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Editorial

In some towns recently we had the disturbing sight of ordinary women joining racist marches through the shopping centres. Disturbing, because these organisations are no friend to the working class woman. They are using her, playing on her worries and insecurity, to give a respectable front to their Nazi ideas.

SCAPEGOAT

Women are anxious about the daily struggle to make ends meet, and worried about the future. It seems commonsense that if only there weren't so many people there'd be more to go round. And the people easily identified as 'having no reason to be here' are black people.

But the problems are not created by immigrants. They are caused by capitalism itself, a system where incomes are distributed very unfairly. The wealth produced by the working class does not go to improve the life of the whole community, but is sucked into the profit-making machine, and provides a luxurious way of life for the very few. In Britain, 1 per cent of the population own 80 per cent of the wealth. If we want to end poverty, homelessness and unemployment, our hatred should not be directed at black workers, but at those fat parasites who thrive on the misfortunes of the mass of the people. The understandable fears of ordinary women are exploited by the very politicians who know so well the real cause of the trouble. *It is the Tories* who have let prices reach ridiculous heights, unemployment go over the million, who spend £2,000 million on 'defence', but economise on pensions and kids' school milk. They are keen to make black people the scapegoat. While the evils of capitalist society can be blamed on 'the immigrants' maybe people won't realise who is really responsible.

THE NUMBERS GAME

'But aren't there too many of them?' Out of 56 million people in Britain, two million are coloured. Thousands of white workers come from Europe, and they haven't made great problems. And the

Tory Immigration Act, although it laid down all sorts of restrictions to make it hard for black people to enter Britain, made it *theoretically* possible for 20 million white people from the Commonwealth to arrive here quite legally! Even the most right-wing politician knows that the problem is nothing to do with how many people come into this country. Their control is not concerned with numbers—it is a blatant colour bar, and encourages racial discrimination against black people already here.

People are often suspicious of anyone who talks differently, comes from another background. Prejudice exists even against people from another town, and it is deeper when strangers can be picked out easily by the colour of their skin. But that is not in itself racialism.

Racialism is the belief that another set of people are inferior, different, somehow not capable of thinking and feeling like we do.

And this racialism is not 'natural'. It has been deliberately fostered over the last 200 years. The roots of racialism lie in Britain's past. To justify their brutality and exploitation of black people in the colonies and the theft of their land and raw materials, the ruling class convinced the ordinary British workers that the blacks were savages, of low intelligence, they were even supposed to have needed the white man. They were never 'people', they were 'the natives'. School books, novels and films strengthened this idea. We were never told of the complex societies that had existed for centuries in India and Africa before the white man set foot there.

Much of the wealth of the United States was paid for by the blood and lives of black men and women, dragged from their homes in Africa, and shipped like cattle to work as slaves on the plantations. And British businessmen too made fortunes out of the slave trade. They had to justify it somehow. White people simply had to be convinced that blacks were not human, otherwise such barbaric treatment of our

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fellow beings could not have been tolerated.

THREATENED

Why do women seem particularly susceptible to anti-black propaganda. For a start, a lot of racist lies have sexual implications. Blacks are 'like animals', 'Can't keep their hands off white women'. And if all else fails, 'How would you like your daughter to marry one?' Remarks like this, with their threatening undertones of attack and rape, stick in women's minds.

The housewife's preoccupation with the home and family, her role in life, tend to make her narrow, afraid of change, threatened by anything different. She doesn't have the chance, as men do, to put things into a wider perspective. This probably also contributes to why so many working class women vote Conservative!

If you're out at work, it broadens your outlook. In dispute after dispute, black and white women soon submerge their differences in the battle for better wages. Some people very quickly realise that the enemy is not the black worker next to you—it's the boss who's making money out of you both. In Birmingham during the building workers' strike, hundreds of strikers broke up a racist march against the Ugandan Asians. The reason was simple. On the picket line, black and white building workers were side by side, their interests were the same.

And they knew that organisations which use racialism to divide the working class today, will go on to denounce socialists and trade unionists tomorrow. That is what happened in Hitler's Germany.

It is sad that women are taken in by the racialists, because we suffer from a sort of 'racial discrimination' ourselves. We hear that women are not very intelligent, cannot take responsibility, are inferior to men. And this is used as a way to keep us in our place, an excuse to pay us less at work, and to set men and women blaming each other for our unhappy society.

Prejudice and discrimination against black people, as against women, works to the advantage of the ruling class. While working class people are divided against each other, we do not look for the real reasons why there is so much misery in the world.

'But isn't it better to stick to your own kind?' Some black people believe this too, and then they are accused of 'not integrating'. Socialists say that 'your own kind' are other working people, no matter what colour they are. The ones we have nothing in common with, the ones who are different from us, are the bosses and the moneylenders and their Tory Government.

Look at the woman you see in the supermarket. She might be Irish, West Indian, Greek, Pakistani. Getting her groceries, worrying about money, trying to bring her family up decently. She goes home to wash-up, make the beds, get the dinner

ready—just like you. Compare her with the wife of a politician or industrialist, with her luxurious home, au pair girls and a cleaning woman. Cooking is 'fun' for her because she only does it when she's 'entertaining'; expensive holidays, her own car, and more money to spend on make-up than you have to spend on food. *Which of these women faces the same problems as you? Has it really got anything to do with nationality or colour?*

News

CO-OPS STRIKE

WOMAN'S VOICE has been saying that there are increasing signs of militancy among women at work. Coop's in Wigan is an example. In the 34 years that Jimmy Hilton, the works convenor, had been in this factory, which is part of the Dunn's ready-to-wear firm, there had never been a strike. Conditions in the factory, which dates from the 19th century, are grim. A girl describes it, 'The atmosphere at work is horrible. The management have the supervisors and floor managers brain-washed, and they are always threatening and bullying. Some of us have got used to it and give back as good as we get, so they mostly take it out on the trainees.'

Constant speed-up has been a feature. Rooms are overcrowded and badly ventilated. Gangways are very narrow. One girl said if there was ever a fire, she was certain lots of workers would get burnt. The truck that fetches work round vibrates so much you have to stop sewing as it goes by. A shop steward called the Factory Inspector in to see about the overcrowding, and the high temperatures (up to 82 degrees on some summer days). The Factory Inspector said they could 'do with another form and ashtray in the toilet'. It turned out she was a good friend of the personnel manager.

Then on bank holiday Monday, management tried to dismiss Jimmy Hilton for the time-saving method of cutting two pieces of cloth at once—an infringement of the rules laid down by management. The rest of the cutting room stopped work. By Tuesday over 300 workers, mainly women, had joined the action and voted to stop work till Jimmy was reinstated.

On Wednesday a mass meeting of all workers overflowed the local Labour Club and had to be held outside. A considerable section of older women and young trainees opposed further action. The official from the Tailoring and Garment Workers Union asked the meeting to divide into two groups to decide whether action would continue. It was a narrow majority for the militants. They reaffirmed that they would stay out till their works convenor was reinstated. And they booed and catcalled as the rest marched back to work.

Management offered eventually to reinstate, but on condition that Jimmy took a job in the warehouse, and did not continue as works convenor. Shop stewards argued that it was up to *them* to elect their convenor and demanded that he be reconsidered for his job in the cutting room after Christmas. *Management agreed* For most of the girls, the success they achieved made them most enthusiastic.

One shop steward said, 'The management will not be able to get away with things now, like they have in the past. This is not the end of it, it's just the beginning. They are going to have more trouble over the next six months than they have had the past thirty years. This strike made things clearer for many of the girls, and they now understand more about being in the union.'

