to operate, obviously we have to have meetings at night. And a lot of our females obviously can't leave their families and so forth at night to go along to meetings. It's impos-

## Personna women fight another battle—for the right to work



sible to do a job within this firm from a quarter to eight to twenty-five past four as a shop steward.

## What is the aim of this strike? Equal pay, or is more involved?

No, obviously with equal pay everything is involved. When you look at the rates of pay within this firm, we work under what's called the small-tool agreement. And under this agreement there are only 6 rates of pay for males—in our firm itself there are 13. On a number of occasions in the last three years we have tried to get the male rates of pay put right.

We figured that with the legislation at the back of us on equal pay this could be forced upon management by doing job evaluation of females. Well, job evaluation of all jobs, that's what the intention was. Management came back and said 'No, only job evaluation of females' and they would not consider doing job evaluation of males. The reason is obvious—it meant pay rises for men as well as females. They then come along and try to give the break-off point without doing any comparison factor or job evaluation of males, and tried to put 190 females on a rate that does not exist within this company.

So in order to qualify under the Equal Pay Act that says equal pay for work of equal value, some males must be dropped down to this rate, that means another 2 rates—15 instead of 13. And who would the men be on that rate?

## Did you have the full support of the male workers when this strike started?

Oh yes, when we were aware of what management were doing, I had a meeting of the shop stewards committee and decided that at that particular point we would ask our females or tell our females that the best way to go about this, and we decided that the only support we wanted from our males at that point was that they didn't do any work normally done by females...that we

would sit-in at our machines so that nobody could work them and we'd just sit there and the men would get their money. Because if they're setters and they've nobody to set-up, they'll still pay them a rate. Management obviously cottoned onto this after the first afternoon. And the Friday morning when they tuned-up for work, all the females were locked out.

We decided whether to go bodily through but there was a line of management and we were a little afraid of our females getting hurt. So we called a shop stewards committee meeting and the males decided to back us by a walk-out.

## And how have management been behaving since?

When we first took the action on the Thursday—the sit-in—management put a personal letter out to each female, I assume they thought our females were illiterate or didn't know exactly what was happening but they offered them a rate of pay such as £33, £32.60 and £34—all it did was anger our females a hell of a lot more. They tore them up and were dancing up and down—they weren't sitting quietly at that particular point!

The next action they tried was dividing the males from the females by putting statements out to the press that our females would be receiving more than the setters. Oh yes I agree with them entirely. I agree with them for the simple reason that a lot of our males aren't getting the right rate of pay. That is not because we want more than the males but the fact that they have, over the years, conned men to work within our factory at any rate they could set them on, with the fake promise of increasing their pay after they had done their initial training. This we fought for weeks at a time to get these men onto correct rates and in a lot of cases we haven't succeeded.

## Why is this strike so important to the Sheffield labour movement?

This is the tip of the iceberg. This is the first case and I'm quite sure that every management in Sheffield looking for a loophole to get out of the Equal Pay Act will be looking to this one. I'm quite sure there's going to be a hell of a lot of females, not only in Sheffield but in Great Britain who'll be taken down this way unless someone closes this loop-hole up. Male jobs will be created. Created in order to keep the cheap labour, that management have used for years, down.



1975—the year of women, or so we were led to believe by the Labour Government when it promised women a better deal. But these promises have worn very thin indeed as women fall foul of inflation, unemployment and public spending cuts. (Areas in which Labour's Anti-discrimination Bill and Equal Pay Act maintain an ominous silence).

Since the Tory and Labour Governments introduced social expenditure cuts in the early 1970's, £460 million have been lopped off education expenditure. Women's opportunities for education, already severely weakened by discrimination, have suffered in the face of these attacks. Women's responsibility for childcare have also been increased as, already pitiful, nursery provisions come under the Government's chopper. In 1974, it was estimated that for every nursery place, 200 under 5's had to do without. With the Labour Governments cuts in education at the beginning of the year, this situation shows no sign of improvement. All local authorities are reported to be ditching nursery plans altogether, or else refusing to fill empty nursery buildings as Government funds for equipment and staff are whipped away. Conditions within the few nurseries available deteriorate, with many groups reporting staff-children ratios of 1:30 and 1:80 and with nursery nurses suffering low pay and long hours.

## PENNY PINCHING SCHEMES HIT WOMEN

When penny-pinching schemes like part-time schooling and raising the school entrance age are introduced, women are amongst the first to suffer, as their childrearing time is increased. The bloodletting in the health service also creates untold difficulties for women, who have increased responsibilities for the sick and infirm and who are denied the health care which should be their right (such as free abortion on demand), not to mention the thousands of women workers in the health service who are worn into the ground with deteriorating conditions and pay.

On the unemployment front, things aren't any more encouraging. Thousands of women join the dole queue, especially in areas of high female employment like the public sector (teaching, health services and local government workers) and industries like retailing, services, etc. Official figures always underestimate the extent of female unemployment, as many women don't bother to register (considering themselves "employed" in the home) or else they cannot register for benefits as they only pay married women's stamps. Once these factors have been accounted for, it is thought that ¼ million women are unemployed.

## INFLATION RAGES — NO INCREASE IN WAGES

Women—as consumers and tenants—are also severely hit, as inflation rages ahead with no increase in income under the restraints of Healey's £6 pay limit. In this situation, the woman as "housewife" has to shoulder the additional burdens, of "shopping around", "home cooking", and mending and making clothes, and replacing the laundrette by the kitchen sink. Of course they are encouraged by national TV awards for "the most economical family" and radio tips for more economical living.

These are just a handful of the problems facing women, as the Labour Government tries to haul British capitalism out of its crisis by shifting the pressure onto the backs of the working class. Sadly, the notion that women are born to shoulder the tasks of childrearing and domestic slavery in the isolation of the family, serve to veil the extent of these attacks. For too long the working class movement has turned a blind eye to the plight of women, in a short-sighted attempt to keep men in jobs and secure the wage levels of male workers. Calls to the working class to 'tighten your belts and make sacrifices', cannot be adequately resisted as long as the workers' movement is prepared to accept that women are dispensable as workers and are born to make sacrifices in the home, in order to secure the well-being of the male 'breadwinner'.

## UNITED FIGHT AGAINST WILSON'S POLICIES

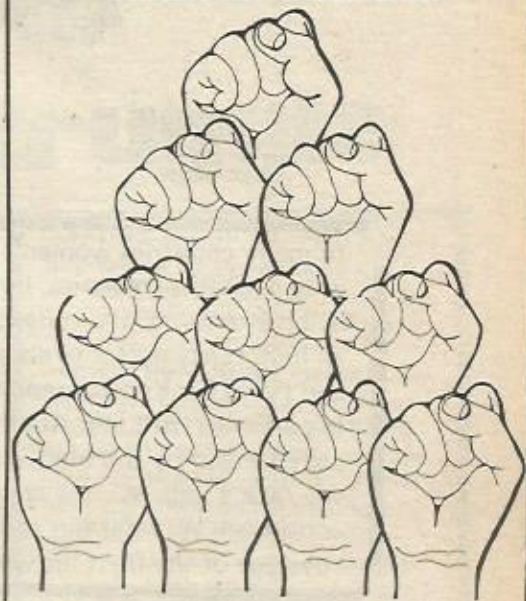
These notions must be challenged, and a united class-wide response built against the anti-working class policies of the Wilson Government—a response which includes a fight for a woman's right to work, for the right of women to free abortion and contraception on demand, for the social provision for childcare and the many other demands which challenge the women's ties to the family. And what is more useful in the fight than the Working Women's Charter?

The Working Women's Charter provides an ideal tool for ensuring that the working class movement confronts the problem facing women as workers and mothers and housewives and begins to challenge her isolation in the family. The Charter was rejected by the TUC General Council, which clearly realised that a fight for the Charter was in complete contradictions to the policies of the Wilson Government which they had helped to cook up. However, one-third of the TUC Congress voted for the Charter, despite this opposition and many important unions have taken it up including the AUEW, NUPE, ASTMS, ATTI, CPS, SCA, NALGO. In addition, hundreds of Trades Councils and local branches of trade unions have adopted and organised around its demands.

continued on p.15

LONDON NEWSLETTER No.4

## WORKING WOMENS CHARTER CAMPAIGN



Angela Phillips (IFL)

Delegates at the "Women and the Cuts" Conference, decide the way forward in the fight against the cuts.



