

SOCIALIST WOMAN

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LOW PAY A CHALLENGE TO ALL THE WORKING CLASS



**CLEANERS . REVIEW WOMEN &
THE UNIONS . IRELAND . EQUAL
PAY EQUAL WORK . SWEDEN .
CZECHOSLOVAKIA . VIETNAM .
GLENROTHES NURSERY CAMPAIGN .
BRANNONS . TUDORS .**

5p

EDITORIAL

Ever since Amin of Uganda announced the expulsion of Asians from that country and it became clear that many of those expelled would come to Britain, the problem of racist divisions within the working class has been sharply posed, and must be as sharply challenged by socialists. This means that we must understand the potential seriousness of the present situation. In the past few weeks the forces of the extreme right have been able to mobilise support for demonstrations and meetings and to gain a much wider audience for their ideas than for some considerable time. The fascist National Front and its allies—the Monday Club, the Powellites—argue that the increasingly obvious problems of this society (unemployment, bad housing, inadequate social services) are caused by immigrants; they use the racist traditions, strong throughout British society since the early days of the British empire, in order to divide working people against themselves. But their aim is to smash any form of working class organisation and every right which working people have fought for. Wherever facism is 'tolerated' it will find ways of growing. Because that is the threat, we cannot tolerate the development of fascist organisations; we cannot extend the right of freedom of speech to fascists.

We must also answer the racist arguments carefully. Obviously unemployment, inadequate housing, social services etc. are not *caused* by immigrants; such problems are bound to occur in a society organised so as to produce maximum profits for a few people and not to meet the needs of the majority. Indeed this system is *so inadequate* to our needs that the influx of more people will mean further strains on jobs, houses, services, especially in some places. But these problems cannot be solved while white workers fight against black (nor while male workers defend their privileges against female workers etc.), but only when all workers and all who are oppressed because of their race, nationality or sex recognise that their problems are not individual or sectional but part of the total system of exploitative and oppressive relationships of capitalist society, and unite in struggle against it.

During the past year there have been important developments in class struggles in Britain, and these have had profound effects in many sections of society, including the women's liberation movement. And these upsurges of worker's militancy are likely to continue in the coming period, at least unless the government is able to tame or crush (or tame and crush) the working class. Selma James has raised many important questions about the relationship of the women's liberation movement to the trade unions, to women and work (see page 3&4); we must also develop the discussion of how the women's movement should relate to the intensification of worker's struggles.

Recent struggles, which have at first been concerned with wages and the protection of jobs have taken on more general significance as the government has tried to use its Industrial Relations Act against those on strike. For example in the case of the dockers, a strike which at first seemed to be the concern of only one section of workers, became, when five dockers were imprisoned, the concern of all working class people. The force of the response to the gaoling of the five was such that the government had to find some way of releasing them, showing that in the face of united working class action anti-working class laws can become useless to governments and employers.

Around all the disputes of this period government, employers, and mass media have tried to exploit the division between home and work, trying to mobilise women against those on strike. But important developments have begun to emerge here also—most notably in the miner's strike when wives organised support for their husbands, picketed and demonstrated on

their behalf; and the committee of the Fisher Bendix occupation organised a meeting for wives. We must endorse all such efforts to mobilise women at home in support of workers struggles, and be ready to draw women into support committees in future strikes. Some SWGs have made some small beginnings in working with strike committees to produce leaflets for striker's wives, explaining about the particular strike, arranging meetings, providing information about social security etc. And at the same time we can raise with those on strike the problems of women at home and in society generally; for male workers on strike are very sensitive to the conflict between the militancy amongst fellow workers and the counter pressure from home for a return to work (the importance of a regular wage for the wife who has to make ends meet, provide for the children whatever happens). Tiny though these practical steps may seem, they are the sort of activities we must try to extend if we seriously want to build any meaning into that readily repeated phrase—working class unity.

On the 5th September, and for more than the fortieth time, the Trades Union Congress passed a resolution in support of equal pay for women. Perhaps this has been an above average year for *verbal* support for women's rights within the trade union movement? Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon made militant speeches to the women's conferences of their respective unions; the AUEW women's conference came out in favour of strike action for equal pay, and equal pay was one of the demands of the engineering workers pay claim which dragged on for many months; on paper the T&G has a policy for a £20 per week minimum wage for women.

In *practice* however support has tended to evaporate. It seems that the TUC has decided to turn a blind eye to the employment minister's decision not to use his powers to compel employers to raise women's pay to 90% of male earnings by 1974 as provided in the equal pay act. Scanlon had already explained to the conference of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions in June that equal pay would have to be dropped 'for the time being' from their national pay claim. The strike at Brannons, Cleator Moor, which had been sustained for over a year by the militancy of women workers, was sold out because of the failure of support from other trade unionists.

This contrast between talk and action represents a dangerous division of interest within the working class, and the government has already shown that it knows how to exploit this division with its proposals for a flat-rate increase which will seem a reasonable amount to a low-paid worker, though ludicrous by a high-paid worker's standards. It becomes even more urgent for the strongly organised sections to prevent this potential split by making sure, where they are putting in for a wage increase, that they take up the interests of the weaker sections and ensure that there is a united struggle for the low-paid to get the same increase as *they* are demanding.

Of course even 'left' trade union leaders won't take up the fight for women's rights in any serious way unless there's strong and consistent pressure on them to do so. Trade unions are basically organisations which *defend* workers pay and conditions within a capitalist society (an important but limited role) and trade union leaders, however militant their speeches, end by *making* concessions and compromises with employers and governments, and selling out on the least well organised sections of workers, particularly women. Seen within this context we can recognise the importance of the sort of strategy which Pat Sturdy is trying to develop for *rank and file* organisation for women's rights within the trade union movement. In this she sees the necessity of combatting both the lack of democracy and make domination in the unions. We print Pat's manifesto in this issue.

REVIEW Women the Unions and work or what is not to be done

REVIEW: *WOMEN, THE UNIONS & WORK or WHAT IS NOT TO BE DONE* —by Selma James. (10p)

This pamphlet is first and foremost a polemic against all strategies and actions within the women's movement which involve any work with trade unions such as unionisation, or in fact any relationship with the trade unions other than one of complete hostility.

To argue for this position, Selma James starts from two basic assumptions: firstly that there is a *sharp division between the actions of the unions and the independent action of the working class* (with their own spontaneous self-organisation and methods of struggle). As Selma sees it, the relative victory of the miners' strike was due to the latter. The unions themselves are presented as being *homogeneously* repressive, bureaucratic, and hostile to the interests of women; as well as being agents of capitalist control and condoning exploitation in the sense that amongst other things they fight against unemployment.

The second assumption is that workers—men and women—have a *choice whether to work or not*—and that you could therefore have a viable political strategy based on a movement by individuals to opt out of the productive process—i.e. to stop working. Thus Selma argues that there is some way of existing for women which involves neither the oppression of home nor of work, *before* the destruction of capitalism. "The challenge of the women's movement is to find modes of struggle which while they liberate women from the home at the same time avoid a double slavery..."

The strange analysis of capitalism indicated by this last statement becomes even more extraordinary when, after criticising campaigns against unemployment, she goes on to say: "You would think (from the demand 'We want jobs') it is immoral to be disengaged from exploitation. The only thing wrong with unemployment is that you do not get paid." Selma does not seem to realise the significance of this last, jokingly expressed, sentence. In a capitalist economy, being unemployed essentially means being without the means of long-term survival. Those who do not own capital *have* to work in the specific sense of selling their labour power—i.e. being exploited. It is not a question of it being moral or immoral to opt out of working—it is simply impossible.

