

SOCIALIST WOMAN

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FAIR RENTS FOR WHOM?

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EDITORIAL: THE HOUSING FINANCE BILL AND THE TENANT'S STRUGGLES

The Housing Finance Bill, which comes into effect on October 1, 1972 has already sparked off a wave of resistance which has not only involved many council house estates, but has also had the result of bringing on to the scene of local politics for the first time since before the last general election that self-styled defender of the rights of the workers, the Labour Party.

Everyone who pays rent knows, or will once the bill begins to be implemented, just what the effects are likely to be. It was estimated by Frank Allaun MP in November of last year that the average council rent would double as a result of this bill. This has since been considered by many to be a conservative (with a small "c") estimate.

Nor will the effect on private tenants, who already in most cases pay exorbitant rents, be less severe. This legislation covers all tenants, and all rented property, and anyone who is at present fortunate enough to have a liberalminded council or private landlord and who is paying something approximating to a "reasonable" rent (though in reality there is no such thing) will find that the law obliges such a landlord to raise his rents to conform to what a commission, composed of lawyers, valuers and surveyors, considers to be a "fair" rent. The way in which this "fair" rent is to be arrived at is consistent with the whole policy and with the composition of the committee which will decide it. Basically it will be decided on the basis of the market value of the property, or as the Bill puts it "A fair rent must give a return that it would be reasonable to expect on it as an investment".

This much is fairly obvious. What many people are asking is why the present government is willing to risk the unpopularity, which is inevitable, and the local resistance on the part of tenants and in some cases local government, which we have already seen begin to develop.

There are several answers to this one. First of all, there is no general election expected in the immediate future, so the problem of lost votes does not arise. Then there is the whole question of expenditure on social services versus industrial investment.

The pattern of the whole period of the present government has been of a reduction at all levels of social expenditure; medicine, school milk etc. The problem with housing is rather more complex. What is intended is not simply to cut the amount of government subsidy on council housing programmes, but to make such programmes pay for themselves, and to aim at a situation where further building programmes would be financed by rents from existing properties.

The only people who will benefit from this are the friends of the Tory government; speculators, building companies, private landlords and so called "housing associations". When most people think of private landlords they probably think in terms of the individual who owns anything from one to four or five properties.

Not so the Tories. The landlords they think in terms of are e.g. Doejan holdings—owns over 23,000 flats and houses—gross rental income in 1970, £2,169,693; Peachey property corporation owns about 5,000 flats and houses—gross rental income in 1970 amounted to £2,640,000 etc.....

And why are the Tories so nice to such companies? One of the reasons might well be that in the run up to the 1970 General Election these companies and others were pouring over £28,000 per annum into Tory party funds.

However, apart from the usual mutual backscratching there are more fundamental reasons for this policy. This is not an isolated example of attacks on the living standards of the working class—and there is no need to hedge about it. Despite the oft quoted figures of workers who are buying their own houses, the overwhelming percentage of tenants, private and council, are working class. They are tenants rather than

owner occupiers precisely for that reason.

Nor must we make the mistake and think that the Tories are launching all these attacks because they are all nasty men who want to grind the faces of the workers in the dust. Doubtless such specimens exist, but the real reason is that a struggle is in process, a struggle for survival, between the working class and the bourgeois class, between those who produce and those who own. And in such a struggle each side fits its tactics to the necessities of the situation.

We have seen the workers develop their tactics through occupations, work-ins, flying pickets etc. The other side also is developing tactics, the main one being to erode the standard of living of the working class in order to weaken its ability to fight back at a later date. What is important about these proposals is not the amount of money which will be saved but the effect on working class tenants who are having to fight simultaneously on the question of wages, prices and rents. Having realised that all these attacks are interrelated, and for a purpose, it is necessary to examine the role of the Labour Party. On the surface it would appear that the LP was returning to its old "defence of socialist policies" days, but lets look a bit further. If we accept that all the Tory attacks are related, we must then ask, what is the LP doing about prices and wages, or in terms of issues in parliamentary politics, what is it doing about the Common Market and the Industrial Relations Act. And the answer is nothing, except sowing confusion.

Why then make such a fuss about the Fair Rents bill? Local labour councils refusing to implement it; labour party branches and officials engaged in rent struggles; promises of repeal; leaflets to the housewife stressing how the LP would not implement this nasty bill etc (much in the same way as the Tory's used the question of prices and the housewife in the election campaign). There are two basic reasons involved here. Firstly, the constituency LP has almost ceased to exist over the past four years, and this looked like a good way of rebuilding some LP branches—a national issue which could be organised on quite easily at a local issue, and one which the LP has fought on before. The second reason is that the LP wants to pick up votes from the bottom but not at the expense of support from the top. In other words, the reason it picked on the rents issue was not its importance, or that it would have created the greatest possible support, but that it was least likely to antagonise those forces which control the British economy. But what about an attack on the Fair Rents Bill? The struggle against it can be contained, especially with the help of the LP, to the housing estates, and kept separate from the struggle on the shop floor and in the unions. Also, it is not directly in the interest of big business to push up rents at the present time, because the labour movement is still strong enough to match this with a demand for increased wages, which they are trying to control. If they had the unions where they wanted them they would lose no sleep about rents whether they went up or down, but at present it is not assisting their aims. For those working in rents struggles and tenants campaigns, this has practical implications; we must make sure the campaign is run by the tenants and in their interests. The LP is always very quick to point out any "ultra-lefts" (i.e. anyone to the left of the LP) and denounce them as simply trying to exploit the situation. In this situation the most guilty party is the LP. Bearing in mind the fact that all the attacks going on at present are related, we must try to make this obvious and where possible treat them as parts of the one attack. Also, bearing in mind that what the Tories, the LP and big business are all afraid of is the possibility of these struggles being taken onto the shop floor and into the labour movement we must try to do precisely what they fear. If that is what they are afraid of then that is their weakest point, and that is where any attack on the part of the working class should ultimately be aimed.

FAKENHAM DANGER WOMEN AT WORK



Early this year the Norwich shoe manufacturers Sexton & Everard, having gone £1¼m. in the red, sold out to a Florida property developer. Part of his conditions for buying the firm was the sacking of 485 workers out of a total labour force of 700. On 17th March the 45 women workers at the Fakenham branch who had stitched the shoe uppers which were cut and soled in Norwich, were all made redundant. That Friday they decided to occupy the factory. Eileen English and Nancy McGrath locked themselves in and barricaded the doors with machines – determined to fight for their right to work.

Edna Roach: "When the factory was bought in Norwich they saved two or three hundred jobs there and we got the chop. As far as we were concerned it just wasn't on, because there was no work here for us anyway. So the only alternative we had was to take over the factory and to work in. By working in it makes it a bit different to a sit in; we're actually doing a job of work, so we don't lose our skills. We just had to work in to try and get somebody to realise that work is needed in this area and to help save our jobs.....If you like to scrub floors or stand up to your ankles in water in one of the processing plants I suppose you could say there's work of a kind. But that's very limited, because they don't want that many and nine times out of ten in the winter they stand off anyway. We're not used to that kind of work. Leather's the only kind of work we know."

CO-OPERATIVE

The women began by machining patchwork bags out of scraps of old shoe leather. All profits from sales and money from donations go into one fund which is used to buy more leather, which they make into bags, skirts, and waistcoats. No one takes

a wage. The women who hadn't made garments before learned as they went along, helping each other out, seeing the product from start to finish. Their factory runs as a co-operative, all decisions are made collectively. When a problem comes up they all meet in the centre of the factory floor to talk it out. The atmosphere in their converted church is miles away from the timeclocked, piecework days of Sextons with husbands and friends popping in to chat, non-stop music and each worker pacing her own work. Every order is turned out to specification and on time.