YOU ARE INVITED TO THE  
**National Working Women's  
Charter Conference**

10th and 11th APRIL 1975  
at the LANCHESTER POLYTECHNIC, COVENTRY

Organised by the  
Working Women's Charter Campaign  
in Coventry and London  
for all groups and organisations  
fighting for the demands of the Charter



# ABORTION

In many countries women's right to abortion is presently under attack. This includes not only capitalist countries, but also the degenerated workers' states. Underlying this attack is the attempt of the state to control women's fertility. On the other hand, certain women have ready access to abortion — in this country, it is those women of 'social classes 1V and IV' as Sir Keith Joseph would have it; in America it is Puerto Rican and black women in particular; in Latin American countries 'forced abortion' policies have been systematically funded by the multi-nationals in the interests of imperialism. In the next 3 pages, we take a look at the abortion situation in several countries as a part of a series to be continued. We refer our readers to the newspaper *Red Weekly* for consistent up-to-date coverage of the fight for women's abortion rights in this country.



John Sturrock (Report)

The month of March marks the first anniversary of the National Abortion Campaign launched one year ago to fight against restrictive legislation and for the right of women to choose whether or not to continue a pregnancy. Today, women's rights to abortion are more restricted than they were when the campaign was launched, despite important successes in taking this issue into the organisations of the working class. The TUC and Labour Party Conferences passed a resolution in support of 'free abortion on request on the NHS' in the autumn of 1975—providing a good basis to begin the fight inside the workers' movement. And in February, 6 MPs withdrew from the reactionary Select Committee which was re-convened with one idea in mind— to further restrict women's abortion rights.

But the fight to roll back this offensive has hardly even started. Since the 3 April demonstration called by the National Abortion Campaign, new tasks have been set. The projected National Forum on Women's Abortion Rights will be an important focus for the work of activists within local NAC groups, as well as for militants in the trade union movement and in the Labour Party. A successful National Forum will need the backing of the entire workers' movement and this support should be gained on a clear political basis—

\*Disband the Select Committee! Against relying on Parliament to solve the attacks on women's right to abortion!

\*For the removal of MPs who vote for anti-abortion policies and refuse to implement the decisions of the TUC and LP Conferences!

\*For a working class enquiry into abortion facilities! Open the books to see where the cuts will affect abortion rights! Remove gynaecologists who impose their reactionary views of women and sabotage the 67 Act!

\*For a woman's right to choose! Free abortion on demand on the NHS!

## ABORTION IN CANADA

The Canadian abortion movement made itself public during the trans-Canadian abortion caravan organised to draw attention to the struggle for legal abortion. Over the last five years it has had an uphill fight, with many setbacks.

The case of Dr Henry Morgentaler shows the bizarre lengths to which anti-abortion forces will go to curtail abortions, and it also shows the complicity of diverse sections of the state apparatus.

Morgentaler ran a clinic that performed legal abortions for many years. But he was charged with performing them illegally because they were not done in hospital. Though acquitted in 1973, the prosecution made use of an obsolete colonial law to override the acquittal of the 12-member jury and on 6 April 1974 the Court of Queen's Bench in Quebec substituted a guilty verdict, sentencing Morgentaler to 18 months, plus 3 years probation.

In March this year the Supreme Court of Canada upheld this ruling and confirmed the sentence. This action attacked the right of trial by jury as well as attacking women's democratic right to abortion. Subsequently the attacks took a direct and brutal form against the individual concerned in this test case, a doctor who believed in a woman's right to choose and who has performed 5—6,000 abortions. Brutalised by his guards, Morgentaler suffered his first heart attack early this year. A second followed after he had been kept naked in solitary confinement. On Set-



# An

# INTERNATIONAL

# Struggle

tember 8th, though twice acquitted of the original charge, Morgentaler was refused parole, on the grounds that he 'could be a danger to society'.

The attacks were not limited to Morgentaler however. On June 25th Montreal police raided the Committee for Contraception Information and Free and Legal Abortion, seizing files and interrogating 7 staff.

## AND IN THE USA

In the United States the challenge to legalised abortion was similar to the Canadian experience. When Dr Kenneth Edelin, a black doctor who believed in providing abortions on request, was found guilty of manslaughter by an all-white Boston jury in February this year, it became obvious that the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalising abortion was under serious attack. Edelin was not charged with harming women. The prosecution rested its case on 'manslaughter' of a foetus aborted in 1973.

The struggle for legal abortion, like many other issues fought for by women, gained its greatest organised strength in the United States before most other countries. The contradiction between increased education, financial independence and high aspirations on the one hand and the oppressive weight of law, customs and conditioning on the other, made many women acutely aware of their role in society. The struggle for the legal right of women to control their own reproduction started early, within a few years of the new women's liberation movement. Science and technology had provided women with the means to control their fertility, but the law forbade women exercising any control. In 1970, under pressure from People for the Abolition of Abortion Laws, New York liberalised its laws. In Spring 1971 Women v. Connecticut launched a class action suit and called for a mobilisation to March on Washington. The August 26th demonstration of 1970 had brought 30,000 people into the streets as an expression of the fight for women's liberation, and this greatly spurred on the new abortion movement. From

1968 when polls showed only 15 per cent in favour, the effect of the women's movement became apparent.

In response to this struggle, and the threat to the sanctity of the nuclear family and women's oppressed state, millions of pounds were spent on a campaign to defend these repressive institutions under the guise of defence of the sanctity of foetal life.

The Women's National Abortion Action Campaign was launched to co-ordinate the state-wide struggles and give them a national focus. The campaign was pledged to organising mass actions on the basis of a woman's right to choose. Opposition came from forces in NOW who counterposed lobbying to mass action, some population control forces like Zero Population Growth who were not interested in giving women the choice, and from groups that either opposed organising any issue on the question of women's oppression as a diversion from the class struggle, [or who opposed campaigning on one issue of women's oppression rather than propagandising on all aspects.]

This opposition to both the independent campaign methods of Wonaac and to the slogans and demands of the campaign, was joined by a mas-

sive right-wing attack. Press releases red-baiting the campaign were distributed, letters were sent to all the prospective speakers at the November 20th demonstration in 1971 warning them off and literature was produced claiming to speak for women in attacking the abortion campaign. The Right to Life Campaign, and Life began a national and international attack on the movement. One of the photographs featuring bloody foetuses, that first appeared on a tract printed in Ohio has travelled far, recently appearing in Holland on a Dutch leaflet.

However, despite this opposition, Wonaac was able to organise a national demonstration and build a nationally coordinated campaign. In 1972 it had to resist the pressure of liberal Democrats who were trying to draw it behind the McGovern campaign. Unlike the NOW, Wonaac remained independent, and in January 1973, after several states had liberalised their laws, the Supreme Court ruled nationally that abortion should be legal. Most states now have abortion on demand up to 12-24 weeks. In spite of this initial victory, there is still a struggle ahead to force the implementation of the changed laws, beat back challenges such as the Edelin prosecution, and go on to win FAOD.





# Abortion in Eastern Europe

On 8 November, 1920, the Soviet Union became the first country in the world to make abortion on demand in the first three months of pregnancy legal. Whilst the right to abortion and contraception was thus won, it was assumed that the need would gradually disappear as social conditions improved. Below, Leonora Lloyd examines what has happened since in the Soviet Union and the other Eastern European workers' states; in the next issue she considers the situation in China and the other degenerated workers' states.

Because Lenin and the Bolsheviks had not fully escaped the grip of sexist ideology, it does not seem to have occurred to them that motherhood - for example - even under the best conditions, might not be every woman's choice. However, they remained the staunchest defenders of women's rights, including the right of women to organise to change their conditions and fight sexism.

The destruction of these rights was to be the work of a caste of privileged bureaucrats growing up within the workers' state which - under the leadership of Stalin - destroyed the Bolshevik Party itself.

## 1936

It was in 1936 that the first Moscow trial launched a mass terror aimed at consolidating the political power of the bureaucracy. And it was in 1936 that Stalin imposed reactionary legislation making abortion a criminal offence except for compelling medical and eugenic reasons.