Certainly if the enthusiasm is maintained, there are many improvements to be made. Who knows, they may even win over the ones who wouldn't strike last time. Apparently, it's them who do most of the moaning now.



FAMILY ALLOWANCES

We are hearing a lot about the Tories' fantastic new tax scheme. Of one thing we can be certain. For all their shouting, it will *not* do much for the poor. Even during times of prosperity the Tories did nothing for the poorer-paid or pensioners, and they are certainly not going to give anything away now, in the midst of one of capitalism's worst crises. What will hit a lot of women hard is the abolition of the Family Allowance. Instead, the man will get some extra in his wage packet. *But the great advantage of Family Allowances is that they go straight to the mother.* Some women were interviewed while drawing their allowances at a post office in Salford, Lancashire.

'This scheme is rubbish. Women buy the food and clothes and they should get the allowance. No, I don't think most men will give their wives more, they won't even think about it', said one. And another woman felt, *'Nine out of ten wives wouldn't get the extra money off the husband if the family allowance is done away with. It wouldn't occur to him.'*

There was another point. *'We get the allowance on Tuesday from the Post Office. That comes in very handy when Friday's money's been spent.'* And another woman was sympathetic as she said, *'Men don't get much money anyway, do they? They'll just spend the extra. It's not that they're mean, but they just won't think of putting your housekeeping money up because the allowance has been abolished. If this new scheme goes through, it looks like a lot of women will find it even harder to make ends meet.'*

TODDLERS' LIBERATION

At this year's TUC conference, transport union official, Norman Willis, championed the cause of Britain's 5 million under-fives. He called for the building of more nursery schools.

Less than 5 per cent of all children below school age receive this vital nursery education. The vast majority are isolated, often in high-rise flats or suburban homes, amid heavy traffic, with no one to play with and nowhere to go. Mr Willis declared, *'When the older kids go to school the toddlers are left with Mum. But Mum is not enough. They need other children to play with. Their development in these years is crucial to the rest of their lives.'*

He went on *'The wealthy already send their kids to privileged nursery schools. It's our people we will be helping because it is the working class child at the bottom of the pile.'* He called on the trade union movement, saying *'It's time for the big battalions of the TUC to come behind the toddlers' liberation movement.'*

We couldn't agree more. Let's see some action.

BLACK AUSTRALIANS

Bobbi Sykes arrived in Britain in October to publicise the plight of the Australian Aborigines. In the forthcoming Australian General Election, the second-class status of these people will be an important issue for the first time. Australia is a huge and rich country, yet it has only 15 million inhabitants (about twice as many as London). With all this space and plenty, the Aborigines are kept either on squalid reservations in the middle of the desert, or exist in disgusting slums just outside the affluent towns of white Australians. There are laws preventing Black Australians from finding jobs outside the reservations, owning property, buying alcohol, or having the vote. Their dreadful conditions have been compared with those of the North American Indians.

Bobbi Sykes



Bobbi Sykes gave one glaring example of the insulting treatment given to the few Aborigine children who go to school. They are still taught from history books that Captain Cook *discovered* Australia and brought the first people there—yet Black Australians had already been living there for thousands of years!

But she is concerned most of all about the thousands of Aborigines who are literally starving to death on the reservations. Many more suffer malnutrition. It has been noticed that Aborigines cannot keep working for long periods and lack concentration. People have tried to use this as evidence that they are 'genetically inferior' because they are black. But as Bobbi Sykes points out, these are the usual symptoms found in people who have suffered from malnutrition since birth. *'The only hope for my people'*, she says, *'is to feed the children, to save them before it is too late.'*

WOMEN'S PROTEST

CAMPAIGN-OLD GOOLE

It started in August last year. Two children were killed crossing a dangerous bridge. The first time, four women marched up to the bridge at tea-time and started parading in protest. They were soon joined by others until about 200 women massed. Police pleaded with them to go away but they refused until police promised to escort all the school children across the bridge each day and to put traffic lights up on the bridge. A picket of women turned up each morning to check and drag the police out of the police station when they didn't turn up. Lights were put up on the bridge. A few weeks later a second child was killed. That very day all the women marched to the school, took their kids straight out of lessons and said they wouldn't send them back until buses were provided. They also got a petition with 12,000 signatures protesting about the dangerous state of the bridge and road. They got school buses (although they have to pay).

After their success over school buses, the women started a 'Women's Protest Campaign'. Their aim? To boycott shops putting prices up, and also to fight the latest rent rises. It was through the campaign that some of them got involved in the dock dispute. Nationwide publicity came to the women who, according to the press, were against the dockers' strike. But one of the women explained why they picketed the Guinness Wharf. *'This violence got us mad. Sitting watching them on television got us going. And we ended up at the Guinness Wharf to protest against the violence. We weren't against the docks strike. Everybody has to strike for higher wages. Now we realise the police were using a lot of violence against the dockers and preventing them from talking to the lorry drivers. The police were trying to break the dockers up and weaken the strike. They didn't tell you about this in the press and on TV. The dockers had a right to defend themselves and fight for their rights.'*

The women have been involved in the Tenants Resistance Association in Old Goole. They organised a rally and march, picketed the local Council, and the Trades Council to try to get industrial backing for the tenants. They want a rent strike in the whole town over the next few weeks, even though their rents went up in April and most people have been paying because they didn't know much about the Tory Rent Act. *The women have also started to meet regularly to talk about the need to fight for a socialist society.* As part of this fight, they're prepared to support any trade unionists who fight for £35 for a 35 hour week. They say this is the only short-term answer to rising unemployment and prices.

KNICKERS!

'Women don't work for money, they do it to keep their minds occupied.' This was the essence of what the manager of the Youth Employment Exchange in Southend Essex said to a group of women who occupied his office.

One of the girls, Pamela Drever explained why they occupied the office. If you are in the unfortunate position of being unmarried, pregnant and after a job in Southend, go along to the local employment exchange, they'll send you to Jacques, a local employer who will offer you the job of a lifetime—trimming knicker legs, 42 hours a week for £7.50, oh! you have to take your own scissors!

The girls are told that if they don't take that job, or get sacked, they'll lose their benefit. As it's one period in the girls' lives when they need every penny they can get, they are very reluctant to do anything about this situation. Pamela and some of the other girls who used to work there are prepared to fight, and as a result of their occupation Jacques have stopped taking on pregnant girls. Although they haven't won the right of a decent wage for these girls, they have put a stop to their gross exploitation.

WHEN MINERS WIVES FIXED THE PRICES

High prices are nothing new. 100 years ago women in the North-East made a right fuss about them.

Prices were rising faster than wages. A miner got eleven pence for hewing a ton of coal; a woman worked all day in the field for a shilling. *It was not the miners, but their wives who caused the upset in 1872.*

It began at New Seaham where Mrs. Hetherington was certain that prices were too high, and the more she talked, the more people agreed with her. She called a meeting, and the women decided what prices were reasonable and said they'd pay no more. They planned to boycott and picket all shops which charged more, and to treat as blacklegs all who dealt at such shops. *The idea spread like wildfire through industrial Durham and Northumberland, but especially in the mining villages.*

The meeting at Prudhoe in June 1872 was well organised and well conducted. Processions converged on the meeting place, preceded by bands and banners, altogether about 4000 people. *But at the meeting itself only women were allowed—except for a male chairman, the bands and the reporters.*

The chairman made a long speech all about being fair to butchers! He didn't take much more part in the proceedings, for a chairwoman promptly described his speech as a load of old rubbish (or words to that effect) and took over the meeting.