The pamphlet confuses the idea of opting out of exploitation with the problem of the destruction of the social system based on exploitation. The relationship *between* the exploiting work situation and the social system as a whole is left quite unclear. As a result, the analysis of the position of working class women is distorted in two important ways. Firstly, where Selma accuses the Left of holding out work as liberating in itself, she is missing the point as she fails to understand that work is a central cause of women's oppression precisely *because*, as we said above, most working class women are forced to work by economic necessity. Any political strategy *must* be based on that fact.

Secondly, Selma also fails to understand the relationship of the family to capitalism in that she cannot, on the basis of her analysis of work, understand why working class men are *forced*

to "employ" a domestic slave—because they *have* to sell their labour power, which has to be reproduced from day to day, e.g. through the preparation of meals, provision of hygienic environment, etc. which of course is all the job of the wife in the family. You could argue from this that the pamphlet looks at the problem from the point of view of a woman with middle-class resources who is part of the only social group which has the choice whether to work or not.

It is not surprising, given her analysis of work and capitalism, that Selma completely misunderstands the unions, their history, the conflicts within them, their possibilities and their limitations. If the unions were such tame agents of capitalist control as she presents them, it would be impossible to explain the determination of Tory and Labour governments alike to destroy their effectiveness with wage freezes, the IRAct. etc. Selma fails to see that under capitalism unions are necessary to defend the working class's living standards by fighting against any increase in the rate of exploitation. To succeed in this basic economic struggle, industrial militancy rather than class compromise has clearly been proved the most effective strategy. Under certain conditions, this leads unions to go on the economic offensive, and they increasingly eat into profit margins, with the important political repercussions we have seen in the last ten years or so. Selma, however, virtually ignores this basic function of the unions, merely mentioning it in terms of some long-past era when the unions helped to ameliorate conditions of "slavery".

Another major inadequacy is the pamphlet's inability to recognise the crucial differences between various sections of the trade unions. Of course the unions face constant pressure from the government in terms of the "national interest" as well as from "progressive" managements to become bureaucratic instruments of social control rather than the organisers of industrial militancy. But because of the basic economic function referred to above, there are limits to the extent to which they can become bureaucratized. If the union leaderships are involved in a strategy of class collaboration, the economic struggle cannot be effectively carried out and the economic gains normally expected by the membership cannot be won. So the initiative for successful militancy passes to the lower levels of the union structure—thus, partly in reaction to the compromising tactics of Deakin & Co. in the '50s, we have seen the growth of militant shop steward leaderships.

Various lessons must be drawn from this for the women's movement and for women workers. The development of the unions was not an external imposition on the working class but a product of the victories and defeats in the course of defending themselves within a capitalist society. So rather than sharing Selma's almost mystical belief in "autonomous" working class action, we can see that the unions have a strength which both government and employers are all too well aware of, and which women workers could gain from. Secondly, because of the pressures on union leaderships to compromise, especially where the workers themselves are passive about the outcome, women workers must organise themselves to gain from the

potential strength of the organised working class and to force the unions to fight for their interests (as did for example the shop stewards of the car industry).

The present super-exploitation of women by employers is related to the ways in which women are oppressed through the family and the particular forms of ideology that go with it. So such issues as nurseries, socialised housework, maternity leave, as well as the hold of male-chauvinist ideology within the working class, are interconnected and must be raised within the work situation. Thus in forcing the unions to defend their interests, women workers will be raising issues which go beyond the traditional concerns of wage-bargaining.

So unionisation campaigns, far from being based, as Selma James argues, on the crude "stage theory" idea that women must be first brought to "trade union consciousness", can in fact produce conflicts within the union and of a different sort against the employers. These lead to a political consciousness among the women involved of a kind far more advanced than when unionisation takes place among other sections of workers in other periods. In addition such campaigns advance the consciousness of other rank-and-file male trade unionists, helping to break the hold of male chauvinism rather than strengthening it by isolating the women's movement as Selma advocates.

We do not therefore pose industrial campaigns and organising around "non-industrial" issues as alternatives. We argue neither that political organisation is only valid if it is based in factory or workplace, nor that one should base the women's movement simply on organisation outside the workplace. Frequently women's job situations are such (isolated, part-time, etc.) that it may well be tactically more successful to make political contact through a nursery campaign or a rent campaign which is *initially* community-based. However, such campaigns are most successful when they can be backed by industrial action.

Kollontai gives many examples of this type of industrial action—e.g. laundry workers striking for socialised laundrettes—and we should be working out this type of linked strategy for the British situation.

Selma's pamphlet is so full of straw arguments supposedly put forward by left organisations that it is extremely confusing to read, and I have tried to deal here only with her main themes. Her pamphlet is important because of the key problems it raises, but if the women's movement were to follow her solutions, it would become even more likely to be absorbed and coopted by the present system than it is at the moment.

Hilary Wainwright



CLEANERS STRIKE AGAIN

Three militant strikes by contract cleaners on government buildings have recently given a new boost to the campaign started two years ago to organise nightcleaners into unions to fight for better pay and conditions.

CONTRACT CLEANING

Contract cleaning has been steadily growing in recent years. The main reason for this has been the switch of government occupied buildings from direct labour to contract labour so as to cut costs. The union rates for direct labour average between £18 and £19 per week, while contract workers are lucky to get as much as £15 per week. Contract cleaners are also expected to clean 1500 square feet per hour as opposed the 1000 square feet per hour of the directly employed cleaner.

Overheads in the cleaning industry are practically nil. So after paying wages almost all the rest of the contract money is sheer profit—which on some lucrative contracts can run to as much as 30 or even 50 per cent of the total. The three major combines, Pritchards, General and Initial, have tried to form a price ring, but the fierce competition still often results in under-tendering, which means that the workers really have to be squeezed dry in order to extract a decent profit. This frequently leads to understaffing of buildings with the remaining staff being paid a few pence extra 'cover money'.

EMPRESS BUILDING STRIKE

The first of the three recent strikes started on Sunday, 30th, at the Empress Building in Fulham, which houses Ministry of Defence personnel. The nightcleaners there came out on five demands: an increase of £3.50 a week, sickness benefit, more holiday pay (to be paid in advance), union recognition, and more staff to share out the work. After several days of suspense the strike was made official by the Civil Service Union and the women given £10 a week strike pay. A week later they were joined on the same demands by 25 cleaners from the Admiralty Building in Whitehall.

Both buildings are cleaned by the same contractor, a small firm called Clean Agents owned by a Mr. Rhoda. During the strikes 24-hour pickets were organised by the cleaners, supported by Women's Liberation Workshop, Socialist

Woman, the International Marxist Group, I.S. and other leftists. Most important, they were also supported by the local Trades Council and the local branch of the National Union of Railwaymen. This was the first tangible support from other workers ever received in a cleaners' strike, and it made a huge difference to morale. It also made it much easier to generalise from the issues of the strike to the question of the class struggle as a whole.

The picket lines were respected by other workers servicing the building: postal workers, dustmen, food suppliers etc. In fact the picketing was so effective that the Ministry was soon warning that it might have to close the Empress Building. In this situation the Government was forced to intervene through the Department of Employment to arrange a swift settlement.

The settlement gave the union negotiating rights, and a basic of £16.50 plus 50p attendance money. After a promise of more staff was also extracted the women at both buildings accepted the offer and returned to work.