Anyone performing an illegal abortion was subject to imprisonment; the woman herself could be fined if the first offence was repeated. There were also a number of measures to encourage motherhood. The effect was to increase the birth rate from 32.3 per 1000 in 1936, to 38.7 in 1938. By 1941 the rate dropped to 31.2. This was due to a massive increase in illegal abortions. In the 1960s, a Leningrad gynecologist recalled that 70% of the beds in his department during this period had been taken up by women suffering from their after-effects.

## 1955

In November 1955, the Khrushchev regime, as part of a series of measures designed to secure it a base of popular support, abolished this law. It is known that the authorities were worried by the wide-spread use of illegal terminations. Under the new laws, women could have abortions up to 12 weeks, and thereafter with special permission - if they had not had one in the previous 6 months.

It must be remembered that this was before the days of the pill and IUD. In fact, there were no effect-

ive forms of contraception available. The effect of the new legislation did not alter the birth rate significantly, so it may be assumed that legal abortions largely replaced illegal ones.

Abortion has obviously remained an important means of fertility control. A Soviet researcher calculated that in 1960 there were 1.6 abortions per live births and by 1963, 2.5 to 3. Thus, perhaps only a quarter of conceptions ended in birth.



In another piece of research, it is noted that of 400 women married in 1960, only 26% had had no abortions by 1965. 14% had more than 2. The picture is generally one of women using abortion as the prime method of birth control. By the late 60s and in the 70s even more so, official attitudes were hardening against abortions.

Women were warned about complications although published data did not bear this out. It now seems, although evidence is difficult to obtain, that women are being encouraged to use contraceptives - mostly the condom, manufactured in the Soviet Union, and of poor quality; use of the pill is discouraged.

So while women still use abortion on a large scale (13 million a year), the Government seeks to discourage it with both emphasis on the dangers involved and attempts to make motherhood more attractive. However, the biggest barrier to this is the great reliance on married women in the labour force. Moreover, there is as yet little socialisation of housework and a sharp sexual inequality in carrying out domestic tasks. This is

not surprising given the open sexism of much of the regime's popular press. (This has been detailed in the pamphlet *Women's Place in the USSR*).

## OTHER COUNTRIES

In the 50s, Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia followed Russia's example. They enacted laws which were then the most liberal in Europe. In Poland, for instance, abortions are obtainable if the woman faces 'a difficult situation', and the woman must be given contraceptive advice.

In Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, a committee of three must approve the woman's written application. In Hungary the most liberal law of all was enacted in this period. Women had to be granted termination if 'the applicant insists on the termination of pregnancy'. However, in 1973 Hungary followed Rumania (1966) and Bulgaria (1968) in restricting women's abortion rights.

In Rumania, the attack has been the most cynical and extreme, so that abortion is only allowable on medical grounds, in cases of rape or for eugenic reasons (incest, etc.)

## ILLEGAL ABORTIONS

The change was motivated both by the falling birth rate and by the dangers in abortion. However, the latter was not borne out by any of the published data! The birth rate in Rumania followed the Russian pattern - it rose from 12.8 per 1000 in 1966, to 39.9 in 1967 - only to go down again, reaching 18.8 in 1972. Meanwhile the incidence of illegal abortions, indicated by complications admitted to hospital has risen sharply.

Of all the bureaucratized workers' states, Yugoslavia is exceptional in encouraging the use of the pill. By 1972 half of all women practicing contraception used this method. However there is great unevenness in its usage - depending on the availability of facilities - and this is reflected in highly varying birth rates in different parts of the country. The figures reach a high of 39.6 and go to as low as 14.6 according to 1963-67 figures.

The only post-capitalist society in which abortion remains totally illegal is Albania.



## WOMEN'S CHOICE

Perhaps one of the most interesting discussions for socialist stems from our demand that women must have the right to choose. Obviously population control takes on a different meaning in a non-capitalist state. The existence of a planned economy, relatively free from the fluctuations of the world capitalist market, means that the ideal size of population can be seen as related to the resources available and the real needs of the mass of the population. In this situation, the expected rate of growth of the productive forces and the rising expectations of the population would be considered. However, even in a workers' state, the final decision must rest in the woman's hands.

The question of population level would then be posed in terms of the ability of the revolutionary party to carry out an intensive fight for its policies—through educational campaigns, and wide-ranging debates.

In the USSR and the Eastern European countries today quite a different situation exists. Rational planning with the ultimate decision in the hands of women is not the order of the day. This is rooted in the fact that these states are not democratically organised, but are controlled by a bureaucratic group whose policies are based on one consideration—the drive to consolidate and maintain their own privileged position.

Thus, although many of these countries have had relatively liberal laws in the period immediately fol-

lowing the regime of Stalin, the ease with which women can actually utilise facilities arising from these laws fluctuates wildly. The common feature of all these states is the attempts of the regimes to ensure that the ultimate control over women's reproductive lives is not in their own hands. With no independent women's movements, the only recourse for women will once again be illegal terminations.

communism versus stalinism no. 4

### A WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE U.S.S.R.



by Tamara Volkova  
preface by Branka Magas

1 MG 25p

# ADVERTS

**WOMEN'S FREE ART ALLIANCE:** Join as a contributing member (£5 a year) and you will be invited to 3 open workshops or seminars. For £10 a year, you can be a sponsor and will be invited to all seminars

(continued from page 12)

This support should be built on, to fight for these resolutions to be more than words on paper. This trade union support for the Charter should become a living part of the struggle against women's oppression and the present anti-working class policies of the Government—which stands in the path of the struggle.

One important way of achieving this is to use the support for the Charter to commit trade unions, Labour Party branches and Tenants Associations to campaign alongside forces from the women's movement for nursery facilities, against closures of hospitals and abortion wards, for the right of women to work, etc.

In London, the Charter Campaign recently organised a Conference on the public spending cuts. This Conference decided on a number of policies and initiatives which will begin to pave the way for a fight-back against the hatchet work of the Labour Government—a fight-back reflecting the needs of women, as well as men. The call has now gone out for a national Conference on the Cuts and Unemployment. Local Charter groups should not be planning how they can best build for this National Conference. The Charter Campaign Newsletter—with a new issue hot off the press—has details of local activities on both these questions. It can be obtained from WWCC, 49 Lowther Hill, London SE23 1PZ.

By Celia Pugh

and lectures, and will receive all copies of publications. Workshop programme includes music, co-counselling, theatre, painting and associated media, printing, weaving, design, etc. Seminar programme includes 'Stereotypes Women Artists, Architecture, and the Community, etc. Further details from: 10 Cambridge Terrace-Mews, NW1, 01-935-1841.

**WOMEN WORKERS LEAGUE:** Two cases of black working class girls, denied the right of education have been documented. A campaign has been organised to defend the right to education 'won after long years of struggle by working class pupils and parents'. If you wish to see these dossiers and discuss what you can do for the campaign, write to Women Workers League, 38 Kennington Lane, London SE11 4LS, 01-969-3892.

**FULL-TIME ADMINISTRATOR WANTED:** Readers with an interest in political theatre and experience of trade unions are invited to get in touch with Broadside Mobile Workers' Theatre. They are looking for a full-time administrator to arrange bookings, liaise with funding bodies and handle finance and publicity. Typing is essential, as is long-term commitment, and a responsible collective approach. Hard work but rewarding!

Broadside made and perform plays with and for working people about issues such as the lump, workers' control, the cuts, inflation and unemployment. Their International Women's Year Show, now called 'Danger—Women at Work' has been performed for trade union branches and schools, trades councils, colleges, the National Abortion Campaign and women's groups all over Britain. They are also planning a new play on the Working Women's Charter and would welcome ideas and information from individuals and groups active in the Charter Campaign. WRITE TO: Broadside, 58 Holbein House, Holbein Place, London SW1 8NJ.

**NATIONAL ABORTION CAMPAIGN:** Write to NAC at 30 Camden Road, NW1, for campaigning material. Badges, a two-weekly newsletter with up-to-date reports on local and national events, NAC News—a mobilising newspaper, as well as brochures and pamphlets on abortion are all available. Telephone: 01-485-4303

## NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

For details, write to: National Conference 1976. c/o 46 Simonside Terrace, Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne. Registration is £2.50 and the Conference is from Friday 23 April to Sunday 25.