In a businesslike way (but with plenty of pit language and wit) it was decided to buy only at the following prices: meat 7½d lb (offal 6½d); eggs 16 a shilling (box-eggs 20 a shilling); milk 1d a pint (½d if it was blue but not stinking); potatoes 1s6d a basket; butter 1s fresh—'and we winna haa' bad stuff at nee price'.

MILLIONAIRES

Some tenants have paid out their increased rents with a few grumbles, and dismissed the rent strikers as a bunch of trouble-makers. They've fallen for the Tory propaganda that all of us, rich and poor alike, must work for a fair system of housing. What about this item from the *Guardian* of 4 October. 'Britain has gained at least 18 new millionaires over the past 16 months as a direct result of the boom in house prices. They are the directors and major shareholders of house-building firms.' And the article goes on to say that the Government's decision to advance £80 million to local authorities to speed up the flow of land to developers will help these profiteers even further.

Didn't we tell you that most of your rent only goes to property sharks and city financiers!

WAGE FREEZE

Win Jones is a shop steward at Cadbury-Schweppes, Bournville, in Birmingham. Win spoke to Women's Voice about the £2 wage freeze.

'The £2 ceiling proposed by the government seems like a way to split the men and women workers. Heath has made no mention about whether women will still have their equal pay. What really makes me laugh is Heath saying he was going to help the lower paid,—but it will still keep the gap between the rich and the poor, they'll be no better off compared with the higher-paid. And then there's the deception of the people—one old lady I know thinks she's going to be given £2 just like that!

And also the 5 per cent price restraint, this won't stop prices going up to 5 per cent and no pay rise need be given. The C.B.I. may have made an attempt to peg prices, but then they still put prices up whenever we win wage rises and then blame us! Just look at the price of houses—it's not the building workers having a rise that started that.'

MILITANTS

Every time the Tories make a speech about inflation they try to blame the well-organised workers like dockers and car workers for the plight of the low-paid and the pensioners. They make out that if only these 'greedy' workers would stop putting in wage claims there would be more money for the others. *This is rubbish.* If Ford workers let their wages slip behind, it just means *more profit for Fords.* Does anyone really believe that the Board of Directors (in America, by the way) will rack their brains trying to find a way to give these profits to the low-paid hospital workers? Highly paid workers have fought long and hard for their wages. Don't blame the militants—follow their example.

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CON TRICK

Heath's idea of curing inflation by restricting wage increases to £2 is a real con-trick. All the same there is no doubt that many people, especially women, have been taken in by it. Sick and tired of struggling to keep up with rising prices, they desperately want a solution.

The Heath Plan will not stop rising prices. Remember this: the Confederation of British Industry claims that its members (virtually all the big firms) have already been operating price restrictions to a 5 per cent increase norm for the past year. But we all know what has really happened. For all this fine talk, prices have been soaring.

Will the plan help the lower paid? No. Take a family with two children, in a council house, living on a meagre £20 a week. Under the Tory plan the most the husband would be allowed to earn for the next year would be £22 a week. But as soon as his wage goes up, so do deductions for tax and national insurance. These would wipe out 70p of the £2 before he even opened his wage packet. The Council rent rises could wipe off another £1 a week. That leaves him with a mere 30p out of the £2.

Anyway, the £2 is a *restriction on wage claims*. It is no guarantee that even the lowest paid will get any increase at all.

The biggest group of low paid workers are women. And the financial magazine, *The Economist*, points out, 'The freeze also freezes further progress towards equal pay for women' who otherwise would have been entitled to big increases in the next 12 months to bring pay up to 90 per cent of men's rates by 1973.

It is claimed that this freeze will hit all of us, rich and poor alike. But, of course, it will not hit the very rich at all. It won't hit those making millions out of property speculation, or those daily watching the value of their shares rising. The object of the operation is to push up profits and rents at the expense of wages.

What's the alternative? There is no permanent solution to this problem under capitalism. But Heath's plan is certainly no help to us. And the TUC's alternative is not much better. What can be done, by militant action, is to keep wages level or ahead of prices. There is no other way to defend our living standards.

It is a well-known commercial saying that McDougall's McD is 'flour so fine that it flows'. When making the current TV advertisement, the agency boys found out that the stuff didn't seem to flow too well on camera. So they added salt to give it the necessary attractive appearance.

RENT STRIKE ON MERSEY SIDE

'When the Revolution starts, it'll start on Merseyside' joked a shop steward at a recent meeting. But there is an air of seriousness under the joking. There is a long history of working class organisation on Merseyside, where it is nothing new to cope with low wages, redundancies, bad housing, unemployment. This time the people are not only coping—they are fighting back with a vengeance. 1972 has seen strikes and sit-ins by workers in factories, on the docks and the building sites. The same spirit is found as the people take on the Tory Rent Act. *And the women are right in the thick of it.*

Ethel Singleton is the secretary of the Old Swan Rent Action Committee. She feels the involvement of the women is what makes this rent strike so different and so effective. *'Women are the backbone of it. All the rent offices are being picketed, and it is the women who are doing the picketing, women who have never been involved in politics before. They have even made up their own baby-sitting rota so they can all take their turn at the picket. They are really marvellous, they are so keen.'*

There are weekly estate meetings. Rent collectors are escorted on their rounds by women from the action groups. Rent offices are picketed. Walls are plastered with posters. Flying pickets are on call 24 hours a day. Plans of action are ready to protect anyone threatened with intimidation. Efforts are made to keep in touch with everyone so no-one feels isolated. But while the tenants pursue their aims so clearly and efficiently, local councillors are in total confusion. The council is split right down the middle over the implementation of the Act. Even before the rent strike, over £1 million was owed in rent arrears on Merseyside. The simple reason of course is that with food prices going up by leaps and bounds, a lot of women have no alternative but to get behind with the rent. For the rents to be put up at this time is just about the last straw. *Despite various rumours started by the Council that the rent strike is already being broken, the truth is that tenants throughout the whole area are resisting the rent rises.* There are two types of strike. About half the tenants are on a *total rent strike*, the rest are paying the old rent but refusing to pay the increase.

Ethel explained that the old traditional tenants associations have been overshadowed by the new militant Action Groups. 'Instead of collapsing, they are gathering more strength as the strike goes on. And this is the crucial thing. It's the women. They have become political. They are saying, we won't just strike on the Rents, we're going to do it if they put the bus fares up, or the electricity or gas.'

The tenants' strength is not only in the defiance of the women but in their strong links with the trade union movement. *'The dockers are supporting, along with building workers and those in cars and engineering. Tenants are putting proposals through their union branches, that if there's any victimisation over rents, the workers will be out on strike.'*

And it is not one-sided. The tenants movement can help the workers too. Bird's Eye tried to sack shop stewards who supported the city's one-day strike against the rent increases. Within two hours, there were hundreds of women picketing Bird's Eye, and pickets also got workers at other firms to 'black' Bird's Eye supplies. The firm reinstated the stewards.

'If there is an eviction, and the dockers walk out, then it'll snowball', said Ethel. 'We're much stronger now than in 1968. Then, you just couldn't have amalgamated the tenants and the trade unions. But now, well, the political climate is entirely different. There is a lot of united action.'

In the rents battle, Merseyside is obviously a crucial area. And Ethel spoke again of the key role of the wives. 'I would really like to keep emphasising it—the upsurge of militancy amongst the women is amazing. I've seen Liverpool women with eight or nine kids, who never thought of anything outside the house, who were like cabbages—but they've got the militancy in their blood now. There's a determination that we're not going to give in at any cost.'