HOME OFFICE STRIKE

On 13 August another strike developed—this time at the Home Office building in Horseferry Road. This building was cleaned by another small contractor, Gatlands.

This time the strike was for the reinstatement of a supervisor, sacked for allegedly being the source of a *Morning Star* article on the appalling pay and conditions on the building. She was reinstated almost immediately as the cleaners threatened to use the same militant tactics employed in the other strikes, but an attempt to broaden the struggle to include the same demands as the other buildings was blocked by the union. However, three weeks later they were out again and quickly received the same basic as the other cleaners had won.

CONDITIONS

We are fortunate to have the concrete details of the Gatland contract which is undoubtedly typical of many such. The cleaners employed by the firm were earning £12 a week basic plus £1 attendance money for a full week's work; there was no sickness pay, and only one week's holiday allowance. For this they were expected to clean nine floors, seven of which have 60 offices on each floor. The supervisor estimated that a minimum of 18 women were needed but the actual number usually fluctuated around 10 to a dozen, *i.e. as much as 45 per cent understaffing*. For this the contractor was being paid £310 per week!

IMPORTANCE OF THE STRIKES

These strikes were the most militant yet in the whole nightcleaners campaign. They can therefore be expected to encourage other nightcleaners to act since quite clearly solidarity and industrial action pay. But equally important were the politicising effects of the struggle on the cleaners themselves. The picket line became a forum every night for animated discussion on almost every aspect of the current political situation, and the film *Salt of the Earth* was shown one night against a brick wall outside and excitedly discussed for hours. In other words, from their own struggle the nightcleaners were increasingly able to generalise the lessons involved and to place it in the context of the ongoing class struggle as a whole.

Jocelyn Griffiths.



WOMEN WORKERS ORGANISE

Two hundred and sixty women in the Lucas factory in Burnley who left the General and Municipal Workers Union to form their own union have now joined the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers. They have disbanded their Women's Industrial Union in a conscious move to put the pressure back where it belongs, inside the trade union movement.

In so doing the women, led by Mrs. Pat Sturdy, hope to benefit from the experience of having had their own organisation by spreading their ideas and demands (contained in their Manifesto, some of which is printed below) inside the trade union movement as a whole. At a time when the question of what role the unions should play is posed so sharply, the willingness of the left to support moves of this kind which go beyond and in some ways contradict the traditional trade union framework may well be crucial for the success of the struggle as a whole.

Mrs. Sturdy, who is now speaking to other groups of women workers about the Manifesto, stresses the importance of rank and file activity in fighting for such demands, and the need to place them within a wider political context. "We need a change of political system of Parliament, anyone, no matter who it was, would end up as a Wilson or a Heath, for all their ideals: the Parliamentary system would change them." She is confident that the struggle of women workers in the trade unions will have an important part to play in bringing about this change.

MANIFESTO

The Women's Industrial Union has made its protest about women not having enough say in the Trade Unions. Now we are determined to fight inside the Unions—for the right to work;—for a decent living wage;—to show working people how they are exploited by the employers.

The government has given the employers a weapon, the Industrial Relations Act, which rank-and-file Trade Unionists are now resisting. It is becoming clearer and clearer that it is these people who must run the Unions and lead the attack against the employing class.

Women have for a long time not been fully active in the Trade Union movement because they have most responsibility for running their homes and looking after their children. This is why they are the most exploited and poorly paid workers. We must organise ourselves to struggle in the Unions for our rights. All Trade Unionists must support our demands since they are in the interests of all workers. We women need to take a more active part in our Unions and in politics generally.

Our campaign centres around the following issues:-

- 1) For equal pay and against low pay
—for a decent wage for our labour

On Thursday, 28 September, Pat Sturdy from the AUEW in Burnley was due to speak to a meeting of socialists and trade unionists in the AUEW rooms in Sheffield. The meeting had been arranged by a woman member of the Communist Party working in the local Socialist Woman group, and had been agreed to by the local AUEW official (also in the Communist Party). Indeed, he had been most concerned about where Pat was going to stay, how she was getting there, etc.....until two days before the meeting was due to take place. Then the Socialist Woman group checked the booking, and found that for some unexplained reason his attitude had changed and the meeting could no longer be held in the AUEW rooms.

Asked afterwards by Pat Sturdy herself why the meeting could not be held in the AUEW rooms, the AUEW official said that he did not know the reason for this decision, and intimated that the responsibility for the cancellation of the meeting lay higher up.

Fortunately, however, the meeting was able to go ahead in the Sheffield students union with a good attendance of about 50 people. One of the most important discussions centred on a local dispute in which women trade unionists who wanted to change from the G&MWU to the T&GWU (because of inadequate representation by the former) were sacked through a deal involving collaboration between management and a G&M official. The meeting elected an ad hoc committee to deal with the dispute, which had resulted in over 30 sackings.

The local AUEW official asserts that the C.P. has always supported the right of all those on the left to express their views in public, but the events surrounding this meeting would tend to suggest otherwise. We would like to know, for instance, whether or not the fact that women from this dispute were attending the meeting had anything to do with the sudden non-availability of official union rooms. Also, although we know she was unable to attend in person, we would be interested to know if Vi Gill, leading woman C.P. member in Sheffield, gave her full support to the meeting. In any case, we feel that the Sheffield Communist Party, especially because of its influence in the AUEW, has some explaining to do in this matter.

Nina Thomas

- 2) Against any kind of job evaluation scheme
—for these only divide the workers more to the advantage of the employer
- 3) For equal opportunity for women
—no discrimination in training opportunities and for more opportunities for women as well as men.
- 4) Against all redundancies
—for the right to work of *all* workers
- 5) For nurseries controlled and financed by local
—to free women to participate more in their Unions and stop being pushed around.

We want to organise industrial groups of women to fight within our Unions, to put pressure on the Trade Union officials for our demands. We need to form a network of groups and factory committees around the country and to get a bulletin going for exchange of ideas and experiences.

If you are interested contact—Mrs. Pat Sturdy,
31 Hogarth Avenue,
Burnley, Lancs.
telephone: Burnley 31783

If you are in touch with other women workers she would be happy to come and talk to you.

SOME FACTS ABOUT EQUAL PAY



The Equal Pay Act, introduced by Barbara Castle and brought in by the Labour government in 1970, provided for equal terms and conditions for men and women workers working in the same establishment or in other establishments owned by the same employer or associated employers, if they are employed on 'like' ('the same or broadly similar') work. The ruling about other establishments does not apply unless the employees concerned have "common terms and conditions of employment" between the establishments, either generally or within each class, e.g. men and women; otherwise women could only claim equal pay with men in the same establishment. 'Equal conditions' doesn't apply to retirement, marriage or death matters. The final decision on whether work was 'broadly similar' would be taken by an Industrial Tribunal. The Act also provided for equal terms and conditions for work rated as 'equivalent' under a job evaluation exercise, but did not enforce job evaluation.

The EPA Act was supposed to come into force on 29th December 1975; if the Secretary of State thought that 'orderly progress' was not being made by 31st December 1973, he was empowered to make an order for women's rates to be raised to at least 90% of men's. Before doing this he had to consult "such bodies appearing to him to represent the interests of employers or of employees as he considers appropriate".

A report published by the Office of Manpower Economics at the beginning of August gives evidence of deliberate circumvention by regrading and the separation of men and women workers—with union agreement—general lack of progress, and a widespread attitude among employers that they would wait for the Act to be enforced before doing anything. Only 4 out of 200 small companies investigated had made any plans at all.