## RED BOOKS

Now available - an up-to-date list of books, pamphlets, etc, on women's oppression. Send a stamped, addressed foolscap envelope to: 97 Caledonian Road, London, N1



Send 35p (incl. p & p) for a copy to: Socialist Woman, 97 Caledonian Road, London, N.1

## NATIONAL CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE AGAINST CUTS IN THE NHS: A

new Bulletin has been produced to help mobilise for the demonstration called on 25 April. Assemble at Hyde Park Corner, 1.30 pm and march to the rally at Trafalgar Square.

**PIRATE JENNY** (formerly West London Theatre Workshop) has a new touring show about the way that the State sticks its metal fingers in your kiddies' head...

### EDUCATION—A TOOL FOR SLAVERY? OR ...?

Available for schools, colleges, NUT branches, trade unions, etc. Now taking bookings for June onwards. Fees negotiable. The play lasts about 1 hour. Write 11 Acklam Road, London, W.10 or ring 969-9348 or 969-2292.





Derek Bowie (FEL)

Women in the forefront of the fight against cuts in education.

This year has begun well for the NUS women's campaign. The 300 women who attended the Bristol conference voted consistently for the democratic organisation of the campaign, and for the kind of policies that are needed to continue to challenge sexism in the colleges, and to mount a fightback against Labour's attacks on women. These decisions have no real status within the NUS – they simply 'advise' the broad-left dominated executive which was totally opposed to half the motions which were passed. But the level of militancy and the unity forged among the activists at the conference, will make it hard for the executive simply to ignore our 'recommendations'.

Women have been fighting for the right to organise autonomously in the colleges since the initiation of the campaign. Some of the stronger groups, such as Kent and the London School of Economics, have won this right in their individual unions. But the NUS constitution puts groups without a strong backing in a poor position – threatened with loss of unions funds and facilities unless they open all their meetings to men.

We have argued that women can only combat their oppression through their own self-activity, and if they want to hold closed meetings, for consciousness-raising, health groups, etc., they should be supported rather than penalised by the students' union.

More and more women have realised the necessity of this demand, and conference resolved:

To campaign for the right of women, lesbians and gays and blacks to hold closed meetings if they feel the need without the loss of unions funds, on the understanding that it is only when women are able to organise independently within the student and labour movement that they are in a position to fight sexism, which divides these bodies, and so win these forces to the struggle for women's liberation.

Motions to this effect were tabled both by Brunel University and by the lesbian workshop. Because they face a double oppression, and are continually fighting to be recognised both by the women's and the gay rights' campaigns, lesbians have clearly seen an immediate need for autonomous organisation and have been at the forefront of the struggle.

Despite the militancy and the enthusiasm which has been characteristic of most NUS Women's Conferences, there have never been adequate structures for co-ordinating the women's groups and running the campaign at a week to week level. The idea of a network for delegates from every college offers a solution: Women active in the campaign could be delegated by their students union, so that the network would represent both the women's groups and the broad student body.

The debate which arose at Bristol centred on the composition and power of the network. The Broad Left argued that NUS Area Organisations should have delegates. But women who had experience of the undemocratically elected bureaucratic cliques which go under the name of 'Areas', argued that they should only have observer status until they had demonstrated their active support for the campaign. Conference agreed that Areas should be encouraged to set up women's sub-committees to take the campaign into the smaller colleges.

The shallowness of the Broad Left's arguments was clear when they cited the London Student Organisation as a model area – it has had two meetings which no-one in the Student Women's Action Group (SWAG) heard about until after the event. SWAG has coordinated London College women's groups for over a year.

Autonomy and democratic control of the campaign have been the major issues which SWAG has fought for both at a London and National



level. At Bristol, SWAG helped to clarify and unify those women who had been confused by the relationship between this type of organisation and the NUS.

Policy adopted by the conference included continued support for the NAC and the fight to force the TUC and Labour Party to implement their conference decisions on 'Free abortion on demand', and support for the Medical Committee Against Private Practice. It also made a commitment to build for the Working Women's Charter's campaign against cuts.

Conference recognised the need to unite with all those forces in the labour movement fighting unemployment, and to raise the particular problems facing women within that struggle.

Entertainments – the favourite hunting ground of the right in the colleges – was also discussed. An amendment banning sexist entertainments, advertising etc. has now been successfully moved by SWAG members at NUS conference in Scarborough.

But women will have to remain vigilant to implement these decisions inside and outside their colleges.

So the ground has been laid for the strengthening of the campaign against women's oppression. But all these issues have to be brought back to individual Student's Unions and women activists must be fighting for delegation from their union to the network.

WENDY FOREST and MELANIE SRASSNY – IMG members elected to the NUS Women's ad-hoc Advisory Committee.



# PORTUGAL

## - women begin fight

SOFIA GANHAO addressed a Conference organised by the Solidarity Campaign with Portuguese Workers held in London on March 13. Her speech is re-printed below because we feel that it takes up the particular problems and tasks posed for the working class in Portugal today concerning the struggle against women's oppression. This fight has only begun to be waged in Portugal, despite the revolutionary upsurge which began there in April 1974. As members of the Fourth International, the sister organisation to the IMG in Portugal—the LCI (International Communist League)—is one of the few organisations of the far left which has addressed itself to this question. In the forthcoming elections, the LCI has placed the struggle for women's abortion rights as an important part of their programme.

Comrades, I am an officer in the Domestic Workers' Union and I am very pleased to be invited to speak to you today about the struggles which we have carried out inside the Union.

Domestic workers in Portugal total over 100,000—that is 3% of the total workforce. Before 25 April, 1974, cleaning workers and all workers employed in the households of the rich were one of the most exploited sections of the working class in Portugal.

As with the agricultural workers, the law denied us any rights, and we couldn't organise in a trade union. In these conditions within a social and economic structure dominated by a petit-bourgeois mentality, and in the absence of organised collective services such as laundries, or social services, such as nurseries or infant schools, the ruling class kept exploiting us to keep their families and households,

Our wages were the lowest because we could not organise, or formulate demands. Illiteracy, lack of political consciousness, ignorance and a vast labour force that was forced to emigrate from the countryside with the mechanisation of agriculture ensured the continuation of these conditions.

Only after 1973 were we covered by the Health Service or protected against accidents at work. These conditions led to the growth of employment agencies who further exploited our labour, going even to the point of openly promoting prostitution.

The only organisation at a national level was the Catholic Society for the Protection of Servants, whose aim was to defend the existing practice and disguise the class conflict with moral and religious preaching.

Soon after the collapse of fascism, in May 1974, two congresses, first in Oporto, and after in Lisbon, were called by the existing movement to create the Trade Union of domestic employees. Delegations were sent from all over Portugal and a project for a Collective Labour Contract was, for the first time, drafted, incorporating our demands. At the same time, workers started organising at a branch level, not only to strengthen the new trade union, but also to carry in practice a programme of collectivisation of cleaning and domestic services.

We have started a Labour exchange in opposition to the employment agencies and in Oporto we founded a cooperative of domestic services. Our demands and our struggle which has always been suppressed by the bourgeoisie has now been made public by our actions and by debates we have forced the media and newspapers to broadcast.

But working against our class interest, the Catholic Service for the Protection of the Domestic Servant which I referred to before, working on exactly the same principles as they always did, constitutes itself into the so-called 'Free Trade Union of Domestic Servants' and asks for legalisation by the state.

As the trade union law outlaws the existence of duplicate trade unions, the process of legalisation was blocked until the Sixth Provisional Government came to power. With the growing strength of the right-wing in this Government, the old Catholic organisation was promoted to a 'provisional legal status' until the statutes are certified by a special court. At present we have appealed in the Courts against the decision of the Labour Ministry.

But we know that our struggle cannot be left to be decided in the Courts. We are carrying out in practice our fight for organisation and better conditions.