THE ROLE OF THE UNIONS

Workers throughout the country have expressed solidarity with the Fakenham occupation workers. They have received donations from Fisher Bendix, £250 from the Upper Clyde Shop Stewards Committee, and contributions from the membership of their own union, the National Union of Footwear, Leather and Allied Trades (NUFLAT), even though they've not received official recognition from the union itself. (Nancy McGrath is the only ASTMS member, and she does get official backing.) The union bureaucrats outdid themselves, sending a circular to the Norwich and Fakenham Trades Councils and to union branches asking that the women be refused any support or recognition.

Edna Roach (NUFLAT steward): "The union unemployment benefit lasts for 12 weeks and runs for females at 27 pence a day for continuous membership or 20 pence a day under the full membership. The union by paying this recognises we're out of work, but the Labour Exchange says we haven't proved we're unemployed. I don't know really how you prove you're

out of work, other than by surrendering your cards and going up and signing on when you're supposed to or going for a job when they send you even if it's a job that doesn't exist when you get there. It's been a month since we put in an appeal and we're waiting for a tribunal.....Waiting a month to get our £4.20, which as married women is all we're allowed, though you pay a full stamp and the same tax as a single girl. Single girls get £6.00 but married ones get £4.20, which I think is a confidence trick in anybody's book."

Nancy McGrath (ASTMS): "I think unions can be a good thing provided the membership of the union works within the union to see that the rules are carried out for the benefit of all the members. I think that in our particular case here there are a lot of things that can be bettered, a lot of restructuring to be done within the union. I don't think it's any good at all forming a breakaway union, women especially. I don't think they'd get the overall membership and they'd never get the funds to support any sort of dispute. I think what they have to do is to remain within the unions that they have representing them now and try to get them restructured from the bottom up. You don't appoint an officer in 1972 and 25 years from now he's still sitting pretty in a seat. You appoint him for maybe two years and let him put himself up for re-election in two years time. I think that's one way that you can insure that union officers are made to work for the benefit of all the members. If they know they're coming up for re-election they'd better jolly well get in there and fight for you and work for the people they represent, not having the people dragging them along by the scruff of their necks, like the people have had to do here in the NUFLAT union."

WORKERS CONTROL

Nancy McGrath: "I think working class people are becoming far more aware of conditions outside of the place where they work. They know for instance, if they read the papers and look at the profits being made as a result of the work that they're doing, they're becoming increasingly aware that they should be involved in the structure of an industry, perhaps at boardroom level. Be in there on the decisions, and in that way I think that these long term redundancies and rationalisations could begin to be fought before they ever reach the stage where four or five hundred people are made redundant and there's nothing you can do about it then."

How long can they go on? When Mr Glassman, the new general manager, said they could remain in their factory rent-free as

long as they paid the bills, he must have underestimated their determination. In actual fact, he can only profit from the women's resolve to buy the factory and set it up as a workers co-operative. He owns the place now and hasn't any plans for it. But any negotiations must go through him. His price for the place is £11,000, and the women have spent a good part of their time these past two months trying to find a suitable backer. As Nancy says, "we don't just want to revert to being creatures behind a machine with all the decisions being made by remote control. We must have a part in any decision which is made. But the practicalities have to be faced now, I have bills to pay, insurance for the workers, and we have bills at home to pay ..." The women hope a trust will loan them the £11,000 to set up on their own and then they can offer jobs to the women who were forced to leave and find other work.

The occupation at Fakenham is limited as is every occupation. The choice the women are faced with—either to set up a cooperative or to obtain contract work—both result in producing for profit; i.e. it is impossible to "beat the system" while the system still exists. But, though the Fakenham women realise this themselves, they have also learnt something which in the long run is perhaps more important: the answer to their problems lies in themselves and more than that—in the unity of the working class and the determination to fight redundancies or whatever with direct militant action. That lesson *must* be remembered for another day.

Sue Shapiro, Tessa van Gelderen

FAKENHAM FILM

The story of the occupation; the women discuss the problems, the issues involved, the lessons to be learnt.

Made by Sue Shapiro with Socialist Woman.

Ideal for showing in factories, colleges, schools, sit-ins—a good basis for discussion. Approx. 10 minutes.

Write: Socialist Woman, c/o Pat Masters, Flat 3, 20 Queens Gardens, London W.2, for more information about hiring.



The Catering Strike and The Kent Occupation

Seven weeks ago a Working Party set up by the Kent University Authorities proposed to make 189 workers, most of them women, redundant and to increase food and residence prices by 10% in order to cover an increasing loss on catering facilities.

STUDENT/WORKER MASS MEETING TO FIGHT REDUNDANCIES.

After the appearance of the report, which had been produced without consultation with either the students, the workers, or their union representatives, in this case the National Union of Public Employees (N.U.P.E.) and the General and Municipal Workers Union (G.M.W.U.), a mass meeting of students, workers, and academics was held. This set up an action committee to fight the redundancies and price increases.

KENT UNIVERSITY CAMPAIGN AGAINST REDUNDANCIES

At first the campaign followed a policy of pressure group politics, by attempting to exert outside pressure on the authorities by meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Shadow Education Deputy Minister, Moyle, and with Jo Grimmond. This form of activity soon proved ineffective, and only served to reduce the active struggle of both the students and workers. Gradually the unions began to allow their members to go to individual interviews about re-employment and when some of the redundancy notices began to be served people began to think that the fight was over.

OCCUPATION

However it became clear to some of us at the university that rather than the struggle being over it had not yet begun. A bold initiative was needed to provide a focus for the fight. That initiative could only be taken by the students alone as the only body still willing to fight and who had not yet been really involved in the struggle. It was hoped that this demonstration of solidarity would bring the workers back into the campaign. It was clear that the only viable form of direct action that the students could take was an occupation. The decision to occupy was made at a crowded Extraordinary General Meeting of the Students Union on May 30th. As a result, the West Block of Cornwallis Building was occupied.

THE AUTHORITIES REACTION REBOUNDS

The University Authorities retaliated by closing down all catering services. Naturally, this crude manoeuvre to divide domestic staff and the catering staff, the 1st and 2nd year students from the finalists and especially the workers and the students, had precisely the opposite effect. For the first time at Kent University there started a unified struggle of Students and the catering staff. (See also the Lancaster Cleaners' pamphlet. The following quotation from a resolution passed almost unanimously by a joint branch meeting of N.U.P.E., G.M.W.U. illustrates this point.

"The Kent University branches of the National Union of Public Employees and the General and Municipal Workers Union express their appreciation of the action taken by the students against the catering report, support the occupation, and will provide food for students and staff while catering services are closed.

Now the fragile solidarity between the workers and the students will begin to be tested. Already this is threatened by the arrival of one of the big union bureaucrats of N.U.P.E. who is prepared to ditch the platform of :-

NO REDUNDANCIES NO PRICE RISES NO JOB LOSS

TOWN AND GOWN—SPREAD THE CAMPAIGN

THE RE-OPENING OF THE CATERING.

The eventual decision of the college authorities to re-open the catering facilities was a considerable success for the occupation especially since they were forced to do this while the students were still refusing to call off the disruptions.

FRAGILE SOLIDARITY.

The branches instruct their stewards, in co-operation with the students, to negotiate with the university authorities for the re-opening of catering facilities, to be preceded by a union meeting of all members of college staff at 10am on the day of re-opening. The branches reaffirm the proposals for cuts in working hours and redundancies are totally unacceptable"

A number of the catering staff volunteered to cook for the sit in and a few of the younger staff sat in themselves.

NATURE OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN KENT.

One thing that we have been constantly forced to face is the lack even of trade-union consciousness amongst the majority of workers at the university. This is generally true of the whole area, with the notable exception of the Kent miners. There is no experience of struggle, low level of unionisation, and unorganised women form the predominant section of the work-force. In the early stages of the campaign, members of Socialist Woman tried to combat the isolation and fragmentation of the domestic and catering staff. However, it is of course difficult to do this during the course of just one struggle. One cleaner left the union as soon as direct action was proposed, while another said her husband would throw her out of the house if she joined the union. And, of course shift working, family pressures and responsibilities made it difficult for the women to attend meetings.

NATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

It is important that this dispute is not confined to the university alone. Since the University is the biggest employer in Canterbury, an area of high unemployment, it is necessary that the campaign should be introduced and fought in the Town. Already, over 200 signatures in support of the struggle have been collected from the Employment Exchange. A Town Rally has been organised at which an Action Committee will be elected to fight for the Campaign in Canterbury.

The crisis in catering at the University is not the result of local bungling by the authorities, on the contrary, the situation here is part of a national problem resulting from State Policy to have *Education on the Cheap*. The University Grants Committee has a deliberate policy that university catering should not be subsidised and must break even financially. The Kent authorities have also decided that the expensive Collegiate System of 'eating in hall' should be maintained. The only way therefore to turn a catering loss into a profit or at least break even is to hit the students and workers with price rises and redundancies.

Other Universities such as Surrey are also experiencing similar attacks on catering facilities.

Because the outcome of the Kent struggle is crucial for Students and workers throughout the country a national demonstration is being organised in Canterbury.

Donations, Messages of Solidarity, and requests for further information should be addressed to:-

Dave Jones, C/o Student Union Office, University of Kent, Canterbury.

**NO REDUNDANCIES, NO JOB LOSS, NO PRICE INCREASES
WORKER/STUDENT VETO ON THE AUTHORITIES
ACTIONS.**

Canterbury S.W.G.

IRELAND-



Mrs. Maire Drumm, recently-elected Joint President of the Provisional Sinn Fein, was in London on June 4th to address a rally in support of Republican prisoners on hunger strike in Northern Ireland jails. A Socialist Woman reporter spoke to her. Maire became known to supporters of the Irish struggle in Britain when she led the intervention by Republican women of Andersonstown, Belfast, against the Stormont-financed "Women Together" movement. Maire has herself served a term in a British jail in Northern Ireland for speaking against the role of British imperialism in Ireland.

The interview was carried out before the announcement of the Provisionals' cease-fire in the North. At the time of going to press (24th June), the significance of the cease-fire is not clear. If the British have agreed to the demands of the Provos in secret, then we could not of course be opposed in principle to a negotiated settlement which got the British out of Ireland. However it must be noted that in the past, it has usually been the British who gain from such cease-fires. In the war against the British in the early 1920s, the British used the cease-fire to produce a desire for peace at any price in the Irish fighters, and waited while the irregular forces of the IRA demobilised. Then, the regular British Army remaining intact, the British government was in a position to issue ultimatums. Whether this will occur this time is unclear as yet. What we must hope is that the fighting spirit shown to exist by this interview will not be frittered away by lack of political understanding of what British imperialism's real nature and aims are.

—The Woman Together movement has been clearly exposed as being run and backed from outside, by people with no interests in common with the people of Andersonstown. People in Britain are less clear however on the nature of the present peace movement. Can you say what it represents and who is backing it?

Maire Drumm: This movement is being promoted by the Bishops, by big business (e.g. such people as Tom Conarty who's on the Whitelaw Commission) and by the Social Democratic and Labour Party. It is nothing but the remnants of the Women Together movement. The people behind it have been onlookers in the struggle. They have never given support to the struggle, so they cannot now withdraw it. The women are completely behind the IRA.

—Do you feel that the Whitelaw initiative offers you anything, and should be given a chance?

Whitelaw has offered us nothing. In spite of Direct Rule, we still have the Special Powers Act, though this does not operate in Britain. They have substituted detention orders for internment. Little has changed.

—Can you tell us something about the role of women in the Provisional Republican movement?

The women in the Provisional movement take a full part in the struggle. Women have taken the lead in protecting their communities, with the men interned or on the run. They organised the "hen" patrols which follow the British Army "duck" patrols* and give warning by banging dustbin lids when the Army is coming into an area. There are many Provisional Republican women in jail now on political charges and some of them are on hunger strike.

—I believe your husband is now in prison on a political charge? He is serving his third term, and has done 13 years altogether. There are many women in Northern Ireland who are suffering, emotionally and financially, from having their husbands in prison.

—Do the women of Belfast want peace?

The people in the peace movement say that 95% of the women want peace. They are wrong. 100% of the women want peace. But it is not peace on any terms—we want peace with justice. The present peace movement is only a varnish on the surface—there is a boiling pot underneath. We want all the internees released, and amnesty for all Republican prisoners and men on the run. We want a withdrawal of all British troops to their

barracks, pending their complete withdrawal from Ireland. There cannot be peace except on these terms.

—Are you confident that the Irish people will win their freedom this time?

We have to win it this time. There has been too much bloodshed and too many people in jail. We are determined to win this time.

*"Duck" patrols is the name given to the British Army patrols in armoured cars in the Catholic areas of the Six Counties.

BACKGROUND TO THE "PEACE MOVEMENTS"

(written before the announcement of the Provisionals' cease-fire—see introduction to interview).

The suspension of Stormont and the imposition of Direct Rule over Northern Ireland in March of this year came about because the struggle of the minority could not be kept down. The Stormont government had tried all the repressive measures it could take; internment had failed; even 13 killed by the British Army in Derry did not stop the movement in its tracks. On the contrary, these events themselves led to more militant action on the part of the minority and an even greater determination to throw the British Army out of the North. Direct Rule and William Whitelaw's move to Stormont was not a solution to these problems for the British ruling class; rather this desperate measure which was taken shows the very real and profound crisis British imperialism finds itself in, in the North today.

Since Direct Rule there has been much confusion as to what is happening. The Protestants are building "no-go" areas, internees are being released, leading Provisionals are being arrested by the Lynch regime in the South, the Officials have called a "cease-fire" and various "peace movements" have been formed.

-PEACE?



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WOMEN TOGETHER AND THE PRESENT PEACE MOVEMENT

The latest "peace group" which has recently come into existence is very different from that of the Women Together movement which received "fame" when Maire Drumm and other supporters of the IRA managed to shout down and break up the Andersonstown "Women Together" Group. The essential difference between this new movement and the Women Together group is that the former supports the IRA. Of the five main leaders of this latest group one, Eileen Semple, is secretary of one of the Social Democratic and Labour Party groups (SDLP) in the area, one Margaret Doherty, had a brother shot dead by the British Army on Bloody Sunday, and one Kathleen Doherty, lost a son aged 16 who accidentally shot himself while training with the Official IRA earlier this year.

THE DEMANDS OF THE PEACE MOVEMENT

The demands of the Derry women are fundamentally different from the Andersonstown Women Together Group. They are not for "peace at any price"; peace to these women means the following:

- an amnesty for all political prisoners and those on the run
- an end to internment.
- no-go areas to remain
- the IRA must still remain behind the barricades.

In other words these women recognise that the role of the British troops is not that of peace-keeping and while they remain on Irish soil the minority in the North must have the protection of the IRA.

PEACE AT ANY PRICE?

The situation, as stated earlier, is extremely confusing. Events are changing so rapidly. And it is not only us in Britain who are confused by what is going on, the minority in the North itself is not at all clear what is happening. What is clear

is that everyone in Derry wants peace. What is not so clear is what is meant by "peace". Probably a small minority wants "peace at any price" the majority almost certainly are in favour of an armistice.

There has been much reporting in the press about the many thousands of people who signed the "peace petition". What has *not* been reported is that these same people who signed that petition still leave their doors open at night for any IRA member in need of a place to hide, still leave out food for these same people whom they are supposed to oppose.

THE FAILURES OF THE REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT

What can also be said is that this confusion arises from the failure, certainly in practice if not in theory, to give a political explanation to the people of Derry and Belfast, particularly the women, about what is happening. The women's social life tends to centre around the church, the men's around pubs. And it is in the pubs that the informal discussions take place, the explanations as to what is happening, the latest news, informations about meetings etc etc.