The Importance of Equal Pay

ANNA PACZUSKA

Equal pay—try saying that to the woman who works next to you. She is *not* likely to leap up, shrieking with enthusiasm. For her, like many others, the issue has become dry and uninteresting. It was a nice thought, but most of us are glad to hang on to any job we can get in the present situation. And we don't see much hope on the equal pay front from the TUC. It's passed so many resolutions about it that we've stopped counting. And it hasn't achieved anything.

There was a campaign after the Ford women's strike in 1968, and after that the Labour Government passed the Equal Pay Act which was supposed to give us all equal pay by 1975. Some hopes! The Act left the bosses dozens of loopholes, and was drawn up with *their* interests in mind, not ours. For instance, one of the main aims of the Act is to persuade women to do shifts and nightwork in return for 'equal' pay. And as the last issue of WOMAN'S VOICE revealed, the *TUC leaders have done a deal with the Tories and the employers* so firms have only got to plead poverty, say they cannot afford equal pay, and they will be let right off the hook.

up with half the pay *and* do another job for free at home. It's downright degrading. It makes us *financially* dependent on relationships with men. Even worse, it makes some of us suspect that maybe there is something inferior about women or we would have done something about it by now.

The truth is that women are not inferior, but that the society we live in has a great interest in keeping women where they are, knowing their place, putting up with life without complaining—and that includes accepting low wages and appalling conditions. Face it with a smile. This is the 'feminine' way to behave, we're told. In return, men are supposed to look after us, open doors for us, carry our parcels. Well, women are beginning to doubt the fairness of this exchange. They are challenging the belief that women should be docile and uncomplaining. And the fight for equal pay is an essential part of the fight for equality.

CHEAP LABOUR

Employers will never willingly give equal pay because they make a lot of money out of cheap female labour. The cost of



NO PRESSURE

There is increasing awareness and militancy among women, and a rise in female membership of trade unions, yet the equal pay issue does not really have much steam behind it. No pressure is put on union leaders and politicians who sell us short. Look at the engineering unions. They discreetly dropped the equal pay demand from their pay claim earlier this year, but were never faced with angry delegations of women workers demanding to know why. In union after union, factory after factory, it's the same. Yet we now have more chances than ever to successfully fight on this issue.

WOMAN'S VOICE thinks equal pay *is* very important. When women everywhere are beginning to stand up for their rights, getting active in unions, involved in occupations and sit-ins, organising on their estates about the rents—then we think there is hope for a campaign on equal pay. *It is of fundamental importance to all women.*

We put up with the indignity of coming home with half the wages that men do. We are *not* half people—we do not eat half, spend half, or get things at half the price men do. Yet we put

implementing equal pay has been estimated at about £1,000 million. And that does not take into account the many women graded into low-paid work, but doing work of equal value with men. If the cost of regrading these women into pay structures that really did give them equal pay was calculated then estimated costs would soar. Many industries that rely exclusively on cheap female labour might find the costs crippling. But if they cannot afford to pay a decent wage, why should we keep them in business by subsidising them? The Tories, representing the employers, are certainly not going to take any steps to ensure progress to equal pay.

AFFECTS ALL WAGES

But unequal pay for women carries other benefits for bosses. Factories employing a lot of women usually have low average wages for men too. **The low wages women earn act to hold down everyone's wages.** This saves the employer money all round. And it has very bad effects in areas where a large proportion of women go out to work fulltime. Things are all right as long as both man and woman are working, but if *she* has to

The Price of Being Female

KATHLEEN ENNIS

Equal Pay contd.

stop work because of family commitments, it is often the case that the man's wage is not enough for the family to live on. In Nottingham for instance, where a lot of women work in the hosiery and boot industries, as well as light engineering, many families immediately plunge below the poverty line as soon as the woman stops working. *Equal pay would put an end to the bosses' use of cheap female labour to hold down all wages.* A victory on equal pay would result in *all wages going up.*

Men and women are not united against the employer. Low paid workers can be used as cheap labour to break strikes. This applies to all low paid workers, but to women particularly. Many trade unionists have long ago given up any pretence of trying to actively include women in their organisation. May Hobbs, the cleaner who started to unionise the night office cleaners, was even advised by the T&GWU to 'join another union' when she asked officials to help her. The officials couldn't be bothered, shied away from the work that such organisation involved—even though the union was running a recruiting campaign at the time!

SELF-RESPECT

These attitudes must be fought. Women now start to see the benefits of union organisation. Linked with the rest of the members, women could be a powerful fighting force against employers who try to hold *our* wages down as *their* profits increase.

But to campaign successfully, we need equality of status within the unions. It is not enough for the unions to simply commit themselves in words to a fight for equal pay. They must be seen to be taking women's interests seriously. It is no good unions calling on the TUC for action if the unions themselves have never thought about giving women equal status within the union with equal subs systems, equal strike pay, equal sickness benefits.

Women are learning self-respect and earning the respect of their fellow workers during sit-ins and strikes all over the country. With this increased strength we must start to fight for equality of wages and conditions. The trade union leaders won't do it—neither will the politicians. The only people who will fight are those it affects—that's us.

Why are women treated as if they were inferior to men? Obviously it has a great deal to do with the fact that our main job in life is to be wives and mothers.

In the home, women put in well over a 40 hour week. Some surveys have even shown the figure to be as high as 80 hours. If factory workers had to work those hours every week (and they'd be getting *paid* for it) they'd be out on strike. And quite rightly too. But most people don't even think of housework as *work*. Work for them is only what goes on in factories and offices. Consequently, the job to which women are expected to devote most of their lives is regarded as *trivial and unimportant*. What people don't realise is that housewives perform as valuable a service for the employing class as do factory and office workers. We provide them with intelligent, healthy workers. Someone has to bring up the workers of the future, and cook and clean for the ones of today. If no-one did, the wheels of industry would soon stop turning!

But, unlike other workers, we don't receive a wage for our work. All we get is the housekeeping money from our husbands. Taken together with the fact that women's wages at work are so low, this means most of us cannot avoid being financially dependent on men. He can *give* us what he likes, but unless we get a divorce or a separation, we have no legal right to any of his wage packet. Even when men are generous, we still feel under an obligation to them. When they aren't, they can really make our lives a misery. *What a terrible basis for a human relationship!*

TAKEN FOR GRANTED

Because housework is not regarded as 'productive work' in the same way as making televisions and cars in factories is, the needs of women as wives and mothers have an even lower priority in our society than the needs of women as workers. Housewives don't directly produce profits, so we are not considered to be worth bothering about. Just take a look at a few of the facts:

- * *In this country, although 2 in 3 women who go out to work are married, there are only enough council nurseries for 1 in every 100 children.*
- * *In many areas children have nowhere suitable to play and their mothers live in constant fear of them being knocked down on the roads*
- * *Shops, blocks of flats, and indeed everything around us, are built only with people in the workforce in mind. Children in prams or pushchairs, the disabled and elderly, with sticks or wheelchairs, just don't enter into planning consideration at all.*
- * *There are 8 million women of child-bearing age. Lack of family planning facilities means nearly half of them are not using contraceptives or are depending on unreliable methods*

Women get taken for granted. We bear the brunt of all the ills in society, while being in one of the weakest positions for fighting back. At work, women working side by side can get together in a union to improve conditions and keep wages level with the cost of living. But at home the housewife, working all on her own, feels helpless in the face of price and rent increases. It seems as if all she can do is to worry, cut back on this week's shopping, and then start worrying all over again next week.