We have opened in Lisbon a home for unemployed domestic workers, which has organised a 'People's Canteen', where meals are served at very low prices. This canteen is used by the working class, not only for meals, but also for meetings, cultural assemblies, etc. This way, domestic workers who have been left without a roof over their heads when their employers fled the country, after April 25, are now organised in a cooperative which is in direct contact with the agricultural cooperatives—for the supplies. And at the same time, it provides a much needed collective service to the working people in Lisbon. This type of contact generates a greater consciousness, not only of the problem of women in Portugal, but also of the experiences and struggles of other workers.

At the moment we are in the forefront of the struggle for women's rights in Portugal. By collectivising the domestic services with the creation of cooperatives we are making it possible for working class women to have time to defend their interests at the point of production, by active participation in trade unions and in the organs of popular power, the workers' committees, the neighbourhood committees, and so on. We are also opening a creche, and this way we hope to transform the nature of our work, by providing much needed services to the working people which up to now have been denied.

We are still fighting not only the legal battle for recognition of our trade union, but also for the right to the same health services as other workers, for legal protection and assistance to the unmarried mother. Recently we won the right to 90 days paid maternity leave. We consider particularly important the struggle for legal recognition of the unmarried mother where the worst injustices have been committed.

Four months ago, a domestic worker was condemned to 14 years in prison for killing her child at birth.

We decided to fight the case of our comrade and have appealed against the Court decision. We demand that she be re-tried taking into account the injustices of law and that the judge be a woman. We are also fighting for free abortion on demand because this was an unwanted child.

All our struggle is based in the fight for the rights of the domestic worker, but as such, it is also a struggle for the liberation of the woman, and it is only when organised and united with other sections of workers that we can achieve positive results. Only the workers can liberate themselves.



# IRISH

# WOMEN

# ORGANISE

Submitted by the Revolutionary Marxist Group (Irish Section of the Fourth International)

The opening meeting of a campaign for free legal contraception drew an attendance of 500-600 in Dublin on Wednesday November 12th. Called by *Irish Women United*, an autonomous group of radical women, the success of the meeting demonstrated the large degree of committed support for radical change in the laws relating to contraception. Its importance is increased by the context of chaos and confusion within all the three major political parties on the question.

This state of confusion reached a high point of political farce last year when the Taoiseach and other members of his Cabinet voted against a government-sponsored *family Planning Bill*. Since then, a situation of legal anomaly has existed, and now the political parties face the problem of a 'private member's Bill on contraception, which is due to be introduced in the Senate very shortly.

## UNCONSTITUTIONAL

Despite the fact that some 90,000 women use some form of contraceptive (mostly the pill); despite the fact that there are six privately run Family Planning Clinics, several laws prohibit the sale, import, advertising or recommending of contraceptives. At the same time, however, a ruling of the Supreme Court in 1972 declares that the legal situation is unconstitutional, and that married couples have a constitutional right to the availability of contraceptives.

When in 1974, Mary Robinson, a liberal Senator, introduced a Bill to liberalise the legal situation, the leader of the Senate attempted to prevent any discussion of the Bill taking place. Discussion did take place, but no vote was taken, because the Minister for Justice intervened to announce that he would be introducing a Government Bill.

## RESTRICTIVE

The Government's *Family Planning Bill* proposed to make contraceptives available only under limited, restrictive conditions, and provided for stiff penalties-including jail sentences-for 'offences' such as selling contraceptives to unmarried people. It was a Bill, as the fortnightly paper 'Hibernia', commented, "which proposed to create as many new categories of criminals as it did freedoms."

Despite its restrictive provisions, the Bill provoked violent responses from the Right. Oliver J. Flanagan, T. D. (Member of Parliament), states in a debate: "This Bill is an attack on the family. It is an attack on society. It means to smash the family to its very foundations." It was defeated by 75 votes to 47, with the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) voting against his Government's Bill.

## SUPPORT

With a recent opinion poll showing 68% of married women of child-

bearing age supporting the sale of contraceptives through chemists, the reintroduction of Senator Robinson's Bill poses problems for the major parties, which are divided on the question. Brendan Corish (Christian first - Socialist second), leader of the Labour Party, faces a particularly tricky situation. As Minister for Health, he is designated by the Bill as the controller of licenses for the sale of contraceptives. He is also leader of a party pledged by Conference resolution "to introduce a free family planning scheme as part of the public health service." But his senior partner in the Coalition Government, Mr. Cosgrave, is firmly opposed to any form of contraception. Such are the strains within the Labour Party that one party branch has taken the unprecedented step of seeking legal advice on the ruling out of motions of the Party Conference (Nov 21-23) dealing with Coalition and contraception by the party leadership.



The Irish Women's Collective have organised a number of actions to support Irish women

Andrew Ward (Report)



So sensitive is the issue, with the Roman Catholic Hierarchy weighing in with a hard-line anti-contraception position, that the more reformist and conservative women's organisations have tended to avoid it like the plague. Thus the radical women's tendency, *Irish Women United* (IWU) has taken the lead in initiating a campaign.

Formed as a tiny grouping in the spring of this year, IWU has gained considerable public attention and involved relatively large numbers of women (and some men) in its activities. It originated when, in April, the *Revolutionary Marxist Group* (Irish Section of the Fourth International) circulated a proposal to all the women's organisations to come to a meeting to discuss a Charter of women's rights.

### CHARTER CONFERENCE

At the Charter Conference in June, which had a very good attendance of about 100, some eight groupings were represented. These were, in fact, the miniscule fragments into which the radical and socialist elements of the women's liberation movement had split. The only socialist organisation that had any intervention within the women's movement was the *Revolutionary Marxist Group* (RMG). In contrast to the economist and workerist tendencies of the Left, the RMG has always insisted on the importance of the struggles for democratic demands that challenge the confessional nature of the 26-County Southern State and the need for an autonomous women's movement. Such struggles, condemned by the rest of the left as 'bourgeois', are seen by the RMG as being very much a part of the permanent revolution dynamic in Ireland. So that, even at the time of the lowest ebb in the women's movement as a whole, they have maintained a high level of propaganda on the question of women's oppression.

### IRISH WOMEN UNITED

At the Charter Conference, *Irish Women United* was inaugurated as a broad, loosely-knit group. In fact, even before the conference IWU had been involved in an action of some importance for the Left. When they had attempted to speak at the Stalinist-controlled May Day Rally, as representatives of the autonomous women's movement, they were physically attacked by members of the Communist Party, Socialist Party and Official Sinn Fein, acting as stewards, and one woman was hospitalised.

Since then, IWU has had an energetic programme of activity and discussion. Fortnightly general meetings rapidly became weekly, and some 12



sub-committees now also operating regularly. They carried out small actions, with pickets on questions such as contraception, rape discrimination against women in state welfare benefits, and organised a meeting on *Women's Right to Join Trade Unions*, in support of women strikers at a Dublin publishing office.

As intervention by IWU at a reception to launch a government-sponsored book on women in International Women's Year, at which the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) was speaking, brought them onto the front pages of the daily newspapers, as did a similar intervention when the Minister for Justice was speaking at a reception. The response to this publicity and flood of mail from women all over the country, and contributed to the relatively enormous attendance at the Contraception Rally on Wednesday Nov 12th in Liberty Hall (headquarters of the Irish Transport & General Workers Union (ITGWU).

### CRITICAL SUPPORT

The rally was addressed by Senator Mary Robinson, towards whose 'private member's' *Family Planning Bill* IWU have adopted a

position of critical support. In addition to a number of loopholes, which leave many questions to the discretion of the government of the day, IWU are critical of the provision in the Bill for the distribution of contraceptives through pharmacies. Insisting upon the importance of advice and information, their demand is for state-financed family planning clinics. They demand also that all forms of contraception and advice, fitting, etc., should be provided free of charge.

A member of the Chilean community in Ireland also spoke, outlining her experience as a political militant of developments on the woman question under Popular Unity. Anne Speed, a member of the Executive of the Dublin District Council of the ITGWU and a militant of the RMG, spoke on behalf of *Irish Women United*, and on the central issue of a women's right to choose.

Further actions and meetings will be taking place in the next few weeks. On the evidence of the rally, the momentum is building up for a broad and militant campaign of women for their democratic right to choose.



# REVIEWS REVIEWS...

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★  
*For Their Triumphs and For Their Tears. Women in apartheid South Africa.* by Hilda Bernstein, International Defence and Aid Fund, 50p.