In the present situation this lesson must be learnt by the IRA. It is extremely important with regard to what is happening in the North at present that the women must be integrated much more into the struggle. Because we should be in no doubt that for all the "good intentions" of these women and the fact that they have stated quite clearly that they support and still need the IRA, this movement does act as a serious lever of pressure *against* the Republican movement.

THE DANGER AHEAD UNLESS ...

In the meantime, unless this lesson is learnt quickly by the IRA, the "peace" movement in all its confused forms will probably continue to grow. Certainly there was no place for the "Women Together" movement, but the response—albeit vague and ambiguous—to this latest movement in Derry and Belfast must be clearly understood. The people of Derry, sick and tired as they may be of the fighting, know they need and depend on the IRA; but unless the IRA itself realises that it cannot rely on the continued support of these people, particularly the women, if they do not give a clear explanation of what is happening in Ireland, then the peace movement could take on its own dynamic, and who knows in what direction it may go.

In the words of a leading activist, this movement represents "the *fear* of the people, not the *will* of the people."

Tessa van Gelderen

The existence of the minority "no-go" areas are an important factor in the present situation in Northern Ireland. To show what it is like living in one of the liberated communities, we reprint these extracts about Free Derry from an article in Time Out.

Families in the Catholic area are large—6 or 7 is average, 11 or 12 is no exception. The two or three bedroom houses are adapted as best they can be, with bunk beds and a constant battle for cleanliness and tidiness. The kids organise their own lives as far as possible: the eldest son of a friend of mine, a studious kid faced with A levels, met two other friends most nights and used a room in the comparatively empty house, in which one of the group lived, as a study.

Much of the life goes on, as they say, normally. Kids go to school, those people who have work go to it each morning. Those who collect the dole—and those who can venture outside the area without being picked up—collect it. I asked the headmaster of one of the nine schools in the area, Brother Egan of St. Peters Secondary (Boys), if he thought studies and attendance had suffered. He said there was little truancy, perhaps less than before the trouble. Studies suffered because of some lack of concentration, loss of sleep and a feeling in the older boys that they should be out "doing their bit".

HOUSING FINANCE BILL

Over the last few years house prices have rocketed and private landlords and property dealers have made a great deal of money. Council House rents have gone up steadily but have not given to the government the sort of rents gained on the private market.

The Housing Finance Bill brings Council House rents to the same rate as private housing and therefore means an end to subsidized housing except for those who qualify for the means tested rebate.

GENERAL ATTACK

When our capitalist economy is in trouble, governments attempt to solve their problems at the expense of the section who can least afford it—the working class. So we see policies from this government and the last Labour government which cut wage demands, increase unemployment, raise prices, and cut the social services. The Industrial Relations Act aims to prevent workers from gaining wage rises or even from keeping up with the cost of living. Unemployment is aimed to curb militancy and cut production costs. Price rises and cuts in social services make wage rises meaningless and further reduce living standards. The Housing Finance Bill is a particular heavy attack and more than any other price-rise or social service cut brings down the real wages of a large section of the working class.

SELECTIVE ATTACK

As well as doubling Council House rents over the next three years, this will enable private landlords of unfurnished property also to put up the rent to the "Fair Rent" level, i.e. valued according to steeply rising property prices. However people getting a mortgage to buy their own house who even before the Bill received nearly double the subsidy of Council House tenants, will continue to get that subsidy. This Bill is aimed only at people who live in council houses and other rented houses. The rent increases are bound to drive some Council House tenants from their homes, which in turn will increase house prices. The government aims to greatly reduce the number of council houses by the twin policies of ending the subsidy and encouraging tenants to buy their own houses. A smaller number of Council Houses at high rents means an increase in slum housing and homelessness.

Some families will qualify for a rebate but most people who are due for rebates do not claim. More important, the means test makes subsidized housing not a right but a charity hand-out. Through this bill the government is dividing tenants so that those who have to pay the full increase are cut off from those who do not—especially the unemployed and others on social security. Again a section of the working class are blamed for government policy, just as immigrants and strikers are made the scapegoat for unemployment, and high prices.

THE LABOUR PARTY

The Labour Party have opposed this bill in Parliament, but how much does this opposition mean? They have a record on housing which matches the Tories! In the 1964-70 Labour government a target of half million houses was set which would have only just kept pace with deteriorating houses and a growing population. But in their last year in government the number sank to 200,000 houses a year. It was the Labour Party who in their 1965 and 1968 Acts established the idea of "fair rents". Although many Labour Party supporters thought these Acts would protect tenants, in fact out of a sample of 1,000 cases brought before the rent tribunals, 500 rents went up, only about 100 went down and the rest stayed the same. The Labour Party were accepting as "fair" the rents produced by the rises in property prices. In other words a fair rent is on one which allows the property dealer and landlords to make more and more money on the property market.



NO HELP FROM THE LABOUR PARTY

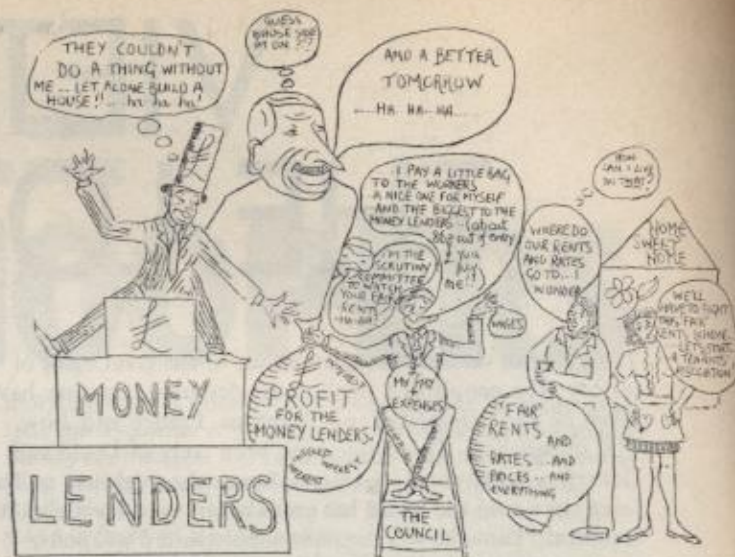
At local level Labour Councils have consistently put up council rents. They have to put up rents if they are to pay off the debts on Council Housing for Moneylenders get at least 16 shillings out of every pound paid in council rent. Thus in spite of occasional claims to be a socialist party, the Labour Party shows that it recognises the rights of profiteers. Tenants cannot expect help from the Labour Party since they administer the system as it is to the benefit of those who own and control property. However the Labour Party condemns the Tory Bill and has pledged itself to repeal the Bill when it comes to power. In fact they are not likely to radically alter the Bill even though many Labour M.P.s support subsidized housing. In office they will have to solve the same problems as the Tories. In a small number of areas (like Liverpool) Labour Councils have promised to refuse to implement the Law. This is against Labour Party (National) Policy because the Labour Party considers that political action should be confined to the ballot box. Thus whether it is the Industrial Relations Act or the Housing Finance Bill we must obey the "Law of the Land". However much we disagree with the law we must not take action against it.

TENANT'S ACTION

The Labour Party, then, are very much opposed to action by the tenants against the bill. In Preston the Socialist Woman Group and other groups organized tenants' committees to mobilize tenants on all the estates in Preston arguing that the only way to fight the Bill was through a refusal by tenants to pay the increase. We came up against a great deal of opposition from the Labour Party, even to the extent where their members were warned not to associate with Socialist Woman or the campaign. The Labour Party moved into each estate after we had held our meetings to take advantage of the ground-work we had done to gain electoral support and divert attention away from action by the tenants themselves. They continually told tenants that they would be evicted for non-payment of the increase and therefore greatly contributed to the collapse of the rent strike in its second week by discouraging and frightening tenants. This was at a time when they were about to take control of the Council and were in a position to promise no evictions. This was to be expected from a party which asks the working-class to delegate their power, and wishes to restrict political action to voting once every five years. The working class can make laws unworkable if it is not under the illusion that the Labour Party will radically change those laws. The only way this Bill can be defeated is through the action of tenants in refusing to pay rent increases and (if necessary) with the support of industrial action. To show that they will not accept *any* increase on the rent from *any* government, Labour or Tory.