The employers and the government understand our predicament very well. This is why they make the housewife suffer whenever there is an economic crisis. They let prices outstrip wages. They cut down on children's school milk, increase rents, raise prescription and dental charges.

Subtle Threats to Equal Pay

SHEILA COHEN

Bosses everywhere are doing their best to avoid the obligations of the Equal Pay Act. But even if employment Minister, Maurice Macmillan, was anxiously hustling employers into line with the Act's original target of 90 per cent of men's rates by 1973, there would still be formidable obstacles between ourselves and real equal pay.

GRADING

Even before any regrading of jobs is undertaken as a step towards equal pay, most firms already have a rigid grading system. The jobs people do are classified into different 'values', each with a different rate of pay. As well as setting one group of workers against another and lending support to the idea that some people's work is 'worth more' than others, this means that the men classed in the lowest grades get little more than those of us who are still the lowest of the low, the women. The Act says that women doing 'like or similar' work to men should get the same pay as them. *But what chance do we get to do work 'like or similar' to men in grades 1 or 2?* For this reason alone, most of us will not be much better off under the Act. There are other reasons too.

Women can be denied real equal pay in three ways. First of all, by the jobs they do, no matter how skilled, being classed into low grades by a so-called 'scientific' job evaluation which rates strength, the traditional man's ability, higher than the 'dexterity' patronisingly said to be exclusive to women.

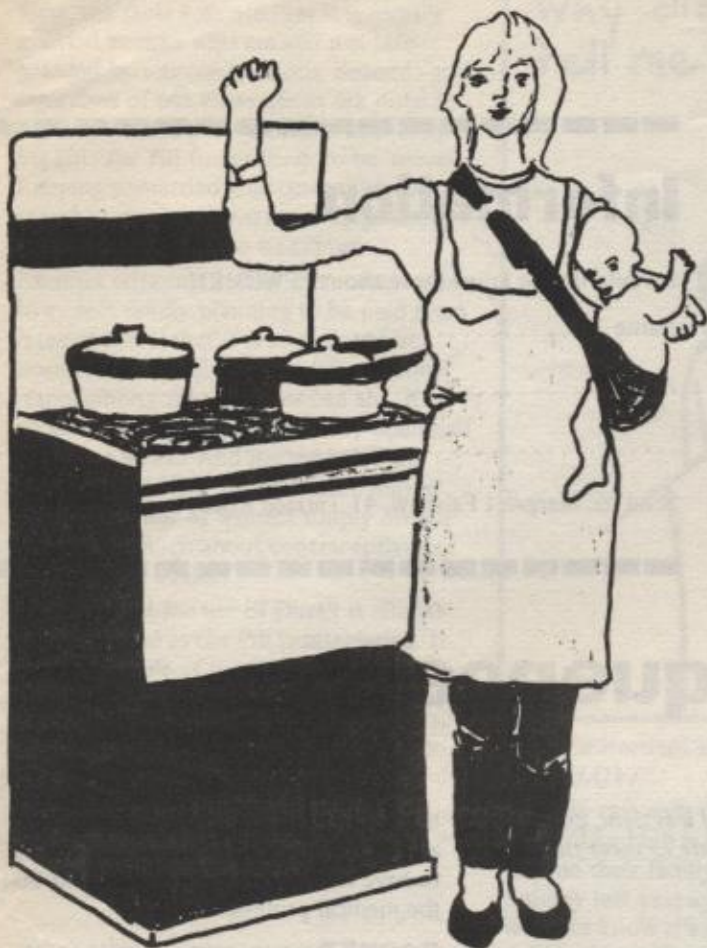
Secondly, even where we have been taken off the 'women's rate' under which women have so long and scandalously been classified, and put on the lowest men's rate, *our average weekly earnings will still not equal those of the men on that rate.* Because women work less hours per week. Why? Because it's us who have to rush home every night or stay off work when the children are ill. Our husbands and ourselves are led to think that it's the man who's the breadwinner—and this is a good enough reason for not giving women a decent wage.

And thirdly, employers are able to class women into low grades because in general women, denied the opportunity for training, do carry out lower-skilled jobs. So most of the time employers can quite 'legally' interpret the Act and still give us only a few shillings more in our wage packets each week.

OBSTACLES

Why are we up against obstacles like family commitments, and lack of training, so taken for granted that the employer can often rely on them entirely to get round the Act? We all know the answer. The employer looks witheringly at any woman bold enough to ask for training for a more skilled job, 'It's just not worth it. You'll only leave and get married'. Whoever heard of a man 'leaving to get married'? Yet let's face it, most of us do have to leave work at some time or another, whether it's because our husbands don't like us working, or for the usual reason of starting a family. *But why use this as an excuse to pay us less when we are at work? After all, it wasn't us who decided that women should do most of the housework and be automatically responsible for the children. The point is that the present system, in which one half of the working class services the other half, couldn't be handier for the bosses.*

We all get pleasure from our families. They're often the only thing that makes life worthwhile. But at the moment women have to pay for that pleasure with a lifetime's unpaid labour in the home. The price for what we're told is our 'fulfillment'. We are pushed so hard into thinking of our duties towards the home, that we just do not have the time for training, or the



TWISTED PRIORITIES

The twisted priorities of our society certainly contribute a good deal to the misery in women's lives. But for many of us, what's harder to bear is the very nature of the woman's role in life.

Our situation in the home gives us an almost sub-human status. At work it gives the employers a licence to treat us as cheap labour. When we join trade unions and try to do something about this, it gives people the excuse to gag us—for interfering in a man's world. When women and men get home from a hard day's work, it gives the man the excuse to put his feet up and let the woman wait on him.

In our society, the ideal woman is the one who always puts her own needs after those of her husband and children. The woman who is prepared to give up any independent existence of her own and let her life totally revolve around the lives of the family. *Because we spend our lives at the beck and call of others, it is very difficult for us not to become petty and narrow in our outlook.* In addition, we are brought up to believe that women should keep to the home and leave men to deal with the outside world. Because our place is meant to be in the home, we are expected to be passive creatures. We are expected to fill our heads with the petty details of daily life and leave the important things to men. We are expected to bear hardships without complaining, to persevere through thick and thin, to be always 'reasonable' in our demands.

Must housework and bringing up children always be regarded as less important a job than making cars and televisions? Must women always be financially dependent on men? Is a society in which profits are always put before the needs of women inevitable or can it be changed? Must women's place always be in the home? In the next issue of WOMAN'S VOICE we will answer these questions. We will show that women's situation can be changed: that a society in which men and women would be equal human beings is not a pipe dream but a real possibility.

confidence to take action against the bosses. And they aren't going to give us big ideas about ourselves by training us for jobs that might just possibly widen our horizons. *No wonder we're stuck in the lowest-skilled jobs!*

ONE GRADE

All in all, the sort of pay inequality that exists between men and women certainly isn't going to be ended by an Act like Barbara Castle's—even if it's 'obeyed'. And, as has been pointed out, *the Act contains no punishments for firms who disobey it.* It's going to take a far more fundamental upheaval. Men aren't to blame for this situation. They didn't start a system of phony pay distinctions between jobs of 'different value'. And no man would willingly do nightwork and overtime if they could earn enough without it. *We have got to see that a woman has as much right to a decent wage as any other worker.* Men and women should never blame each other for this system. It is the bosses and their government who are the block to a sane society. *One step towards bringing in the kind of equal pay that means something, is to fight here and now to reduce the number of grades. Let's aim for one 'grade' and one rate of pay for all men and women workers—the top one.*

Facing the Consequences

'Sex on the rates' cried the headlines. 'Cheap, easy and irresponsible'. What were the papers condemning? Free brothels in the town hall? No. This shocked indignation was because local women had demanded one of the most basic rights of any woman—the right to choose whether or not she should have a baby. They wanted more family planning clinics, open at convenient times, and widely publicised so that everyone knew where to go. And the whole service—medical advice and all forms of contraceptive supplies—should be free to all over the age of 16. *Look at some facts.*

- * A study of married mothers showed that about one third of all babies are unplanned
- * There are 8 million women who could become pregnant. Only about half of them are protected by a reliable form of contraception
- * There are over 300,000 unwanted pregnancies in Britain each year, about half of them ending in legal or illegal abortion
- * Last year about 100,000 births occurred 8 months or less after the parents' marriage.