When a book states in its early pages that some of the arguments against apartheid are that 'it aggravates and creates illegitimacy, bigamy, and prostitution; homosexuality and drunkenness...' one is immediately thrown on guard, for such statements demand that the book be thrown into the bin without further ado!

Save for two or three chapters about the working and living conditions and struggles in South Africa, we are convinced that the book does indeed belong in the bin.

Bernstein's arguments fall into three areas of confusion: apartheid, the family and 'the struggle for national liberation'. 'In the special language of apartheid,' she writes, 'blacks are not human beings. They are labour units who are productive or non-productive'. One does not have to be particularly astute to notice that, let alone this 'special language', exactly the same can be said about workers in any capitalist society. Throughout her book, Bernstein fails to relate 'apartheid' with capitalist exploitation with dangerous results: since in South Africa, the small white working class is totally sold out to the capitalist class, the black working class is the only revolutionary class, and the only class in whose interest it is to smash the racist state. But in order to do so, it must necessarily challenge the entire capitalist system, for in no other way can it smash racism. By failing to recognise this, Bernstein raises purely moral objections against the racist regime and implies that capitalism with a better face must be on the agenda for the South African blacks.

She correctly identifies that the 'apartheid economy' depends on the use of a cheap migrant labour force, that black women play a minimal role in this as a direct labour force, and that the burden of rearing children (ie. the next generation of workers) is forced onto the backs of women in the 'reserves'. But Bernstein's objections are that this causes 'illegitimacy' and 'provides fertile ground for faithlessness' and that because the men are forced to sell their labour as migrant workers, it 'makes a mockery of family life'. 'For many', she tells us, 'a family unit is never formed. The result is social chaos'. For Bernstein, women's liberation no doubt means the restoration of the family unit!

The most valuable part of the book deals with the struggles of women but even here, she uses these examples simply to boost the image of the African National Congress (ANC). This body did little to actually support or build the struggles, but instead tail-ended most of them and used all its opportunism to take the credit for them. An example that she quotes was the June 1959 'riots' led by women against the appalling living conditions in Durban-

where both men and women were brutally attacked by police and many were jailed as a result. It was not until September of that year that the ANC came to the support of these struggles by calling a special conference to 'thank the women!'.

Bernstein's avid support for this movement (the ANC) is clearly reflected when she talks about the 'struggle for national liberation', a phrase which implies that South Africa is a colony that must struggle for—at least—political independence. Since the vast majority of the African population is proletarianised, the slogan for 'national liberation' is about as meaningful there as such a slogan would appear to the British working class!

For black African women in South Africa, the struggle against their oppression involves immediately a struggle against the racist state that bases itself upon the exploitation of the black working class in the interest of both the South African and the international bourgeoisie. Their struggle involves a fight against the backwardness amongst black men whom they must educate and win over before they can lead southern Africa to socialist revolution. Though much belated, a serious analysis of the oppression of black women in South Africa is urgently needed. Hilda Bernstein's book will be of little help for this task.

—Julius Karanja

A Portrait of Women  
in an English Village

## Fenwomen Mary Chamberlain



Illustrated

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★  
*Fenwomen* by Mary Chamberlain, Virago Press, 1975.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★  
*Fenwomen* by Mary Chamberlain is published by Virago Press, a new feminist publishing house. Chamberlain's study aims 'to redress the balance of rural studies' by giving us a social and oral history of the isolated Fen village of Gislea through the eyes of women. The recollections of the women span a century and we see clearly how superficial the changes have been in the life of the women.

Gislea, with a population of 1400, is a remote village 30 miles north of Cambridge. There are few employment opportunities open to women, except for some work in the local factories and traditional land work. The land was once owned by a wealthy family but now it is divided into a num-

ber of small holdings.

The village is really isolated as there are few roads and the railways were closed in the 1950s. Buses run once a day to Cambridge and weekly to the local market town. The houses in Gislea dispel the myth of beautiful country cottages. There, the houses are dilapidated, frequently lack indoor sanitation and the thatched roofs have often been replaced with corrugated iron.

The women are born, live and die in an area which 'seems in a state of permanent decline and decay.' Chamberlain mentions that the village is as isolated as it always was, despite TV and all the technological advances. 'But the decline of transport and work is recreating the old isolation. Only this time television creates an illusion of twentieth century, of progress, change, and communication, anaesthetising the problems of a rural community in decline. But little has changed basically—only details, not fundamentals'. (p.23)

Despite the welfare state and several Labour Governments one condition of life for the people, particularly the women, has not improved. It is still a life of hardship and grinding poverty.

After a brief factual introduction Chamberlain divides the life of the women into nine major aspects and in each chapter the women describe their life as it was at the turn of the century and how it is today.

The quality of the chapters is uneven, and I liked best the chapters on girlhood, marriage and work. Sybil Hayhoe, 86, was in service at the Vicarage sixty years ago... 'seven days a week. And I was earning 5s. when I got married. We got up at 6.30 and had to clean the dining room, light a fire in winter, one in the kitchen, then clean the hall and have the breakfast ready about half-past eight... And that was a lot of scrubbing in the old houses. Oh dear! You know, brick floors. You'd have to scrub them and make them look ever so clean... We was always at work.'

Janet Hornigold, 23, works on a farm today. 'I get £14 a week... But it's hard work, very hard work. And a seven-day week. My day (is) usually eight to about five-forty-five. And an hour for lunch.'

The women are discontented but see no alternative to their life as it is. Their horizons are no wider than they were at the turn of the century.

The final impression of the book is of a discreet series of interviews backed up by some evocative photographs from the turn of the century and modern ones taken by Angela Phillips. There is no attempt to draw together all the information. We are not clear how all the beliefs, are related, although a feminist analysis is implicit. I think it would have been useful to have presented the views of one or more women on all topics, rather than different women on different topics. Chamberlain's method gives us variety but tends to be confining.

More broadly, Chamberlain's study is weak in that it lacks any analysis of why Gislea is still so isolated, and the effect of this isolation on the behavior and attitudes



# REVIEWS REVIEWS...

of the women.

Despite these criticisms, *Fenwomen* contributes to one of the important tasks of the women's movement – that of writing women back into history. Chamberlain's history does help women develop a sense of their own importance and relevance in society.

– Phyllis Duniface

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★  
*All Work and No Pay*, edited by Suzie Fleming, Falling Wall Press.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★  
 The Power of Women Collective believe that women are performing productive labour when they do housework, and that the capitalist class make a profit from their labour just as they do from factory workers. Accordingly, they advance the demand for 'wages due' to housewives – Wages for Housework. The basis for this demand was laid by Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*.

There, they argued that since women all over the world shared the common burden of domestic labour, the issue of wages for housework should become the major ground of struggle for women. This argument is further developed in *All Work and No Pay*, which is edited by two members of the Power of Women Collective. It is a collection of writings and speeches of women from many different countries and situations.

All the struggles of women which are familiar to us – of nurses, claimants, factory workers, black women, lesbians, miners' wives, women in Northern Ireland and 'third world' women – are viewed through the perspective of wages for housework. The descriptions by women of their own situation portray vividly many aspects of our oppression – especially where we bear a double load by working outside the home as well.

In many ways, this is a powerful and valuable addition to the literature of women's liberation. In particular, I was impressed by the way it tries to integrate the struggle of lesbians – so often ignored or relegated to a few token phrases – with the fight for the liberation of all women.

There is also present throughout the book an awareness of the close relationship between the oppression of women and the operation of the Welfare State which is particularly relevant to our fight against the present cutbacks in social spending. But by the last article – which calls for a General Strike for Wages for Housework – I was becoming a little weary of the constant reiteration of the demand as a panacea for all the problems of women under capitalism and imperialism. Can it be true that this one demand can unite all women?

In the first place, the Power of Women Collective have never answered the criticisms levelled at their analysis by many Marxists who challenge the assumption that domestic labour is productive. As Wally Secombe says, 'The housewife, in Marxist

terms, is unexploited because surplus value is not extracted from her labour. To say this is not, as James and Dalla Costa imply, to be soft on women's oppression. The housewife is intensely *oppressed* within the nuclear family under capitalism, but she is not *exploited*.'