*Cath Ryde, Marion Eves, Heather Read, Viv Varley
Preston S.W.G.*

THE FAIR RENTS SHOW



Bristol Socialist Woman Tenants Play.

[We are sorry not to have room to reprint the full text of Bristol Socialist Woman Group's play. The cartoon and following introduction set the stage. Bristol Group's address appears on the back cover for interested groups and individuals to contact them.]

Characters (left to right): **MONEYLENDER**, **HEATH** (and the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**), **COUNCIL HOUSE**, **RENT COLLECTOR**, **HUSBAND** (a Council worker), **WIFE**, and **NARRATOR** (who bangs the drum). Also needed: someone to hold up Heath.

Narrator: Ladies and Gentlemen, we are going to perform for your entertainment "The Fair Rents Show". Who bood?

Husband (entering stage from audience): I did, and I ain't afraid to say so. "Fair Rents"—that's a laugh!

Narrator: You haven't introduced yourself.

Husband: Oh, haven't I? Well, I live in a Council House—like most people here—and I work for the Council. (His wife appears at his side.) And this here's my wife.

Wife: How do you do? I have a hard time making ends meet as it is—what with this Fair Rents and everything—I don't know what we shall do.

Narrator: Meet the Government—Mr. Heath!

Heath: Pleased to meet you.

Narrator: Now, that gentleman you see who is climbing up the ladder is the Moneylender—what's he doing in our play?

Moneylender: Making money in the usual way.

Narrator: How do you do that, my friend?

Moneylender: By lending money to the Council at a handsome interest rate.

(Council House appears.)

Council House: At your service.

Narrator: Out of every pound you pay in rent, 84 pence or so goes to repay this gent. And now! One more character and the play's complete:
The Rent Collector—who you all love to meet!

(Rent collector bows.)

THE FAIR RENTS SHOW!

A sunny Saturday morning in Hartcliffe's shopping centre—a square of about a dozen shops—a crowd getting in the weekend food. Enter a procession carrying moneybags, a moneylender's ladder (from which he can peer down at us masses), a "Council House", a top hat and a pretty painted screen called "Home, Sweet Home". It's us, Socialist Woman, gathering an audience for our "Fair Rents Show", like the Pied Piper, whistles, drums and all.

Hartcliffe and Withywood form one enormous council estate belt, covering an area about as big as a medium-sized town (e.g. Bridgewater). It takes a long, expensive bus journey to get there from the centre of Bristol, and once there you are without a single cafe, cinema or other social amenity—except schools and one Community Hall. But there are houses, and tenants, and every single one of these is going to be affected by the Government's latest Big Deal for Housing, with a £1 rise in rents next October for a first taste of "fairness". We brought along our street play to draw attention to this and other consequences of the new Bill, following it up with leaflets and meetings, discussing the Fair Deal for Housing and how a Tenants Association could be formed.

We decided that in Hartcliffe's case, the best way to start a Tenants Association would be to build from the ground upwards, through street committees or blocks of flats' organisations, and coordinating these with area committees, and finally, with the whole Tenants' Association. So far, we have worked in a small area in which two blocks of flats and two streets are forming themselves into committees, a feat accomplished by the hard work of a few tenants who went around, sometimes with a Socialist Woman member, simply knocking on doors and asking their neighbours whether they knew about the Fair Deal in Housing and were interested in joining a Tenants Association to fight it. Incidentally, we found that the most committed and militant tenants were women. We are now issuing membership cards, and together with more publicity (performing the play to other areas, leafletting, etc.) and cooperation with other Tenants Associations, we are confident that, from small beginnings, the movement will snowball. For an area as large as Hartcliffe and Withywood, there is no easy way and no short cuts.

A few important points: it is the tenants' own organisation. Socialist Woman offers help, such as propaganda leaflets, the play, information, but that's all. Secondly, militant action by just a few houses or streets would be easily picked off—so no rents or rates strikes until we have such a strong movement that people are asking—"Whose bloody houses are these, anyway?"

—NOT A PENNY ON THE RENTS!

VIETNAM THE LONG WAR

The Vietnam war will go down as one of the great epics of history. The people of a small under-developed country have taken on and defeated in turn Japanese, French and, now, U.S. imperialism. The struggle has been truly of David and Goliath proportions. U.S. imperialism is the mightiest military force the world has ever known—yet despite all its technical “know-how”, the most sophisticated weapons, hundreds of thousands of armed men and the use of most inhuman methods it has been quite unable to beat the Vietnamese peasantry and their armed vanguard.

Of course, capitalist propaganda tries to paint a different picture: the Americans are merely trying to save South Vietnam from the aggressors of the North, it claims. They seek to “save” the south in a very strange way: by turning whole areas of what is normally the most lush vegetation in the world into desert, by bombing to the ground hundreds of towns and villages and by putting millions of people into re-settlement areas which are remarkably like huge concentration camps.

The North Vietnamese and NLF have been able to run rings round the Americans for one basic reason: they have combined a struggle for national independence with a social revolution. The social revolution has consisted of destroying the old landlord system, which brutally exploited the mass of Vietnamese peasantry, and the socialisation of what large industry there is in the liberated zones and the North. While the Vietnamese liberation forces have not created organs of mass workers and peasants democracy, there are innumerable committees organising people in the streets, farm cooperatives, factories, etc. This gives the revolutionary armies very deep roots in the people. This is the basis of the guerrilla armies of the NLF. This is why the army of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (the North) has inflicted such huge defeats on the Saigon forces in recent months.

The dragging out of the Vietnam war and the growing anti-war movement (the most important aspect of which has been its development in the army) forced the U.S. administration to go in for “Vietnamisation”. This policy consists of the Americans gradually withdrawing their *land* forces (whilst stepping up bombing, etc.) and handing over land fighting to the puppet forces of Thieu. This policy has been a complete failure as the military events of the last period have shown—areas populated by millions of Vietnamese have been liberated because the puppet army virtually fell to pieces.

The American response was typical—the resumed bombing of the north. This is difficult to imagine in Britain. The blitz, which some of us can remember, pales into insignificance by its side. Only the atom bombing of Japan has involved the use of a comparable explosive power. The bombing is not aimed primarily to effect the military struggle. The Americans have learnt that they cannot win the war on the ground that way. It is aimed to lay North Vietnam waste so that pressure is put on the Vietnamese leaders to call off the struggle in the south. Thus its targets are not primarily military—they are the factories, the dams, the hydroelectric plants, the houses, hospitals and even schools. This is why the Americans have

introduced plastic fragmentation bombs—these being designed to make proper medical treatment impossible because X-rays cannot detect plastic. This bombing has a wider aim: to teach the peoples of the world the price of defying US imperialism.

However, there is little reason to think that the Americans will succeed in this—the Vietnamese have fought too long to be intimidated just now and even if they wanted the leaders of the North would have the greatest difficulty in getting the huge numbers of armed peasants in the south to lay down their arms. But having said this, we need to do what we can to solidarise ourselves with the Vietnamese people.

In trade union struggles, student struggles and women's liberation struggles we have learnt that unity is strength. It is the same in the international struggle against capitalism. It was the fight of the Vietnamese people (along with that of the Cubans, Chinese, Koreans, etc.) which stimulated the growth of the radical youth movements in the west, (these in turn laid the basis for the start of such things as the women's liberation movement). The anti-imperialist movements of the west have helped the Vietnamese too—apart from the effect on morale, these struggles have helped to build the anti-war movement in the US army.