A report from Incomes Data Services in July estimated that equal pay was ten years off at the present pace. According to a report in *Socialist Worker* (26.8.72) when the Secretary for Employment, Maurice Macmillan, approached the CBI and TUC on whether to use his powers to enforce progress in the light of the OME report, (pointing out the dangers of inflation and so on) the TUC representatives (Feather, Jones, Scanlon, George Smith, Sir Sidney Green and Lord Cooper) agreed that their £20p.w. minimum basic wage proposal was merely a 'guideline', and that they would not push for enforcement of Equal Pay.

As we pointed out in the last issue of *Socialist Woman*, the provisions for equal pay for equal work under the Treaty of Rome of 1957, with special procedures for implementation within three years added in 1961, have not so far led to equal pay for women at any level in any of the six EEC member countries. A survey conducted in France in 1970 showed an average 33.6% discrepancy between the pay of men and women. France has had equal pay since 1946.

It now seems that the combined resistance of the employers and inertia of the unions has resulted in the indefinite postponement of the implementation of the Equal Pay Act. Apart from proving yet again, as in the case of the jailed dockers, that the sanctity, etc. of the Law is only a matter of the class relationship of forces—and in this case the working-class so-called representatives weren't bothering—we need to have a closer look at the many and varied kinds of "equals" that have been dragged in to befog the discussion so far and have helped to prevent any effective action from being taken.

EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK

The Equal Pay Act, even if implemented, and even without the numerous loopholes devised by ingenious employers, Management Advisors and the like to get round the wording, would affect at best only about one-third of the female workforce, for the simple reason that the majority of women do not do "the same or broadly similar work" to male workers.

Traditional female areas of employment are women-only jobs at the bottom end of the manufacturing industries—over half the female working force are in semi-skilled and unskilled manual jobs and this percentage is increasing—or in the badly organised distribution and service sectors.

So while we must of course fight for the "rate for the job" for women in all cases, this really amounts to little more

than smoothing out a particularly glaring anomaly—despite the shrieks and groans of employers and sex-conscious male workers—and is no favour for us to be thankful for.

EQUAL PAY FOR WORK OF EQUAL VALUE

This is a slightly more liberal interpretation of "equal work"; it is the definition used by the International Labour Organisation and is a possible meaning of the part of the EPA Act which allows for Equal Pay for *equivalent* work as rated by a Job Evaluation exercise. For this reason it is a more dangerous interpretation, and one that has caused confusion in the labour movement.

To talk of "value" and "evaluation" raises the question "value for whom?". And as we live in a capitalist society where individual workers must sell their labour power to individual employers (or, more likely, concerns, but the principle is the same) in order to survive, it would be the individual employer who would determine the *value to him* his profit.

And since we are working for him because we have to, and not because it makes us feel all warm inside to think how we are contributing to the company profits, we are not in the least concerned with how valuable we are or are not, or for that matter whether we are employed upon making genuine artificial garbage of no value at all, as long as we get our wages. (Though in a socialist society where we would be producing for the benefit of all, we would be very concerned to make a valuable contribution).

So to argue for pay to be based on "value of work performed" can only end up in everyone competing to see who can be of most value to the employer—a recipe for low pay all round. It is also a particularly irrelevant argument for women in that it cannot take account of the reason for their inequality on the labour market in the first place—the value of their contribution to society in unpaid domestic responsibilities and child-rearing.

PAY FOR WORK

In actual fact, of course, as labour-power is a commodity for sale like any other, rates of pay are ultimately based on the state of the labour market. It is the traditional function of trade unions to defend the living standards of the working class by restricting the number of workers willing to work below certain wage; the greater the unity and solidarity of the working class, the better the price.

But we also have to take account of the many other complex factors which determine what the union membership considers a "fair wage" to hold out for, beyond which the necessary unity cannot be maintained. These will include custom—for whatever historical reasons—and factors such as training, or unpleasant or dangerous conditions, which again push up the scarcity of the labour power available for a particular job, and therefore its price. One important idea in negotiating for wage claims is that of comparison with other workers—not necessarily those in the same area, or even the same country, so it is not just a case of threatening to go to an employer who pays better—via parity claims or "leapfrogging".

The use to the employers of the different methods of payment peddled as being more "just" or "rational" than each other—once PBR now MDW, "national Job Evaluation Schemes", threshold agreements, etc.—is simply to introduce confusion into this last, subjective factor, and profit by dividing the interests of the working class—hence the introduction of grading schemes where each has his bit extra to defend against the one below, merit payments, etc.

This of course is where women workers lose out, as with all the weight of everyday social relationships and pressures,



backed up the media, reinforcing the idea that women's domestic role gives them different interests from those of employed workers, the trade union movement in general (including women workers themselves) cannot see the interests of the working class as a whole and fails to take up seriously the question of equal pay.

A recent glaring example of this was the dropping of the Engineers' Equal Pay Claim, first in most of the local negotiations, and then at national level. The Engineering Employers' Federation's concession of a "higher % increase" doesn't even bring women up to the labourer's rate, with the result that the accepted level of pay for women is *lower* than it was years ago. In addition, divisions may be reinforced inside the unions, with graded membership according to sex and skills.

So the trade unionists who maintain that equal pay can only be achieved through industrial action (and not through legislation, job evaluation, etc.), while entirely correct in one sense, rather beg the question of how such industrial action is to come about, since the TUC has been calling for equal pay for the last 80 years or so without noticeable results.

EQUAL WORK/EQUAL WORKERS

In fact this problem highlights the basic contradiction in the position of the trade unions in a capitalist society like ours: that they defend the standard of living of the working class against capital—the employing class—but at the same time by operating *within that framework* reflect the basic social structures and ideologies of capitalist society within themselves.

So having said that the gaining of equal pay is a matter for the unions, we are going to run into the union version of the "relative value" principle we condemned above, with the familiar arguments about "women can't lift heavy weights, aren't available for awkward shifts, don't work nights, retire earlier, take days off when their children are sick, have gentlemen stand up for them on buses, etc. etc."—in other words, no one minds women having access to equal *and* equal pay along with it as long as they're prepared to pretend that they're really men.

This opens the door to the favoured few (and should be taken advantage of), but does nothing to improve the situation of the mass of women workers who because of their social role and family responsibilities—to say nothing of probable lack of training and confidence—are not in this position. Such fear for the loss of privilege if women are admitted to be equally part of the working class can only arise from the belief that you get your little slice of cake by kind permission of the management (and you don't want to share it), instead of seeing that you should have control of

the whole bakery.

The union movement (and the left in general) will have to take the problem more seriously than that. The present economic crisis is forcing the government to pull out all the stops to break the unions' independence—their traditional freedom to organise in self-defence. So union members must see the choice before them clearly: if the unions don't take up seriously and fight for the needs of the working class as a whole, but instead go on upholding sectional privileges and prejudices, then they lay themselves open to the only alternative—division and control by the state.

On the basis of what we said earlier about not tying pay to boss's profits, the organised working class cannot be concerned with the relative merits of men and women workers, any more than black or white, or old or young workers, from the employers' point of view. By organisation and collective bargaining, certain minimum rates are fixed for certain jobs; once you start conceding that women should be paid less because they're a "bad bargain" (e.g. because of domestic commitments), you must agree that Ron Smith must also be paid less because he's got a weak bladder and spends more time in the toilet, or that the Ford workers must be paid less because they waste their employers' time going on strike.