Such a weak theoretical basis for their analysis forces the Power of Women to rely heavily on empirical evidence and emotional argument to substantiate their case. Thus a brief examination of the role of the unions in women's struggles leads Selma James to the conclusion that racism and sexism are in the nature of the trade union movement. Similarly, an examination of the way the NHS treats women both as workers and patients leads another contributor to call for the destruction of the NHS.

The Power of Women Collective thus reject the strategy adopted by socialist feminists in the Women's Movement of working within the organisations of the labour movement to win men and women to the struggle for women's liberation. The editors of *All Work and No Pay* consider that the struggle of women against their wagelessness will of itself make it possible for men to press their demands.... a kind of revolution led by women setting an example. 'They (men) lose a servant but gain the power to refuse their own servitude'. Yet in demanding wages for housework they are in effect only reinforcing the servitude of women by accepting their traditional role as bearers and rearers of children in the isolation of the home.

Our assessment of the politics of this collective cannot remain simply at the level of criticisms of their theory and practice. The fact that this tendency has emerged inside the women's movement internationally is a result of the historical weakness of the labour movement – its failure to recognise and help to combat the specific oppression of women.

Selma James is absolutely correct in rejecting the crude Marxist analysis which situates working class politics at the point of production alone. In categorising housework as productive labour she is attempting to replace the factory as the centre of struggle by the home and the family.

*All Work and No Pay* demonstrates clearly to us the need for an analysis which will integrate the fight for women's liberation with the struggle for the working class. This analysis is still only partially developed; but it has already given rise to movement such as the Working Women's Charter Campaign and informed the decision of the National Abortion Campaign to take the politics of abortion into the heart of the labour movement. It is these struggles that will contribute to our freedom from domestic and wage-slavery – not wages for housework.

– Karen Margolis

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★  
*Women in the Spanish Revolution* by Liz Willis (Solidarity Pamphlet no.48)

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

This pamphlet is in many ways a useful addition to the literature now appearing on Spain and Portugal. It deals with the period of the Spanish Revolution and Civil War – 1932-38. The information is collated on the condition of women in Spain and their treatment in the revolutionary period will be of great use to British revolutionaries.

The revolutionary process that has been taking place in Portugal and dramatic rise in workers' struggles in Spain make it vital that we reassess the events of the thirties. This particularly so because many of the political ideas that led to defeat then, are making a reappearance. In particular, the Spanish Communist Party has resurrected the notion of the Popular Front – a governmental alliance with 'progressive sections' of the ruling class. Liz Willis' pamphlet is more than a digest of statistics. It also addresses itself to the political issues of the period.

There are problems however. The pamphlet uses 'libertarian' sources for its facts. Now in the author's own admission, many of these sources are tainted with wishful thinking. Liz Willis has the rare honesty to criticise her cothinkers. She admits that the anarchist collectives (Solidarity is an anarchist group) were deformed by sexual prejudices. In fact, as she points out in many of the agricultural collectives, women did not even achieve equal pay, let alone any of the more advanced demands necessary in a revolutionary situation. However, very little discussion is given to the attitudes and practices of the other working class organisations – the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and the POUM. For this reason, a somewhat one-sided picture is presented.

But the most glaring deficiencies of the pamphlet are in its political analyses. The record of anarchism in the Spanish revolution was the final proof of its worthlessness. Not only did the Spanish anarchists quite happily accept the popular front, but we were even treated to the amazing spectacle of an anarchist Minister of Justice!

The anarchist leaders (don't laugh) were successful in hoodwinking their base until the damage was done, until the Stalinists had gathered forces to crush the revolutionary upsurge. The heroic fight put up by the rank and file anarchists (together with the centrist POUM and Spain's few Trotskyists) against the Stalinist troops in Barcelona May 1937 only underlines the cowardice, stupidity and treachery of Garcia Oliver & Co.

As Liz Willis herself concedes 'the revolution was lost a considerable time before the war was lost'. The only conclusion she can draw from this however is that 'glossing over real differences for fear of dividing the movement means that the tougher dominant ideology triumphs by default'.

In short, she continues the lame and witless apologetics practiced by the anarchists in the thirties on which Trotsky commented as follows: 'After all we could have taken power in July 1936.... After all we could have taken power in May 1937... The anarchists begged Negrin-Stalin to recognise and reward their treachery to the revolution. A revolting picture'.

Liz Willis should surely ask what sort of revolution it is that eschews even the power to defend itself.

– Janice Mills



# REVIEWS REVIEWS...

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★  
*Forgetting's No Excuse* by Mary Stott,  
 Virago Quartet Books, London, £1.75

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★  
 Mary Stott was born in 1907 into a family of journalists—a career which she took up herself at an early age, finally to become Women's Editor of the *Guardian* until 1971. Her life in the journalist profession was not made easy by the fact that she was a woman; and her success was only ensured by accepting her role as a woman's writer. For many years a campaigner in the women's liberation movement, she was also a founding member of the 'Women in Media' group—mainly composed of dynamic liberal women journalists.

Mary Stott's political convictions and her ideas on women's liberation are representative of a number of women in the liberation movement and are well expounded in her autobiography *Forgetting's No Excuse*. To understand these ideas, it is important to look at the context in which they were developed.

The central years of Mary Stott's experience were those of the Second World War, and the economic boom which followed it. Expansion of production meant that many more women were drawn into the labour force, and some of the worse aspects of their oppression relieved through the institution of such things as the health service and contraception—taking on some of the tasks women previously had to carry. This period saw a certain liberalisation and led to a radicalisation amongst women. But these developments also reinforced illusions that, with change, bourgeois democracy might be able to produce the 'goods'. It was this ideology, which dominated much of the women's liberation movement, and to this ideology that Mary Stott adheres.

She realises some of the contradictions of the competitiveness, inequality and irrationality of capitalist society. Differentiating between the 'haves' and 'have nots', she aligns herself with the latter, and expresses the need for change. She also recognises that part of any campaign for an 'egalitarian' society necessitates the liberating of women.

But the method of change she advocates is a gradual process of reform within the system; a reform which does not reject the concept of private property ownership. She is a pacifist, and as such rejects the notion of 'violent' revolution. She realises that any fundamental challenge to the existing order could 'inevitably produce a violent anti-reaction' and consequently her 'reform' is placed firmly within the existing capitalist framework. Her dilemma is how best to combine 'idealism and common sense to the private profit motive'.

This strategy leads her to a series of contradictions. Capitalism is founded on private property relations. It is from this basis (that some should 'have' and some should 'have not') that all the injustices of the system, which Mary Stott polemises against, flow. The exploitation of workers is essential to maintain the wealth of the ruling class who 'have', and it is this exploitation which oppresses those who 'have not', both men

and women in the working class.

Mary Stott is sensitive to the more superficial problems women face in a sexist society. But she is unable to understand society in class terms, but simply on the basis of 'privileged and unprivileged'. She is unable to comprehend many of the problems faced by working class women, or that their problems might be different from hers.

According to her analysis, women will be liberated when they have obtained equal pay, job opportunity and the relieving of the burden of house-work through the technological evolution of labour-saving devices, and child-care facilities. This, she says, can be legislated through Parliament, backed up by an anti-sexist education throughout society. But housework is not a direct part of capitalist production. There is no profitability in domestic labour, and capitalism therefore has no interest in raising productivity in the home, except by exploiting its potential on the consumer market.

Of course, it is very important for women to campaign for equal rights as part of the overall campaign against their oppression. But to limit the struggle for women's liberation to the above is to accept women's right to be equally as oppressed as men. It also negates any understanding that, in order to reinforce capitalist ideology, the ruling class uses national chauvinism, racism and sexism to divide and confuse the working class. Although anti-sex discrimination laws may well pass through Parliament they will only be fully realisable in a period when capitalism is being fundamentally challenged, when the working class and oppressed masses are posing their control of society.



Because she accepts private property relations, the framework of capitalism, Mary Stott also accepts the concept of the nuclear family. To her the family provides 'security and dependence'. But to accept the family is to accept the servitude of women. The family unit fragments the working class, retains the concept of private property within the class, procreates the existing labour force, and reproduces the future labour force—all at the expense of the woman who maintains the family, in order to further the exploitation of the masses in the interest of the ruling class. It is not until we have eradicated the constrictions of the nuclear family—and instituted the socialisation of domestic labour under the con-

rol of the working class—will we be able to talk realistically about the freedom of women to determine their own fertility and life. Again, this can only occur when capitalism is fundamentally challenged.