At the time of writing the Family Planning Association runs over one thousand clinics with about 700,000 people attending each year. Brook Advisory Centres for Young People have 14 clinics (seeing 10,000 new clients a year). 150 Local Authorities have clinics run with the FPA, and 40 run their own. The majority of couples rely on either the family doctor prescribing the Pill, or they use contraceptives like Durex or pessaries bought over the chemist's counter. Or they trust to luck.

It's a hotch-potch of a system, and it's certainly not adequate to meet the needs of 8 million women.

DO GOODERS

Family planning clinics don't attract enough women. And, sadly, it is the women already overburdened with several children, or very ignorant of sexual matters, who don't go to the clinics. And little wonder. You often need to be 'in the know' to even find them. A London woman described the situation like this: *'There aren't many clinics for a large borough like here. And most of them are only open for an hour or so each week. The times aren't particularly convenient: the evening session tends to be at the time you're likely to be busy with dinner-time and the children. Many women don't know about their nearest clinic, or can't get to it when it's open. If you go to work, or have several children, it's even more difficult.'* And another said, *'I wanted to find my local clinic, but there was nothing under family planning in the phone book. I later found out that it's disguised under "health and welfare".'*

Other things put people off going. The clinics still smack of do-gooders. You're often treated like someone who's not quite bright enough to understand what it's all about. There are remarks like 'You must realise the doctor gives up her time off from the hospital to see people here' (and you're expected to be duly grateful and wait for maybe nearly an hour, desperately trying to keep your two-year-old from destroying the waiting room). The doctors don't always seem to appreciate how nervous and embarrassed many of us are about internal examinations and ques-

tions about our sex life. Yes, we know it's all necessary, but please don't expect us to have the same sort of detachment that the medical profession has!

RACKET

Often the easiest way to get contraception is through your GP. But again there are various criticisms. Many doctors who'd genuinely like to do more for their patients can't because of lack of time, and knowledge of the subject. **Only 4,000 out of approximately 23,000 GPs have received formal family planning training** (although of course many have long practical experience). Other doctors are doing very nicely, thank you, out of prescribing the Pill. One woman who became unintentionally pregnant explained, *'I couldn't afford the 75p for the prescription that week, not with the 20p on top when I got it from the chemist. So I thought it wouldn't matter if I left it a few days. They turned out to be the days that mattered!'* And another girl, *'I asked him about contraceptives and he said he'd put me on the Pill. I didn't really want that. I asked him where else I could go, and he said the clinic was a long way away, and I was being silly and should go on the Pill, and it'd be £1 for the prescription for 3 months supply. It seems a bit of a racket to me.'*

But some doctors refuse to prescribe the Pill on religious grounds. A girl in Wigan was told 'Try self control' by one doctor! This isn't funny to the thousands of people who are unable or unwilling to change their family doctor.

NOT SAFEGUARDED

The extent of the problem makes nonsense of the statements of those who are

Information

I would like to know more about IS WOMEN

Name

Address

Send to: Margaret Falshaw, 41 Terrace Road, London E13.

opposed to free contraception. Some say it's a service for girls who sleep around. First, the facts indicate that it is mostly married women who are still not safeguarded by reliable methods. Second—and regardless of our views about sex outside marriage—there is no evidence that denying girls the Pill forces them to be 'moral'. Keeping unmarried girls ignorant just means more abortions, more illegitimate babies, more shot-gun weddings.

Another criticism is that it is unreasonable to expect family planning to be paid from rates or taxes, that it is something each woman individually should take personal responsibility for. But how can she, if clinics are hard to find, and only open half an hour a week? And her own doctor charges a quid for the Pill? More important, thousands of women simply *do not know* very much about contraceptives or where to get advice.

The fact that the use of Durex is almost as widespread as the Pill is interesting. It isn't as reliable as the Pill, and can spoil the spontaneity of lovemaking. But everyone knows about it, and where to buy it. There's little embarrassment for a man buying Durex from his barber or the chemist. This shows that *knowledge* about a contraceptive and its *availability* are really important.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATION

Happily, lots of babies who are 'unplanned' are loved and wanted once they are born. But many others are not. They become the victims of neglect, poverty, or broken homes.

Contraception certainly doesn't solve the problem of poverty, which has its roots in the nature of our capitalist society, but it does help a woman to gain some control over one part of her life.

We are distressed by the human misery caused by unwanted pregnancies. That misery is impossible to measure. But it is possible to calculate the cost in terms of money spent on children in care, and welfare and social services. Every £ spent on family planning could save public authorities up to £100 in health and welfare expenditure, and it is of course this financial consideration that has persuaded several Councils to provide a good, free service and to publicise it widely. One leaflet says 'Not only would better services decrease human suffering, they would lead to big long-term savings on the rates'. This isn't our reason for demanding such a service, but it is helpful to have all the facts on our side. But even with this weight of evidence, you'll still find prejudice and narrow-mindedness. A local newspaper, commented on a women's contraception campaign meeting, 'These women are unwilling to take the consequences for gasping moments of passing passion (!) ... and yet the neighbouring Borough of Islington operates a free service and has a



widely advertised slogan 'Family planning means LOVE'.

And the two ends of the scale are miles apart. Lambeth is spending £96,000 a year on their family planning scheme, Burnley last year spent a total of £41! Well, we know it's a smaller place, but there's something wrong somewhere.

EVERY WOMAN'S RIGHT

Here are some improvements which could be made straight away.

- * More clinics, open longer, and an end to patronising attitudes
- * Training and financial compensation to doctors so they can give patients a better and free contraceptive service.
- * Far more sex education in schools, with emphasis on how to use contraceptives.
- * Family planning advisers to visit all work-places, in the same way as the TB screening service does
- * All these services to be given the widest possible publicity
- * And everything must be FREE and available to all over 16, married or single.

Action like this would drastically reduce the number of abortions. It would improve the health of women and children. But, most important, we believe that every woman who doesn't want to become pregnant has the right to decide that for herself, and to have every help in her decision. It is the right of every woman to choose—and of every child to be truly wanted.

What about the population explosion? We're coming to that in the next issue.

Send all contributions for

Womans Voice to:

Valerie Clark

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DEMOCRACY IN THE UNIONS

We always stress the importance of all workers being in their union. But it is not enough just to *join* the union. It will not automatically fight your battles for you. Organisation and militant action *are* the keys to beginning to change anything, but it is not as easy as it might sound.

Many unions, and especially the ones with the most women in them, fail miserably to act in the interests of their members. Their cautious attitudes or lack of interest have sometimes broken strikes more effectively than the employers, especially in terms of demoralisation. This disappointment shows up very clearly among women when they realise that most unions are more ready to represent the skilled, male sections than the unskilled, largely female sections, and that many officials are prepared to accept that women's pay should be less than men's.