EQUAL PAY AND EQUAL WORK

So how can we go about turning the unions into real working class organisations? To help to put the principles of Equal Pay and Equal Work into practice—and so also increase the confidence of women workers that their demands are justified—there are many issues we must fight on at a very basic level: not only equal pay and job opportunities, but also the right to the training that can make this a reality (in 1970 there were 110 female apprentices to skilled craft occupations, compared with over 112,000 males; 8.9% of young women workers outside national and local government get day-release, compared with 39.7% of young men, and this falls to 2 or 3% in industries with a high female work force).

The fight for equality shouldn't only go one way, either: if women need protective legislation, restrictions on night work and retirement at 60, then so do men.

Women lose out both at work and in taking an active part in union affairs by their home responsibilities; the unions must make sure that marriage or time off for pregnancy does not cost women their jobs. They must also make it possible for women to take part in activities by providing creche facilities where needed and by finding out at what time women can attend meetings—if the only time available is in working hours, so much the better.

Reforms of this kind are valuable not only in themselves, but also in changing the attitudes of the people involved, in the same way that we report on women's involvement in militant trade union struggles—to disprove the myths about their apathy—or on their achievements in history (or for that matter, in the same way as the Dolle Minas pinching men's bottoms in Amsterdam—it all helps).

And if we take these reforms seriously, we must also fight for the means to bring them about. So we must fight not only for women's right to equal union membership, but also for their right (and the right of other oppressed groupings) to have their own organisations inside the unions to fight around their particular problems and needs. Such organisations can only be active rank-and-file organisations: we must resist any attempt to substitute token "Women's Advisory Committees" and the like, as these have no effect and only serve to confuse the issue by taking women's questions out of day-to-day activity, rather than ensuring that that is

where they are fought.

So the demands we would put forward for women workers inside the unions would include both on long-term goals the immediate demands which will begin to achieve these goals. For example while we will always put the demand for "Equal Pay Now", we will also always fight against any increase in the % differential: equal increases for all, as a minimum. Other general principles would include:

- Equal Training and Job Opportunities.
- No inequality of status between union members.
- Proper representation of the interests of all workers affected in any negotiations.
- Complete control by all the membership affected over any agreements made in their name.
- The right of specifically oppressed sections—women, black workers, youth, etc.—to organise themselves to ensure these are carried out.

Finally, of course, as we said earlier, we must recognise that the trade unions themselves, by their very nature in representing the interests of the worker against the boss, cannot solve the basic problems of our society: that will only be done by removing the boss altogether and taking over ourselves. So as it becomes more and more necessary for the unions to go onto the offensive against the capitalist class merely to maintain the living standards and rights they have won so far, it also becomes increasingly obvious that we must extend not only the scope of our ideas, but also our organisations which express them, beyond the relationships of the workplace to take up the questions of the whole of society.

For example in the case of women workers, it is clear that, although we can help to free women to fight for their rights, nothing will really be solved until the central question of women's responsibility for housekeeping and childrearing is dealt with, and that will take a complete reorganisation of society, calling in far wider forces than the present membership of the unions.

The women's liberation movement has a vital function to perform here, and not just in the long term; it is important that those of us outside the union movement both support the efforts of women workers in getting the unions to represent them, and take up the wider issues relating to the oppression of women in the family and society—childcare facilities, maintenance, housing, contraception and abortion rights, etc.—so that given the balance of forces against us, these essentially interrelated struggles can lend each other strength. It is a sufficient comment on the nature of our society that it will take a thorough-going social and economic revolution to concede such seemingly basic democratic rights as equal pay and equal work. As a first step we must start to build the degree of political organisation that can achieve this by involving all the different forces concerned in work towards these goals on a day-to-day practical level.

Marilyn Scotcher.

GLOSSARY

PBR—Payment by Results—piecework

MDW—Measured Day Work—a fixed day's pay for a fixed day's effort, regardless of productivity.

Job Evaluation—a scheme to place all jobs at a given place of work (or within a company, etc.) within a rigid system of grading so that they are paid according to the value of their content, content, according to 'scientific principles'.

Threshold Agreements—a scheme being discussed now between the government, the CBI and the TUC to allow for wage increases if prices go above a certain % (with the idea of avoiding other rises, and pay rises above that %).

Dolle Minas—a women's liberation group in Holland a couple of years ago.

LETTER FROM THE UNION OF VIETNAMESE WOMEN IN HAIPHONG

On April 16 this year, at 2.15am, hundreds of US aircrafts, including B52s dropped over 600 bombs on the densely populous quarters of Haiphong and on outlying villages. 2,000 people, mainly women and children, were killed in the raid 500 more than in London, in World War 2 on the worst day of the blitz, and it took three days to sort out the bodies from the rubble.

This is an extract from a letter sent by the women of Haiphong after the raid:

"Even the kindergarten of Cau Tre workers' community was not spared, where 8 little children and one nurse were killed. Perforating type bombs with their anti-tank markings were found on the children's cradles. These same bombs killed 4 of the 10 pupils who were on duty on the Thai Phen senior secondary school. New types of bombs which explode in mid air were used which cut off the heads of people. Many of the victims were so disfigured that their relatives couldn't recognise them...

Right after the bombing raids, our Haiphong Women's Union received a number of children like little Tuan, only three years old, never to see his parents again. His mother and his younger sister were killed by bombs, and his father lost his life when he was out protecting people's lives and property. Many other little ones survived the attacks but became orphans, and are too young even to know their parents' names...

The US is half the globe away from Vietnam. Our Vietnamese people have never done it any harm. Who allows the US Government to use these modern lethal weapons to kill our people and bring untold sufferings and mournings to our families? Mr. Nixon at one time claimed that he is "anxiously concerned about the world's children". But the fact is that Vietnamese children are being killed in great numbers...

From our city, still plagued by US bombs and shells, we mothers and wives who have very much love for our husbands and children, we earnestly call on women everywhere and on all women's organisations in the world, to take strong action to stop this massacre and maiming of our people, and to support the courage and staunchness of our Vietnamese women who are fighting for the right to live and for the future of our children."

Dear Friend,

Despite the continuing ferocity of the American war of aggression against Indochina - now dramatically confirmed by American citizens as diverse as Jane Fonda and Ramsey Clark - the movement in solidarity with the people of that area has gone into decline in Britain. When the movement first declined - in 1969, after reaching a peak with the 100,000 strong October 27th demonstration in 1968 - this could, in part, be explained by doubts about the continuation of the war. Indeed, the US Administration worked hard to sponsor this illusion, using the Paris peace talks and the cessation of the bombing of the North to create the impression that the war was being de-escalated.

However, three years later, the bombing of Vietnam (North and South) has reached new heights, we have seen the invasion of Cambodia, there is greater and greater intervention

in Laos, the build-up of the use of Thailand as a war base continues. Thus, despite the withdrawal of large numbers of American troops it is clear that what is involved is a new strategy - the so-called 'Vietnamisation' and the greater use of air and sea power - not the gradual phasing out of the war. In spite of this new escalation there has been no corresponding upturn in the solidarity movement in Britain. This is all the more deplorable because British complicity in the war continues. On the political front the present Tory Government was one of the few (and earliest) to issue a statement supporting the American resumption of the bombing of the North. Key components absolutely vital to the American war effort continue to be manufactured in Britain.

This continuing weakness of the movement in Britain is in contrast to the situation in a number of other countries. In the United States the anti-war movement has remained at a high level. In France, Japan, Scandinavia and other countries there has been large scale activity in solidarity with the Vietnamese people this year.

Clearly we need to find ways and means of overcoming this weakness in Britain. The struggle of the Indochinese people against US aggression remains the high point of the world-wide fight for national liberation and social advance. All anti-imperialists have a stake in the outcome of the struggle because it will have deep repercussions for their own fight.