Mary Stott has been in a position to influence many an unsuspecting reader through her columns in the *Guardian*. By simply advocating social reforms, and 'do-it-yourself' organisations, her role has been to reinforce illusions in bourgeois democracy, and the possibility of real change by reform—thereby helping to perpetuate the system, the evils of which she readily criticises.

Although she provides a certain insight into the behind-the-scenes workings of the newspaper world, her book is mainly a detailed account of her life and the sectoralised one-sided view a middle class individual has of society—including how it should (or rather shouldn't!) be changed. I was given a free copy of the book in order to review it. Unless you get that—not an overwhelming chance—or unless you want to reach a contorted analysis of how to combine being a working woman, wife and mother and be 'liberated', I wouldn't rush to buy the book.  
 —Stephanie Ware

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★  
*Village Life and Labour* edited by Raphael Samuel, Routledge, Keagan and Paul, 1975.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★  
*Village Life and Labour* is the first volume in a series of collected papers given at Ruskin History Workshops over the past eight years. Future volumes will include papers on women's trades, and on marriage and the family. This volume comprises a general introduction to the whole series, and three papers on nineteenth century rural life and work—on harvesters, country work-girls, and a study of Headington Quarry, a village near Oxford.

The stated aim of the series is the writing of 'people's history', the history of the working class rather than their organisations, and the history of those who are often excluded from historical concepts of the working class—the many people who worked casually and were unorganised, including women and children. This represents a radical departure from those histories of trade unionism in which 'Everything is seen from the Head Office', and histories of the working class whose conditions is invariably seen through the eyes of its contemporary rulers.

All the papers in this collection deal to some extent with the role of women at work in the countryside, and with the nature of family income. Jennie Kitteringham's paper on country work-girls provides a detailed account of the kinds of work in which women were employed, and includes a discussion of the late nineteenth-century 'moral' objections to women undertaking work in agriculture: the conflict between the bourgeois ideal of Victorian womanhood (helpless and ornamental) and the proletarian reality. Davis Morgan's paper on harvesters describes the work which women did at harvest time. Raphael Samuel's paper on Headington Quarry is



# REVIEWS REVIEWS...

particularly good in showing the diverse ways in which women contributed to the family budget (and were sometimes its mainstay) both by wage-labour and other means.

In all these papers, family income emerges as the key to cottage economy rather than the wage of the individual adult male worker. Over half the agricultural labourers in nineteenth century census returns were not yearly-hired workers with a modicum of security, but day labourers, hired by the day or the week and unemployed for long periods.

In this situation, the earnings of wives and children assumed considerable importance. Wives of agricultural labourers took in out-work as well as working on the land. They also went gleaning after harvest to keep the family in flour through the winter. At Headington Quarry many households took in laundry every week, and all the female members of the family took part in the work. One resident of the village said: 'Nearly all the women in Quarry used to take in laundry work... women had to do laundry work to keep the family going'.

Jennie Kitteringham and David Morgan both show how the sources of women's work in agriculture began to dwindle towards the end of the century. The depression in arable agriculture in the last twenty-five years of the century meant that many farmers dispensed with labour which was not absolutely necessary, and this caused women to be hired far less frequently since their jobs were often taken over by permanently employed reapers.

Although Jennie Kitteringham discusses the objections to women working at agricultural labour stemming from bourgeois morality, she does not tie the more widespread acceptance of these objections towards the end of the century to this changing economic situation.

Country girls who gradually attended school more regularly, came more and more under the sway of an ideology which excluded girls who worked on the land from the more genteel domestic service, and even from suitability for marriage. It was argued that field work removed girls from the home in which they should receive a suitable preparation for marriage and motherhood. A far more fitting job was held to be domestic service—a job which, as Jennie Kitteringham points out, imposed duties as exhausting as those carried out by female farm workers, but which was ideologically more in tune with the bourgeois ideal of womanhood.

A girl who worked on the land had a degree of freedom which was quite unacceptable to the Victorian middle class male whose vision of women was one of helpless dependency or unquestioning obedience.

Although the aim of the collection is to investigate the unorganised and less organised nineteenth century workforce, a look at some aspects of unionisation would have been a useful addition. The growth of unionisation in agriculture in the 1870s and again in the 1890s is not mentioned,

nor are the strikes and lockouts of agricultural workers in the 1870s.

Unionisation among women agricultural workers is not touched upon, and this is an unresearched (possibly unresearchable) subject. Branches of the largest agricultural union, the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, certainly did admit women to membership, although against the wishes of its Executive.

Generally, the book is much more concerned with labour than with life, and is descriptive rather than analytical. It has a lot of detailed information about work in nineteenth century agricultural communities, and about women's part in what is traditionally assumed to be an overwhelmingly male occupation.

—Helen Gurden

WOMAN'S EVOLUTION-REED

## Evelyn Reed WOMAN'S EVOLUTION

from matriarchal clan to  
patriarchal family



★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

*Women's Evolution* by Evelyn Reed,  
Pathfinder Press, £2.05

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

In this book, Evelyn Reed, the American Trotskyist, attempts to reinvestigate anthropology—a field which has been hardly touched from a Marxist viewpoint since Engels. In doing so, she has made a number of controversial assertions and has become something of a target not only for bourgeois academics (that was to be predicted) but also for a number of revolutionaries. Unfortunately most of these criticisms have contributed far less than the book itself has.

It is certainly true that there is dubious material in the book. For instance, Evelyn Reed asserts that women in primitive societies never take part in cannibalism and that is the first social distinction between women and men. However the evidence she uses for this assertion is inadequate and is not always well interpreted. However, although it is necessary to make such criticisms of the book to stay at that level as so many reviews have done is to miss the essence and real value of *Woman's Evolution*.

The heart of the book is its restatement of the thesis of the matriarchy. This theory asserts that under savagery and barbarism (before the emergence of class society), tribes and clans (units of social organisation) were organised as a

matriarchy. That is, kinship was determined on the mother's side and that women had an equal and honoured role in society. Other anthropologists—Kathlene Gough for instance—have preferred the term *matrilineal kinship society* for such groupings. This term does have the advantage of removing the implication of women ruling primitive society in the way that property owners have ruled all subsequent societies.

It is not worthwhile to argue about terminology however. Evelyn Reed's book fully substantiates her case on this and goes on to establish equally satisfactorily that in the period of barbarism, it was women who made all the major breakthroughs in the techniques of production. Women certainly were the first farmers, the first potters, the first to manufacture clothes. It is likely, though unprovable, that women first discovered the use of fire. Reed's reassessment of anthropology at once destroys the notion that the family has been with us since the earliest times and reestablishes woman's place in the early history of humanity—thereby disposing of a great mass of reactionary nonsense about the hereditary weakness, helplessness and stupidity of women.

However, the very advances made by women were to lead to their subsequent subordination. The development of agricultural technique led to the accumulation of a surplus of goods over and above societies' immediate needs. Inevitably there are attempts to seize this surplus, and such seizures are accomplished by those with arms—one faction or other of the men.

The first ruling class and the first state (the first armed bodies of men for the protection of property 'rights') emerge together. But the social precondition for the success of this enterprise is to break the hold of the matrilineal kinship arrangements. Thus in all the mythologies and semi-histories of ancient peoples we see the struggle to establish a ruling class taking the form of struggle for the establishment of the patriarchal family. Or to put it another way, a precondition for the successful establishment of class society is the historic subordination of women.

The latter parts of *Woman's Evolution* explore that revolution. One would be tempted to say this is done one-sidedly, with too much emphasis purely on the family explore that revolution. You would be tempted to say one-sidedly, with too much emphasis purely on the family—if you were not aware of the crying need to emphasise the role of women in history. If Evelyn Reed had done no more than contribute to that re-emphasis her book would be well worth reading. In fact, she has laid the groundwork for more thorough and rich restatement of our knowledge about the nature and evolution of human society. Many things said in *Woman's Evolution* may have to be discarded, but it makes possible a debate on the left that have been almost dormant since the turn of the century.

—Martin O'Leary