There is another more pressing reason for us to continue with solidarity activities. The main danger to the struggle of the Vietnamese people now comes from the pressure being put upon them to make a compromise by the leaders of Russia and China. This is why Nixon went to Peking and Moscow. If anyone doubts that the Russian and Chinese leaders are working for a compromise—let them remember the way Nixon was toasted as “a great representative of the American people”, in Peking and Moscow at exactly the time he stepped up the war in Indo China. The Vietnamese have painful memories of being persuaded to make compromises. They had actually liberated nearly all of Vietnam in 1954, but the Vietminh army withdrew to the North. They were promised elections to unify the country (which Eisenhower said Ho Chi Minh would win with 90% of the votes), instead landlordism was re-imposed in the South and the Americans stepped in to put down the peasant revolts against landlord brutality.

This is why it is necessary to have a clear political line—for victory of the Indo Chinese people against US imperialism. It is totally inadequate just to call for peace—Nixon would like peace! But there are different kinds of peace. We must support the kind of peace the Vietnamese people want—one in which they are able to re-build their country without imperialist interference. We do not call for peace in a strike—we proclaim our solidarity with the strikers. We want them to win and we tell the world that because that is the best line to take. It is the same principle in the Vietnam war—by going on the streets saying that we stand for victory for the Vietnamese revolution we make it harder for the Russian and Chinese leaders to force a compromise. By taking the solidarity line we best explain to people the real nature of the war—this not only helps the Vietnamese, it also helps us to build a revolutionary movement.

S.S. = STATE SNOOPERS

WOMEN AND THE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM

The fundamental role of women in bourgeois society as appendages of men, and in particular their role within the family is reinforced throughout the labyrinth of laws, rules and regulations related to claiming benefit in our so-called welfare state. But it is most evident in the way that the Cohabitation rule has been formulated and ruthlessly applied.

The Secretary of State for Social Security recently defended the increase in the number of special investigators employed by the SS in order to "safeguard public funds". It is interesting in this respect to note that between 1960 and 1969 113,161 people were forced to pay back £152,577,038 to the Exchequer after evading taxes but there were only 1,240 criminal proceedings on these grounds for the same period. While every year around 25,000 people are "investigated" by the SS and 7,000 prosecuted for paltry amounts (it is impossible to get anything that could be called substantial out of the SS).

WOMEN—THE WEAK LINK

The point being, of course, that SS policy is part of the overall method by which the working class is being whipped into line by the capitalist state. And women are the weak link at which the SS are striking hardest. Unsupported mothers are harassed from all angles. If the woman is pregnant and unmarried they will bug her to name the father and force maintenance (if she succumbs to their pressure she is then forced to endure unbelievable humiliation in order to prove the paternity "charge"). A mother whose children have reached school age is then pressured to go out to work even though she might be worse off this way with the very low wages that the average woman earns, and so on and then we get the vicious cohabitation rule. The main weapon used in this battle is ignorance. The SS investigators snoop and spy for a short period and then barge into the house, confront the woman with the "evidence" of a man's presence, convince her that this is cohabitation and confiscate her order book. Most women, ignorant of the fact that sleeping with a man has nothing whatsoever to do with cohabitation, flustered by the pressures of bourgeois morality, accept this judgement and are left penniless with children to feed and rent to pay.

NO MORAL JUDGMENT!

It is important that the Claimants Unions and Socialist Woman Groups wherever possible inform women that it is possible to fight this. The question is not one of

morality—that is nobody's business. It must be made clear that the Victorian concept that sex involves an exchange of money is nonsense. CU's around the country have successfully brought many cases to the Appeals Tribunals. In itself this is a very hard thing for many women to do. To stand in front of a court and say, "Yes this man is my lover but he doesn't pay me for it", is not easy for many women. But with support from other women and claimants it will be easier.

Needless to say very few unsupported fathers are victims of this type of harassment, yet.* In fact unsupported fathers are entitled to a grant for a housekeeper, even if they are unemployed. Needless to say no woman receives such a grant. It is a ludicrous situation that two single people sharing a flat are 1.15 per week better off than a married couple. A man claims and it is the woman that is always the dependent. The fact is that women are treated within the framework of an assigned role in the nuclear family. The SS is determined to perpetuate the idea that women belong in their homes mothering children, (unless it suits them to send her out as cheap labour), and permanently cast in the role of dependent of some man or other.

The Manchester Claimants Union have produced a very useful *Unsupported Mothers Handbook*, which is a great help for women alone with children. Some cardinal rules should always be remembered by all claimants:

NEVER FACE THE SS ALONE—JOIN OR FORM A LOCAL CLAIMANTS UNION

DO NOT ADMIT THEM TO YOUR HOME WITHOUT AN APPOINTMENT

IF THEY CONFISCATE YOUR ORDER BOOK—APPEAL

FILE A NEW CLAIM IMMEDIATELY

* Editorial Note: A recent news item stated that men receiving supplementary benefit will also come under the "cohabitation" rule. It is interesting to note that gay couples are to be excluded—the State obviously does not recognise such relationships!

NEWS ITEM—Discrimination in the E.E.C.

A recent report sponsored by the European Commission examines social and economic discrimination against women in the six countries of the E.E.C. Although the Rome Treaty supports the principle of equal pay for equal work, it is *not* respected in *any* one of these countries. Thus although there are variations in detail from one country to another, throughout the E.E.C. at *every* level women receive *less* pay than men, and in the industries dominated by women, the salaries of *skilled female workers* are *lower* than for *unskilled jobs* in industries where men predominate.

WOMEN AND THE UNIONS

Pat Sturdy and the women who formed the Women's Industrial Union (W.I.U.) in Lucas, Burnley, last May are now going into the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (A.U.E.W.) after being in existence for just over a year as a separate autonomous organisation.

Briefly, what has happened over the past year is that the W.I.U. received varying degrees of sympathy from other women trade unionists, but very few of these women actually joined. For women, without much experience of struggle, who don't think much of or about the Union, the prospect of just joining another sort of Union, albeit a women's Union, would not be very attractive. More militant industrial women, with some Trade Union experience would see what they had gained as part of the working-class struggle through the established Unions and be rather sceptical of a breakaway Union. As I outlined in *Socialist Woman* 1, 1972, I think that underlying this is a theoretical mistake; certainly the Unions are bureaucratic, non-democratic, male-dominated, but this is a result of the function that Trade Unions have played in relation to capital in our society over a long period of time. While the exploitation of women is part of the way in which the ruling class exploits all working-class people, it follows that their struggle against their exploitation must be part of the whole working-class struggle in the Unions. Bureaucracy and male-domination of the Unions is just one problem amongst many that faces workers. The W.I.U. women have learned this in practice. Their experience also rather knocks on the head the idea in *Women's Liberation*—that women should opt out of the Trade Unions, because working people's struggles are somehow outside the Unions (see Selma Jones—"What is not to be done"). Her arguments are based on a confusion between the Union's rank-and-file and the union official leadership. While we are all quite well aware that the Unions are bureaucratic it does not at all follow that the Union equals the Union officials and that the rank-and-file in struggle are outside the Union. Precisely the workers are more effectively able to go into militant action because they are strongly unionised. Although Pat Sturdy does have more faith in the more democratic and militant A.U.E.W. than in the General Municipal Workers' Union (G.&M.W.U.) she is unlikely to find that the interests of the officials in the A.U.E.W. often coincide with those of the rank-and-file.

The perspective that the Burnley women now have for the future is that of developing women's industrial groups within the A.U.E.W., organised a programme demanding equal pay, job opportunities, nursery facilities etc. Mrs Sturdy is proposing to the A.U.E.W. that the women should have a Women's Industrial Section within it, based on groups like hers in different areas. Mrs. Sturdy is currently drawing up a manifesto for her group declaring the central aims—to campaign for equal pay, and nurseries, which she is keen to distribute to other A.U.E.W. plants. She is also preparing to speak to other sections of women about her organisation to encourage them to do the same.

Already many improvements have been made in Lucas; in a recent dispute concerning women they were backed by the

men workers and under threat of strike action the matter was settled within hours.