The Editorial Board of INDOCHINA has, together with other interested people, have been engaged in discussions of how the problem of this disparity can be overcome. We propose, together with the sponsors listed on this letter, to call a conference to discuss the problems involved.

We believe that the conference should be open to all those who wish to discuss the best way to build a movement opposed to US aggression in Indochina. In particular the conference should discuss how best to respond to the US movement's appeal for supporting activity on October 28th and November 18th of this year. We would like to see the conference lead to the establishment of a new and broader solidarity movement.

To facilitate the broadest participation in the work of the conference we propose: (a) to get organisations and individuals to sponsor the conference, and (b) to establish a preparatory committee to organise the conference.

We would ask you to carefully consider sponsoring the conference and taking part in the preparatory committee.

If you would like further information about the proposed conference or would like to discuss the questions we have raised please get in touch with us.

Yours fraternally

Terry Smith

pp INDOCHINA Editorial Board.

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Dear Sisters,

This is a letter in partial reply to your article on Gay Liberation in the Socialist Woman Summer issue.

As a group of lesbians we feel that we threaten the institution of the nuclear family more than any other political group. In a male dominated society we are potentially the most threatening to make privilege, since although we are conditioned to be male orientated, we are sexually free of men and also to a large extent socially as well. We wish to be seen to function as a lesbian group that is involved in struggles other than just gay politics. To this end we recently held a benefit disco to express solidarity with working women.

By involving ourselves with the women's movement at large, as well as other gay women, we want to help create the situation where women can identify with each other socially in addition to overtly political ways.

The original caucus of GLF women left the gay mixed movement in January 1972, because lesbians had gradually become aware that we are oppressed primarily as women and secondly as gay women. Subsequently 3 separate groups have been formed; 1. a social group where newcomers can meet other gay women and "come-out" after the experience of isolation. 2. lesbian liberation in South London held at the women's centre there. 3. our own group Gay Activist Women who identify both with Women's Liberation and Socialist groups.

In our group we have not comprehensively analysed how the sexual politics of the Gay Movement relate to the overthrow of capitalism. We feel that in an ideal society psychological oppression would not exist and without that the urge to chauvinistic and exploitative power over each other. This is of course only a superficial comment upon the most complex problem of the revolutionary struggles. We will be interested to learn other views on this relationship between sexual politics and socialism in order to sustain an ongoing debate.

GAY ACTIVIST WOMEN.

Glenrothes nursery campaign

Glenrothes Socialist Woman Group have been very active over the last period on the question of 24-hour nurseries in the area. The group decided on this initial campaign because 51% of the factory workers locally are women—and this involves a large number of women with pre-school children. The women workers work all shifts—i.e. day shift, swing shift (5 p.m.—10 p.m.) and night shift, which only makes the problem worse.

The Socialist Woman Group collected information on nursery/play group facilities in the area, and then wrote to Fife County Council asking why there were only 261 nursery places, and out of these only 28 were full-time, when there were 4,000 under-5s! The reply from the County Council was classic: they claimed that they provided more nursery places than any other local authority and they provided part-time places because they "believe that hours away from home is enough for any child of pre-school age except in exceptional circumstances."

The campaign has initially been developed through petitions, which provide a focus for Saturday meetings in the town centre. This will continue with going round from door to door, and to the factories themselves.

In this way the SWG hope to make direct contact with the women workers with whom they hope to develop their next campaign, which will probably be on equal pay.

The nursery campaign has received extensive coverage in the local newspaper, including the publishing of the main demands of the Socialist Woman Manifesto. The AUEW (Technical & Supervisory Section) has been helpful and has agreed to speak at one of the meetings organised.

The campaign itself has given an impetus to the SWG, which is newly formed, and will enable them to develop other campaigns and to make contact with working women in a way that is very relevant to them.

—Janice Cummings

Brannons & Tudors: the unions in the balance

The year-long strike at Brannans thermometer factory, Cumberland, which we have covered in past issues of *Socialist Woman*, has collapsed following a decision in July by the West Cumberland district of the AUEW and union executive to withdraw strike pay. Muriel Hillon, the leader of the strike committee, said she thought the strike had failed partly because the factory was so isolated, but also because their union had failed to mobilise other workers in solidarity. "If the union had let them know, and asked for support, it would have helped enormously." Failure by the union bureaucracy to use the potential power of their members in support of the weaker sections is an old story—but the recent success of another struggle which might have turned out like Brannans shows what can be done when the support is there.

In September, 300 women workers at Tudor Accessories, Ystrad Mynach, South Wales—a firm which makes accessories for motors—came out on strike for a basic rate of £15.50 (their current rate was £13.48) and against pressure for speed-up via their bonus scheme, personal warnings, etc. Like the Brannans strikers, the women were threatened with the sack by management (by personal recorded delivery) and saw their strike in danger of being undermined by the scabbing of staff workers—in this case the clerical staff, who resigned their membership of APEX to get an extra £1 a day for doing the women's work. Like Brannans, this led to violent confrontations at the gates, with management attempting to drive staff scabs through mass pickets of over 80 women every day.

Unlike the AUEW, the union involved in this case—the General

& Municipal—doesn't even pretend to be militant, and the women made sure early on to get publicity and support from workers at the local pits and factories—flaunting their Red Knickers banner (to illustrate the slogan: "Tudors works the knickers off us")—as well as appealing for blacking of the firm's products by workers in the motor industry.

Towards the end of the second week of the strike, coachloads of the women went to confront the Cardiff regional office of the GMWU and to demand official recognition; their slogans as they occupied the steps of the building showed that at least *they* were in no doubt as to what the union bureaucracy was there for: "G&MW: You've had our support long enough. Now give us yours." "United we stand, divided we fall, because our union is doing bugger all."

After two days of this the union's regional committee found itself sufficiently impressed by the arguments to extract an agreement from management which, although it was less in money terms than the women had asked for, was considered by a mass meeting of the strikers to be enough of a victory to go back to work on with their solidarity unshaken.

Why such different results from the two struggles? The traditions of the surrounding area—and what practical and moral support can be expected there—of course plays an important part. But to leave the outcome of a struggle to geographical accident is to ignore everything that unions are supposed to stand for in uniting the strength of the working class for the defence of the living standards of *all* members. If women in the soggy GMWU can claim a victory after two weeks, the women membership of the "militant and progressive" AUEW might be entitled to ask what is the point of the union's much-vaunted industrial strength when it allows a basic union-recognition fight to die after a year's bitter struggle and sacrifice by their own members. The unions have some hard thinking to do if they are to emerge from the present government onslaught with their claims to represent the working class intact.

Anne Holloway

WOMEN'S LIBERATION IN SWEDEN

The Women's Liberation movement in Sweden has a history different from the movement in the rest of Europe. Due to the late development of the Swedish working class and its relative smallness, the question of women's liberation was an issue taken up through the development of bourgeois society and the formation of the liberal ideas of that era. The first women's organisations fought for the right of married women to own property, for the right to equal education, the right to hold positions in society etc.

The first proletarian women's organisation was formed only in 1886 by glove seamstresses over the issue of wages. At this time only 20% of all women were wage earners. Shortly after, two other proletarian women's organisations were formed, even a women's trade union was formed. The issues for all these organisations were strictly related to working conditions, working hours, wages etc. But as in Germany, women in Sweden also had to fight hard against the reactionary tendencies of male workers who even in trade union programs demanded regulations and restrictions against women workers and very often women were also banned from joining trade unions.