RANK AND FILE

Not unnaturally, some women leave unions that let them down. Very dissatisfied with the lack of democracy in the General and Municipal Workers Union and its male domination, women in the Lucas plant at Burnley decided last year to form a Women's Industrial Union and invite other women in industry to join it.

But they have found that this kind of breakaway union *outside* other unions cannot survive. Their solution has been to apply to join another, better union, the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers. But they will still have to fight within the union for their rights there along with other workers.

There ought not to be a difference between 'the union' and 'the membership', or any conflict of interests. But where, for

instance, there is no proper annual conference, where officials are elected for life, where there are no local branch meetings and no representation from the shop floor—then the needs of the members can never be reflected by union officials.

But remember that the union *is* the members. And where it is not, then the ordinary trade unionists must change this. Car workers, teachers, electricians, amongst others, already have rank-and-file groups committed to fighting for democracy in their unions. There is room for much more of this. As Nancy McGrath said during the Fakenham shoe factory occupation:

'I think unions can be a good thing provided the membership of the union works within the union to see 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.'

And insist that you are represented by your own elected stewards, not just by officials who come down from the local office. A girl in a Leeds tailoring firm describes a situation common where a lot of women work. *'Quite a few of the old hands were in the union, but only as a safeguard against losing their jobs. There was no shop steward there, only the union officer that comes round every so often.'*

What are the necessary steps to take when we fight back, with other women:

- * putting the case for *more strength through organisation*, and getting as many of the girls as possible into the union.
- * taking part, alongside men trade unionists, in the fight for more democracy
- * electing shop stewards to represent the workers
- * building up combine committees of shop stewards to link up with workers in the firm's other factories
- * building *women's sections* in our unions to raise the issues which face women most, from the opening of more jobs to women, to taking up questions connected with equal pay, and family commitments.



Some of these suggestions are more important than others depending on the sort of place you work, but two things are always true.

- * that 10 people are stronger than one, and that 20,000 people in one union are even stronger
- * that the stewards YOU elect, who work alongside you on the same job every day, will understand workers' grievances more than any official who just pops in from time to time.

At this moment, the ruling class is carrying out a vicious attack to break workers' organisation and resistance. And we must fight back. The TUC is keener on talks at No. 10 rather than action. So it is more important than ever that the rank and file makes its voice heard.

KATHY TAIT

VITAL READING FOR ALL WORKERS!

The Employers Offensive—Productivity Deals and How to Fight Them, by Tony Cliff.

This book tries to help militant workers and socialists in understanding the general nature of productivity deals—devices used by employers such as Time and Motion study, Measured Day Work, Grading Schemes, and other pitfalls which exist for workers, BOTH MALE AND FEMALE under the guise of productivity bargaining.

Available from: PLUTO PRESS,

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Born Stupid?

Barbara Kerr

Children from working class homes are prevented from developing their abilities to the full.

We all know that the rich have their own 'public' schools where they can buy a superior education to ensure their offspring key positions in society. What is not so obvious is that, even in the State schools, working class children do not have the same opportunity as children from the middle class.

Recent studies have shown that 96 out of 100 children whose fathers are manual workers drop out of school before they are 17. The proportion of boys going to university from working class homes has not changed since before the war, and accounts for only 25 per cent of all students.

Girls are discriminated against even more—the daughter of a manual worker has a chance of only 1 in 600 of going to university, whereas the daughter of a 'professional' man has a chance of 1 in 6.

The result of course is that few children from working class homes have any chance to get a job with better conditions and more leisure time than their fathers or mothers. The system makes sure that most of these children (who grow up to become two-thirds of the country's workforce) cannot change their position in society.

TALENT WASTED

Why is this? Some people say that working class children are not as clever as middle class ones. *This is nonsense.* One survey took a group of 11 year olds. They were all of the *same* measured ability and yet those from middle class homes took their education much further than the others. *Why aren't working class kids given their chance? Why is so much talent wasted?*

One reason is that our capitalist society does not want a nation full of teachers, lecturers, doctors and managers. What it needs more than anything is a large number of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers to produce the wealth for the country. Nowadays, because of modern technology, workers must be reasonably well educated so that they can understand the machines and develop skills. On the other hand, society does not want them to be so well educated that they become dissatisfied with their work, pay and conditions. So the schools turn out a large number of students at 16 to fill these positions. But why are they always from the families who previously filled these jobs?

There are many reasons, but two important ones are: the home of the child, and the attitudes of schools and teachers.



To appreciate the importance of the home, remember that the kids who get most out of state education are those whose parents have enough leisure time to help the children with their school work, and who had a good education themselves and can add to what the kids learn at school. They have enough money to buy educational toys, books and other extras not provided at school, and have a large enough home so that each child has room to get on with homework, reading and hobbies in peace and quiet.

Not many working class families can provide all these. Men work long hours, sometimes shifts, and cannot always see their kids every day, let alone help them with school work. Women go out to work to keep a decent living standard for their families and then have housework to do in the evenings. Councils allocate houses just big enough for each family—certainly not with one room per child. Private tenants are worse off. And even those buying their own homes can only afford quite small houses. Parents who want to help their kids are often hindered by their own lack of education and memories of their own dismal school life.

It is easy to see that children of well-educated couples with well-paid jobs and plenty of spare time have a distinct advantage. If their mothers work, they can often afford a 'daily', as well as more labour-saving appliances, to remove the drudgery of evening housework, leaving them the time we would all like to devote to our kids.

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES

At school children from middle class homes have an advantage. Most of the teachers and the headmaster come from the same kind of background, and have the same outlook on life.

The outlook of people from comfortable middle class homes is different in many

ways from that in working class communities. Children's attitudes depend to a large extent on the sort of home they come from. One survey found that children whose fathers had well-paid jobs in business and the professions agreed with statements like: *'You have to look out for yourself before helping your parents'*. But children from working class homes agreed that *'It is better to keep your friends at school rather than trying to beat them at everything'* and *'There is no sense in worrying about the future as long as you're doing all right now'*.

Loyalty to family and friends, a belief in sticking together and enjoying life while you can is strong amongst working class kids. This is because of the kind of life that the system forces working people to lead. *Workers in a factory must stick together* to improve their living standards—pay and conditions. And try to enjoy themselves now rather than look to a future made insecure by threats of redundancy, industrial injury, bad health. By contrast, *middle class men are continually competing against each other* for promotion and better jobs. The ones who are toughest get the furthest. *'You've got to tread on others to get to the top'*. It's the law of the jungle. No solidarity and comradeship here!

Co-operation between people could be the basis of a kind, happy, socialist society. But that is not what we live in. The values of our society are competition and 'getting on', if necessary at the expense of those around you. *And these values are encouraged by schools.*

Teachers praise the one who has come top, the boy who won the race. It is not wrong to praise a child because he has done well, but it is wrong to praise him *because he has beaten all the others.* This encourages children to push themselves in front of others for teacher's praise and attention, and also to tell tales on their classmates. *It is usually children from*

middle class homes who conform and please the teachers, because they learn these ideas at home too.

But working class kids will stand solidly behind their friends, whatever the 'crime'. There is a defiant conflict of kids on one side and the teacher on the other. And this widens the rift between the working class children and the school.

LITTLE UNDERSTANDING

In 1964 a survey showed that teachers in junior schools automatically connect 'intelligence' with the way children speak and the clothes they wear. Unconsciously most teachers expect poorly-dressed kids to be less bright and don't demand such high standards of them. They may think they are being kind, but a child usually does as much as is expected of him. If the teacher thinks he isn't capable of much, he will start believing it himself. And small children quickly realise what adults think of them, they don't need telling. So, without realising it, teachers are condemning kids from homes where money is tight.