I think it is clear that it is only in this way, by women organising themselves around the issues that particularly affect them as women but through the working-class organisations that exist, that women will challenge their oppression. If, for instance, men and women workers are involved in a factory occupation the natural tendency will be for women to adopt their normal roles in relation to men within the struggle i.e. they'll do the cooking, look after the children etc. while the men make all the decisions and do the organising. At the same time one of the objectives of the strike could be Equal Pay for Women! The men will support it and fight "for" the women; perhaps in the end it will be thrown out in negotiation as a concession. But if women begin to organise themselves to make sure the equal pay demand doesn't "get lost"—who will look after the children while they're at meetings? Women are then beginning to challenge their oppression as women as well as—as workers. When they begin to discuss amongst themselves they might well ask why they are worth less than men in the first place, why they don't get the chance to train for the better-paid skilled jobs etc., and thus the whole spectrum of women's oppression is raised. It will then become a political issue, instead of being a few words in the mouths of male Trade Unionists and Union officials.

While this kind of organisation is absolutely progressive in principle we only have to look around at the sorts of struggles that have taken place around equal pay, at the progress (or lack of it) that has been made towards equal pay to see why it is so necessary. These struggles have been fragmented, breaking out here and there, many occurring in the engineering Union, because of its policy to fight for three demands, more money (including moves towards equal pay), longer holidays and a shorter working week, at local level. Some progress has been made in various Unions with a comparatively large female membership, e.g. in some sections of Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) and so on. But the progress depends to an overwhelming extent on the women involved (or not involved). There is some pressure within USDAW, and the A.U.E.W. cannot really ignore the question of equal pay. But nowhere is there a systematic means of organising the campaign; National Joint Action Committee Campaign for Women Equal Rights (NJACCWER) died and with it the coordinated rank-and-file support for equal pay, and other demands. Since it is only when women themselves begin to organise that they are going to make gains, the Burnley women's move may have a great deal of significance.

If the industrial groups develop, as I think they should, they could have a marked effect on Women's Liberation Groups, male Trade Unionists and the revolutionary left. Women's liberation will find it less easy to argue against work in the Trade Unions. As Pat Sturdy says, the abortion issue is important but not central to working class women at the moment, a statement with which we in *Socialist Woman* Groups would agree. Some abortion campaigners might begin

to think the same thing for themselves. A very important part of any work around the issue of women's oppression is the effect we have on men. I think on the whole male unionists will sympathise with the industrial group since any militant will support another; they will perhaps begin to understand more about the oppression of women and see that they have interests in common. Lastly we can show that as part of revolutionary left politics the issue of women's oppression is not a side-issue of secondary importance, but an integral element in every working-class struggle.

The Lucas women hope that the idea of women's industrial groups will spread within the A.U.E.W. and there does seem to be a reasonable basis for its development, now that there is the example of what can be done and what has been achieved in Lucas. The main areas which would be most receptive to the idea would be:-

- 1) In factories where there are women in the A.U.E.W.
- 2) Where there are already militant groups of women unionists, perhaps in the tobacco industry.
- 3) Where militant struggles are happening, e.g. in the A.U.E.W. occupations in Manchester.

When such a group forms, for instance in a factory where some women are in the A.U.E.W., it would provide a stimulus for other women workers in the factory in another Union to do the same thing. There would then be a basis for forming a committee of women from each Union to organise the struggle for women's demands within the factory; they would demand equal women's representation on shop stewards committees,

coordinate demands for equal pay, coordinate proposals for Union branches to put pressure on the local Trades Council to support women's rights etc., and in the process develop women's ability to speak, organise, and fully participate in their Trade Union raising the demands of the rank-and-file women.

While the implication of the formation of women's industrial groups is political i.e. by implication acknowledges the oppression of women, the main criterion for their effectiveness will be how much active grass-root participation and control there is. If they don't become part of an on-going active struggle for women's rights they will degenerate and may possibly be subject to any kind of leadership that can be bought off by the Trade Union bureaucrats.

So the job for Socialist Woman Groups is to help the formation of Women's Industrial Groups, encourage them to meet regularly, coordinate the work of different areas, and especially to agitate in them around the political issues of women's oppression and their relationship to the whole class struggle. In the Lancaster and Preston Socialist Woman Groups we hope to work with Pat Sturdy in the initial stages. In the meantime I hope SWG's throughout the country will discuss this issue so that in the shortest possible time we can use our national organisation to its fullest advantage in hoping to set up more W.I.Gs.

Nina Thomas
Lancaster Socialist Woman Group



GAY LIBERATION

Any form of society which has exhausted its progressive role can in the long run only be maintained if the people who live in it accept an ideology which justifies its continued existence, and so fail to see that their real interest lies in overthrowing it in favour of a more rational system. This is the case with capitalism.

THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY

One of the most effective ways by which people are confused into thinking that capitalism is the only possible way of life is through the ideology of the family and the relations between women, men and children (which are presented as 'natural', 'right', and 'normal') associated with this. It is very difficult then for anyone who learns these relations from the moment of birth to think outside this framework.

Attempts to challenge the ideology associated with the family system of relationships between people have been made to a varying degree by the youth movements and the women's movements. Another challenge is now being presented by the Gay Liberation Front who very explicitly demand an end to social and legal oppression of people who do not fit into the 'normal' heterosexual categories accepted by this society.

However, the family must not be identified as the source and cause of oppression. The recent analysis of radical feminist writers e.g. Greer, Mitchell, that the family is the pillar of class society, implies that to attack the family is to attack the very core of capitalism. The family is the social unit within which people experience their lives and which expresses and reinforces the repressive nature of society. The family is essentially a social grouping and thus adapts to the prevailing economic conditions. The ideas, then, which develop in support of the family give it an aura of autonomy, permanency and inevitability which it does not possess.

GAY LIBERATION+ WOMEN'S LIBERATION

The London Gay Liberation Front has been formed for about 18 months and there is still no clear support from either left women's organisations or the left in general. Gay Liberation and Women's Liberation are fighting the same oppressive ideology. They have common aims: to create a society where people can live without the exploitation and distortions of capitalism which women and gay people experience more than heterosexual men due to the phenomenon of sexism. We must organise on the basis of our oppression and recognise the need for other groups to do this.

The oppression of gay people starts in capitalist society's smallest social unit—the patriarchal family in which the enshrinement of the stereotype 'male', 'female' sex roles offers no place for gay people. G.L.F. fights alongside the women's movement for the abolition of the family so that the sexist, male-supremacist system can no longer be nurtured there. This is a sexist society in which one's biological sex determines almost all of what one does. Gay women having none of the ties of sexual dependence on men are perceived as a threat in a man's world.

GAY ACTIVISM OR GAY LIBERATION?

The first stages of gay liberation of coming out, coming together, and learning to overcome self-hate, are now well-organised. G.L.F. must work out what changes are necessary

for liberation and must develop a practice along these lines. Two paths are open: gay activism or gay liberation. Activism is when gay males seek their full share of male privilege; social equality for homosexuals within a society based on male-supremacy. Gay Liberation fights to end male-supremacy and the whole gender role system. The London G.L.F. Manifesto relates gay oppression to the oppression of women and sees the gender role system as the common basis of both. Transvestites are seen to be an important factor in the gender role system. They do not attempt to fit into a particular role; male transvestites reject in a dramatic way all rights to male privileges. We should be free to develop with greater individuality, and to do this the stereotype sex roles must be smashed. Many people are alarmed at attacks on gender roles and only see chaos or total conformity as a result. As far as we can see there would be greater individuality and more freedom for experimentation. By openly rejecting the roles of oppressor and oppressed, gay women and men fundamentally challenge the sexual chauvinism that capitalism uses to divide the working class.

THE LEFT AND GAY LIBERATION

A consensus has not yet been reached within G.L.F. concerning the left movements. The attitudes vary from "we should put our energies primarily into changing sexual attitudes" to a belief that a radical change in sexuality is only possible after the downfall of the economic structure and this cannot be achieved by changing people's sexual attitudes first, others think that both struggles should be carried on simultaneously, i.e. by working in a left group with a total revolutionary perspective. The left cannot be the saviour of G.L.F. for the bourgeois ideology concerning women also extends into the revolutionary movement and male chauvinism has found very blatant expression in the marxist movement at various periods.