Very soon the proletarian women's organisations joined the social democratic party and their main task was to go out and agitate among men and women to join the party. The specific character of women's oppression in a class society was not brought forward.

In the fight for universal suffrage women in the social democratic party had a hard battle to wage: the party demanded that universal suffrage for women should not be made a major issue since this might endanger the chances to get it for men. The party was also willing to maintain the income barriers for the women. In short: the question of universal suffrage for women was only seen as a tactical question that could be used to bargain with in parliament. These proletarian women were so betrayed by the social democratic party that many of them were thrown off into the bourgeois camp that was leading the suffrage movement. When universal suffrage was at last introduced in Sweden in 1921, women in Finland had had the right to vote since 1907, in Denmark since 1908 and in Norway since 1909.

During the 1930's the social democratic party showed a radical face concerning women and the family. In Europe as a whole a very reactionary ideal was brought forward with the rise of fascism in very strong patriarchal families and a highly developed feminine mystique. But here in Sweden there was no need for this ideal. The social democrats have all along seen it as their main task on their peaceful road to socialism, to strengthen the economically most progressive parts of the bourgeoisie. The developing monopoly capitalism could within its framework very well use a new woman's ideal. The relatively small working class needed to be expanded as quickly as possible and the continual regrowth had to be secured. A campaign for larger families was started: collective housing

facilities, day care centres and financial aid for every child borne. But women on the Swedish labour market are treated no different from women on the labour market in any other capitalist society: cheap unskilled labour for fields related to household work e.g. maintenance, and a huge army of reserve labour.

This spring the social democratic women's organisation came out with a program concerning their family policy. In quite radical language this program condemns class society and the existing structure of the ownership of the means of production. When it comes to analysing the family, the air has gone out and the perspectives given for the future family are such that they already are a reality today. No analysis of the function of the family in a capitalist society is given, no analysis of the specific oppression of women is given, the problem is simply put as a problem of sex roles. One of the demands is a shorter working day to give both the man and the woman more time for family life in order to get rid of the sex roles.

As the social democratic party has never been able to see the oppression of women as a problem requiring any attention different from the working class as a whole, the social democratic women's organisation has also never been able to have a progressive role: it was the liberals leading the struggle for universal suffrage. During the 1960's when the debate on the oppression of women came to the fore, it was again the liberals leading the discussion making it to a discussion of sex roles only. Here the debate among the bourgeois liberals and the social democrats in many aspects fused: women's liberation was identified with her right to work outside the household. In a moralising and non-analytical style arguments were brought out against the housewife institution: if men and women only did the same kind of work, men in the household and women in the labour market the differences of the sexes would disappear. No connection at all was made between the oppression of women as a sex with the social and economical structure of society as a whole. The left was non-existent in this discussion: at this time the stalinist hegemony was total.

The development of the new women's liberation movement is very much in reaction to the liberal sex role debate and the traditional women's organisations for their utter failure to give the movement any strategical perspective and instead of mobilising the oppressed working class women they relied on getting response from the authorities and the commercial and industrial interests.

The same two tendencies, the feminist and the socialist, that cut through the movement on an international scale also cut through Sweden. The feminist tendency is today only represented in one group, limited to a university town in southern Sweden, Kvinnoligan (League of Women) and its main emphasis is on consciousness-raising and ideological-critical work in order to liberate women from their male suppressors. Within League of Women there are different tendencies concerning the perspectives of the political work: some voices are

aised in favour of active political work whilst others claim that women today, due to the oppression they have suffered for so long, are unable to form a political opinion of their own.

As a symptom of the non-existent political perspective a split in the League of Women occurred a year ago when Socialist Women's Group was formed. Up till now this group has been concentrated on theoretical work and a consolidation of cadres but before the end of this year the group will come out with a political platform.

Today the biggest and most rapidly expanding women's organisation is Group 8. Group 8 was formed in 1968, on a clearly defined socialist platform which stressed the class character of women's oppression and related the liberation of women to the revolutionary development of society as a whole. The reasons for setting up a separate women's organisation were due to the inability of the left in its stalinist heritage to see women's liberation as a question worthy of any attention. The problems of a separate women's liberation movement have not yet been settled and there are different tendencies on how to build the organisation, whether it should have the character of a mass-movement or an avant-gardist organisation, what the

perspectives are and the relationship to the other left organisations.

The two manifestations and the exhibition on the economical, political and ideological oppression of women that Group 8 arranged this spring has contributed to a mass-affluence to the organisation. This mass-affluence has underlined and sharpened the urgent need for the organisation to express and concretise its strategical and tactical positions. This need for a politicisation has resulted in a decision to hold a national conference late this year to which other socialist women's organisations are invited. Preparations for this conference are being made and groups have been formed to prepare internal discussions around very specific political questions as Reform or Revolution and Class analysis etc.

If Group 8 is to maintain its mass-base and revolutionary potential, this conference must contribute to outlining the strategical and tactical perspectives of the movement. It is the duty of the revolutionary left to give their support in building a revolutionary women's liberation movement.

A Swedish Comrade



Demonstration organised by Group 8 on the platform: Struggle for Socialism and Women's Liberation.

WOMEN & POLITICAL OPPRESSION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Most of the articles in *Socialist Woman* deal with the oppression of women in capitalist society. But women in the bureaucratically run societies in Eastern Europe are also oppressed. Indeed, one of the clearest indications that these countries are not socialist is the oppression of women in them. They are not capitalist either, but societies in which a bureaucratic elite has taken over the working classes' decisions as to what to do with what is produced, in the name of socialism. Thus, women are supposed to be liberated, but in reality they are not, as this interview about the position of women in Czechoslovakia with Sybille Plogstedt shows. While women have some economic independence, since it is usual for almost all women to have a job, their position in the family subordinate. This is true of all East European countries, though there are variations, as Sybille shows in the last part of the interview.

At the moment in Czechoslovakia a series of purges and trials is going on that has even been criticized by the British Communist party for its injustice and a Committee for the Defence of Czechoslovak Socialists has been formed (32, Belitha Villas, London N.I.) But these are merely a second big wave in a series of trials which have been going on ever since the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Sybille Plogstedt is a Czech-speaking German, a marxist and a revolutionary. It was at the end of 1969 that she was arrested, with a group of young Czechs, on trumped up charges of anti-social activities and undermining the State, charges of which she was found guilty in a framed trial. She spent the period until March 1971 in jail and was then expelled from the country. She keeps in close touch with Czech affairs.

Carol Riddell

C.R. What is the economic position of women in Czechoslovakia?

S.P. Legally, they have equal rights, but this is only a facade. There are more women doing intellectual jobs, like doctors, than in the capitalist states, but these jobs are often in lower regard and have lower pay relatively than here. Women factory workers are concentrated in less skilled jobs in the older and less productive industries like textiles, where, since they work old machines, they cannot produce much and so get low wages. Not only this, but in some factories women doing the same work as men get less wages - this is justified on the grounds that, for example, since they are more frequently absent, they are less efficient workers, and thus deserve a lower rate. They certainly aren't in positions of management either. I have never ever heard of a woman factory director in Czechoslovakia.

C.R. What about their political position?

S.P. Women are practically excluded from the structure of power and decision making in Czechoslovakia. There are no women on the Political Bureau of the Communist Party, and very few in the regional committees. Only at the local level are women represented in any numbers, and there they are in a small minority. There are one or two organisations for women, but these are totally bureaucratic, and merely co-ordinate with similar organisations in other East European countries.

C.R. If women are subordinated in economic and political life, is the same true in the family?

S.P. The situation for ordinary working women in Czechoslovakia is quite difficult. Even the official ideology supports the idea that shopping, housework and bringing up children are women's jobs, rather exclusively. Shopping is quite time consuming, as there are insufficient shops and the distribution system is erratic, involving long waits and queueing. Although there are more kinder-gartens, than in the west, there aren't enough, and so for many families, grandmother is still the childminder, with all that means in distorting the education of the young children. The most repressive family forms are in the rural areas, especially in Slovakia and among the minority national groups, Hungarians, etc. In some villages marriage is still a very great ceremony. It can last for 3 days to a week. But where there is not such pressure from cultural attitudes, divorce is not legally difficult to obtain.

C.R. Is there social provision for contraception and abortion?

S.P. Again, the practice is very different from the theory. For instance, contraceptives, including the pill are supposed to be freely available, but often they aren't obtainable for months on end, so unless you lay in a good supply you've had it. Abortion is available, but is hedged round with restrictions. You must appear before a commission of doctors and have to be able to show that your "case" meets certain criteria - for instance, if the baby would be illegitimate, if you are unable to support it, if the father has an incurable disease. There is a possibility of appeal from one commission to another, but the decision of the second commission is final. In practice abortion is quite restricted. Incidentally, the combination of economic subordination and cultural inferiority encourages quite widespread prostitution, especially in bigger hotels catering for western guests. Many of the women in jail with me were prostitutes, and although sentences are heavy, the regime utilizes prostitution with a job, one is much less likely to get arrested than if it is done full time, as not having a job is likely to lead to immediate investigation - groups such as gipsies are persecuted under this legislation too. Many of the prostitutes are young - it is the fastest way for a woman to get a lot of money in Czechoslovakia.

C.R. What do you think would have been the impact of the developments of spring '68 in regard to the position of women? I talked to some Czech economists at the time who quite cynically spoke of increasing efficiency and reducing surplus labour by pushing women back into the family.

S.P. That may have been so, but since then the regime has not been able to modernize and industry remains labour intensive, so there is a shortage of workers not too many. In fact it was the development of organs of dual power in the workers' council of 1968 that could have led to the increased participation of women and demands for an improved position in society generally, but these did not express themselves as separate demands at the time - after all even in the USA and Britain, the women's movement had hardly begun developing then. So women became involved in a total oppositional position rather than one relating to their sectional demands.

C.R. *Is the situation the same now?*

S.P. Certainly. There is absolutely no possibility for women to oppose their subordination through their own organisations. They are either forced back into passivity or into total opposition. Since the regime's official propaganda hardly ever concerns itself with the question of women at all, it does not seem that they are worried about this matter; yet, in contrast to East Germany, where there has been a considerable easing in the divorce laws, attacks on traditional household roles and even the encouragement of a limited process of conscious development of women stimulated by the party.

C.R. *Why do you think that this is?*

S.P. The Czech working woman is relatively culturally isolated from outside influences, whereas in East Germany the possibility of a peace treaty makes it not unlikely that a vast increase of communication between West German and East German families may take place. Since the West German housewife is better off gadget-wise than the East German, perhaps only the conscious idea of a different style of life can protect the regime from being subject to serious discontent from women there; so it is prepared to stimulate reform itself. That is not so in Czechoslovakia. There, any opposition by women to their position must take on the character of a direct opposition to the whole bureaucratic regime.

IRELAND report on the anti-internment league conference

In support of the continuing urgent need for the solidarity of all socialists with the struggle in Ireland, we are publishing a report on the recent annual conference of the Anti-Internment League. The AIL is a united front open to all organisations and individuals who want to help build a mass movement in support of the Irish struggle. Anyone who would like to help or have further information should ring Bob Purdie at 01-348 3752.

The annual conference of the Anti-Internment League which met on the weekend of 7th-8th October voted overwhelmingly to reaffirm its "solidarity with all those socialist and Republican organisations struggling against British imperialism in Ireland." The conference got off to a good start, with 49 delegates from the branches and affiliated organisations.

Two motions on the agenda seemed to criticise the solidarity position which the AIL had taken earlier this year. One of them, from IS, was withdrawn after the IMG had moved an amendment to it. The other, from Haringey AIL, which tried to remove the solidarity position, was massively defeated.

Bob Purdie, formerly Scottish organiser of the Irish Solidarity Campaign, was elected as organiser on a part-time basis, to replace the former organiser John Gray who had resigned in order to be more free to criticise both wings of the Republican movement. The new committee, [includes John Gray] and members of both the Provisional and Official wings of the

Republican movement, the International Marxist Group, Workers Fight, International Socialism, People's Democracy, as well as independents.

DEMONSTRATION

The next major event planned by the AIL was a demonstration in London on 12th November, for which support is expected from all over Britain. Posters and leaflets advertising the demonstration were organised ready for distribution to branches and delegates.

A leaflet from Central London AIL which was distributed at the conference said in part: "The November 12th demonstration must be the key point in our work following the conference. It may not be as big as previous demonstrations. But it will be a more powerful testimony of our determination to keep up the fight, than a larger demonstration at a time of spontaneous mobilisation. It will be a political focus for the work of all branches, and will be especially useful for assisting new and weak branches."

After the conference, the new organiser, Bob Purdie, appealed to all revolutionary socialist groups, Irish organisations, trade unions, women's liberation groups, student unions, Soc. Socs. etc. to support the November demonstration and to help build a mass movement of solidarity with the Irish struggle.
Gery Lawless



WHAT IS SOCIALIST WOMAN?

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

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

EDITORIAL BOARD: Margaret Coulson, Leonora Lloyd, Wanda Mariuszko, Pat Masters, Vicky Robinson, Linda Smith, Felecity Trodd.

DESIGNER: Ruth Prentice

signed articles do not necessarily represent editorial opinion.

BACK ISSUES OF SOCIALIST WOMAN AVAILABLE

- March/April 1971* Includes articles on the Politics of Women's Liberation, Helen Keller, Socialist, review of Sexual Politics, women telephonists, nightcleaners, etc.
- May/June 1971* International issue: articles on Italian factory women the Irish struggle, Peruvian liberation movement, Paris Commune, American third world women, British strikers.
- July/August 1971* Articles include: the Family, Part-time work, cleaners, 19 century agricultural workers' struggles, etc.
- October/November 1971* WIM in Britain and America, women in Ireland, women in Eastern Europe; Brannon strikers, etc.
- January/February 1971* Low Pay; review of Woman's Estate; women in Soviet Union; women's unions.

SPECIAL OFFER: ALL ABOVE ISSUES FOR 20p, including postage.

SOCIALIST WOMAN PUBLICATIONS

- Socialist Woman* is produced bi-monthly 48p for six issues
Women Workers in Britain: A Handbook 28p
International Women's Day by Alexandra Kollontai 8p

This publication is on file at the International Women's History Archive, 2325 Oak Street, Berkeley, Calif. 94708, and is available on microfilm through Bell & Howard, Wooster, Ohio.

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YORK: Julia Baldasara, 1 Longfield Terrace (off Bootham).

**If you are interested in forming a group in this area, please contact the address given.*

In reply to readers' enquiries: this is the first issue to be produced since the Summer 1972 one. We are sorry for its lateness. Anyone with a year's sub. will get six issues anyway.

Please send me SOCIALIST WOMAN for the next year. I enclose 50p which includes postage & packing (for overseas rates see below).

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