Without their own organisation gay people would not have the confidence to 'come out' even in left organisations. The lack of support for Gay Liberation is indicative of the general lack of understanding of the way sexism (like racism) is used to divide the working class both ideologically (through male chauvinism) and organisationally (through the family). We should support the Gay Liberation Front on exactly the same basis that we support all groups fighting against the bourgeoisie and its ideology. We are not just fighting an economic system; ideological oppression is just as real as economic oppression. There is a danger that the left may look upon minority group struggles economically and therefore disregard movements like Gay Liberation because it has no specific economic roots or else it will regard them merely as a recruiting ground. G.L.F. is fighting an ideological oppression which unless drawn into the general struggle is relatively meaningless and in the final analysis is doomed to failure.

THE WORK TO BE DONE BY SWGs

In the Manifesto adopted by the Socialist Woman Groups at their Conference this year it was agreed that one of our aims should be: "an end to sexual repression and exploitation . . . including recognition of the rights of gay people". We have still to work out in detail the relationship between this kind of oppression—that of homosexual people in particular and sexual oppression in general, the overall social and economic structure of society, and how the fight for gay liberation can relate on a practical level in the struggle to overthrow capitalism. We hope that further contributions to the discussion will be made in future issues of Socialist Woman.

S W MANIFESTO

(adopted by the national conference of the Socialist Woman Groups, 1972).

We think that women cannot be liberated in a society such as this where class divisions distort all relationships between people. So by the liberation of women we do not mean the equality of women with men in the present set-up, as this could only mean "an equal chance to be unequal" (for some to be wealthy and some to be poor, for some to be managing directors and some to be workers).

The only way to change this society for a better one is through a working class revolution, and this must involve women and men. A socialist revolution would end the exploitation of men and women workers for the profit of the employing class, and would create the possibility of ending all oppression such as that experienced by women. The ending of this present system of production for profit could release the necessary resources to provide the full range of educational, social and medical services which will be needed to support the liberation of women. But for this possibility to be realised women must play a full part in the development of a socialist society.

In present society all women are to some extent oppressed, but working class women are one of the most oppressed sections of society, oppressed because of their class and because of their sex. At the same time, because of their position of dependence and isolation in the family, women are often the upholders of traditional values and behave in a reactionary way. To break out of this situation women need to organise themselves, to discuss and clarify their understanding of the subordination of women, and to begin to act to change things. The need for this is made greater both by the lack of understanding among male trade unionists who do not see that the subordination of women (which seems to give them some immediate advantages) is used to make divisions within the working class, setting male workers against female workers, housewives against trade unionists. And also within most socialist groups the question of women's liberation has been neglected, ignored or dismissed as irrelevant.

We see *Socialist Woman Groups* as a way of organising against the oppression of women at the present time. We give priority to the struggles of working class women, both as the most oppressed and as those in potentially the strongest position to organise against the central economic basis of women's oppression in this society.

To begin to challenge the present situation we raise the following demands:

EQUAL ECONOMIC RIGHTS—END DISCRIMINATION IN JOBS, SOCIAL SECURITY AND THE LAW

- Equal pay and equal work: an end to low pay
- Work or full maintenance, regardless of marital status
- No discrimination against women in social services and benefits—no strings.

EQUAL CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS

- Social provision for children—free 24-hour childcare facilities controlled by the community
- Equal education and training

END TO SEXUAL REPRESSION AND EXPLOITATION,

- The right to choose whether or not to have children: free contraception and abortion on demand
- The right to a standard of living to make this a real choice: adequate housing, income (wage or social security), childcare facilities (schools, playgrounds)
- An end to the presentation of women as passive sexual objects
- Recognition of the rights of gay people

And above all we are working for:

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND SOLIDARITY—AN END TO ALL DIVISIONS IN THE WORKING CLASS

- Working class support for women's rights
- Full unionisation of women and their full participation in unions; democratisation of the unions
- An end to discrimination on grounds of sex, race or religion
- No redundancies or unemployment: we must be clear this includes women
- Support for women involved in working class struggles—for better pay and conditions, greater control over conditions of work including job evaluation; and to widen these: women on strike, wives of strikers, community struggles,
- The development of class consciousness and a revolutionary socialist perspective in the women's movement.

Conditions of membership

Membership of a Socialist Woman Group involves:

1. General agreement with the political basis of the Socialist Woman Groups as expressed in the Manifesto.
2. Acceptance of responsibility for sharing in the work of the Group, both discussions and activities.
3. Regular attendance at meetings (difficulties should be discussed with the Group).
4. Financial contributions to maintain the Group's activities (amount to be decided by the Group).
5. Agreement to support, sell and if possible write for, the paper *Socialist Woman*.

SWG's

BIRMINGHAM: Sandra Cooper, 72 Cambridge Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham 14.

BRISTOL: Viv Prior, 7 Ravenswood Road, Redland, Bristol 6.

***BOLTON:** Joy Leman, 6 Mornington Road, Bolton.

CANTERBURY: Liz Lawrence, Darwin College, University of Kent, Canterbury.

***CARDIFF:** Sue Lukes, 92 Llandaff Road, Cantons, CF1 9NN.

***CHORLEY:** Cath Young, c/o Chorley College, Chorley, Lancs.

***COLCHESTER:** Celia Pugh, c/o 16 Church Hill, Rowhedge, Essex.

***COVENTRY:** Maureen Draper, c/o 27 Paynes Lane, Hillfields, Coventry, CV1 4BH.

GLASGOW: Shelley Charlesworth, 61 Fergus Drive, Glasgow N.W.

***KEELE:** Nicola Charles, Students Union, Keele University, Keele, Staffs. ST5 5BG.

***KINGSTON:** Jane Cullen, 61 Kings Road, Kingston, Surrey.

LANCASTER: Margaret Coulson, 35 West Road, Lancaster.

***LEEDS:** Val Jones, 69 Bagby Road, Leeds 2.

LEICESTER: Jean Holman, 7 College Street, Leicester.

LONDON (North & Central): Pat Masters, 182 Pentonville Road, London N.1 (340 7031).

LONDON (West): Leonora Lloyd, 40 Inverness Road, Southall, Middlesex. (574 7407)

MANCHESTER: Sheila Cohen, 43 Brantingham Road, Whalley Range, Manchester 16.

NORWICH: Rhona Ball, 140 Earlham Road, Norwich.

***OXFORD:** Hilary Wainwright, St. Anthony's College, Oxford.

PRESTON: Kath Ryde, 246 Leyland Road, Penwortham, Preston.

READING: Carolyn Rice, c/o 50 Basingstoke Road, Reading.

SHEFFIELD: Catherine Cirket, 7 Bannan Street, Sheffield S6 3GE.

***STAFFORD:** Hilary Wykes, 3 Slessor Road, Beaconside, Stafford.

WATFORD: Leslie Richardson, 111 Frankland Road, Croxley Green, Rickmansworth, Herts.

WELWYN GARDEN CITY: Val Peterson, 76 High Street, Kimpton, Herts.

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

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

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, Jacky Freeman, Leonora Lloyd, Roberta Manners, Wanda Mariuszko, Pat Masters, Vicky Robinson, Linda Smith, Felicity Trodd.

DESIGNER: Ruth Prentice

Signed articles do not necessarily represent editorial opinion.

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

Name

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Occupation

Send to: **SOCIALIST WOMAN SUBS,**
c/o Pat Masters, Flat 3, 20 Queens Gardens,
London W.2.

Sub. Rates: Britain 50p; overseas 60p (\$1.60); per year (6 issues). Single copies: Britain 8p; overseas 10p (26c). Write for airmail rates.

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

WLM 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.