And where the 11-Plus has been abolished, junior school teachers decide who goes into the top forms of the comprehensive, and who goes to the bottom. The children of the poor don't stand much chance of their talents being recognised.

Teachers don't want to spoil children's chances. The majority are concerned about all their pupils. But most teachers have grown up with little understanding of the lives of working people. Their training does not alter this. And with 30 or more children in a class, even a really progressive teacher has no time to give the kids the individual attention they need.

This is not the full story. There are a lot of other points that could be made. But from these alone it is easy to see the connection between children's achievements at school and the kind of work their parents do. What is more, the education system almost ensures that kids will grow up to do a similar kind of job as their parents.

Can this be changed? No government can pass an act to change this situation, nor do

they want to, because schools serve the economy quite satisfactorily at the moment. We have seen in the past that changes in the school system are only carried out when industry needs more skilled and literate people.

The capitalist society can't help wasting talent, because as far as the system is concerned it would just be a waste of money to give most people a good education. It might even be dangerous—we might get ideas above our station! What happens in school reflects what happens in society generally. Only in a classless society will all our children have equal opportunity to develop their talents.



Textiles—a thought....

The rise and prosperity of the highly profitable textile industry in the nineteenth century was built upon the broken bodies and spirits of the poor mill workers. The dreadful conditions of the millgirls are well known. The hours were long, the pay pitifully low. Accidents were common, and thousands of girls had their health ruined

by poverty, fatigue and the damp atmosphere of the mill. Here are some verses of a song from Batley in Yorkshire. Apparently the sound of the old Dobbie loom when it was working made a rhythm that fitted the song. If you look at the wage rates in textiles today, some of the words still ring true!

Poverty, poverty, knock,
Me loom is saying all day.
Poverty, poverty, knock!
Gaffer's too skinny to pay.
Poverty, poverty, knock,
Keeping one eye on the clock.
Ah know ah can guttle (eat)
When ah hear me shuttle
Go poverty, poverty, knock.

Oh dear, me poor head sings
Ah should have woven three strings,
But threads are breaking and my back is aching

Oh dear, Ah wish ah had wings!
Up every morning at five
Ah wonder that we keep alive.
Tired and yawning on the cold morning
It's back to the dreary old drive.

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LETTERS

Having seen the recent new WOMAN'S VOICE which I hope may long continue, I could not resist sending you the enclosed verse—a suitably satiric comment on bourgeois marriage. Incidentally, I do not know if you would agree with this observation, but it seems to me that subjects like marriage, the family, 'consumerism' and so on are not very well covered in the general IS critique of present-day society. Perhaps WOMAN'S VOICE will be able to remedy this.—
Josie Blann (Mrs), Hanwell.

rush down the stairs screaming—anything to make contact with other people. What is the cause of this? When I read Alison Langan's article it seems that it is the same reason as the other housing problems. These people in charge just do not care about us, we are just names and numbers on a list to them. These high-rise flats are supposed to be the last word in modern design, but they are sending women crackers! It is all to do with saving money, as usual, it is just a way of getting as many people as possible on to a small piece of land. It's interesting that all these Town Clerks and people live in semis with gardens. If they are so enthusiastic about tower blocks, why don't they live in them? (Mrs) B Parker, Sheffield.

I am writing to you in the hope that, if more people are aware of the working conditions of women in supermarkets, we can do something to improve them.

I have been horrified at some of the stories my mother tells me of where she works. The management does not recognise or tolerate any union organisation. The pay is of course pitiful. Many women work part-time and the management suddenly realised that by cutting a few hours off their employment time, they would save some SET. Needless to say they still expected the same amount of work to be done. Management are rude and treat the younger girls with contempt. Their central office has a security force that monitors the staff's activities (particularly if there are till discrepancies) with methods seemingly gleaned from the Gestapo! I have heard that a woman who headed this department 'had a nose for wrong 'uns' and that was good enough reason to condemn them before any facts were known.

The facilities provided for the women are very poor. Anyone reporting things to the press are liable to instant dismissal. I have wondered for some time how to do something about it. Despite the hard work to get such meagre wages, the women are obviously dependent on them. But I have recently admitted to myself that one has to be politically motivated to achieve any results. I believe the aims of IS generally are on the right lines and hope to help to achieve something. Can we do anything about this situation I have mentioned?—**Mr G M (name and address supplied)**

Editor's Note: We are asking IS women to investigate shop work conditions in their area, and to raise the matter with the appropriate union, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. If any readers have useful facts or experiences, we'd be grateful if they'd get in touch with WOMAN'S VOICE. Names and addresses will not be used without permission.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

pudding-cheeked and epicene,
With plummy voice to boot.

An ideal husband he would make
For he's got bags of loot.

He does not earn his money bags
But makes it day by day

Selling this and buying that—

Respectable, some say.

No muscle needed for his 'work'
Nor intellect, we find.

Just craft and cant and privilege
For him and all his kind.

So grab him girls, you must agree
To live with him is great.

You should not have your own ideas
To find a better mate!

The legal document is all

You should not look for more.

For well-bred girls are neuter, dear,
You must have heard before.

Yet 'marriage is for women's good'
Too often still is said.

When will we all wake up to truth
And kill this myth stone dead?

STELLA CHAPMAN

I was interested in Alison Langan's views about housing. But if I knew her, I would warn her about these tall blocks of flats. We hear a lot about living in slums, but living 10 floors up can have an effect on you that is nearly as bad. When I first came to live here I thought it was great to have such a modern place. But the feeling of isolation is terrible. I started to get feelings of awful panic. In fact I thought I was going round the bend! In the end I went to the doctor who gave me tranquillisers. I felt a bit silly getting all worked up over nothing, but he seemed used to it and said that lots of women on this estate suffer from 'anxiety' as he calls it. I used to think I was the only one, but I have since met several other girls who say they have got these feelings since living in the flats. Sometimes you want to just

I feel that women have got to be more independent. You had an article about men not letting their wives go out on their own. But there is another point. Nearly every girl I know moans that her husband never takes her anywhere. But they won't go out on their own even if their husbands don't mind. It seems to me that a lot of women, once they get married, lose the confidence to go out without their husband. Women get funny looks if they go in a pub without any men, and it's a bit dreary if your social life consists of going to the pictures or bingo with your girlfriend once a fortnight. All we seem to be left with is the old 'tea-drinking' routine, and *that* doesn't even get you out of the house.

When men get fed up with work and things at home, they go to football, down the pub, or go and help a mate with his car. Even if they haven't got much money they seem to be able to keep up a proper social life of their own. We were most of us independent girls before we got married. What happens to us when we become 'Mrs.' that makes us such stop-at-homes? I'm sure I don't know. You are right to keep telling women to put up a fight at work, but I don't think we are going to get anywhere unless we start to act like independent people with ideas of our own at home too. (Mrs) J. Freane, Luton, Beds.

Editor's Note: We would like to include ALL letters sent in but due to limited space we have had to hold several over until the next issue. Would readers therefore keep their letters as short as possible.

LETTERS



A Classless Society?

Compared to middle class children of the same age, children from poor homes were:

- * 4 years behind in their reading
- * 1.3 inches shorter
- * more likely to squint
- * more likely to have a speech defect
- * more likely to wet their beds

Facts from this summer's National Children's Bureau study.



To International Socialists, 6
Cottons Gardens, London E2 8DN.
I would like more information
about the International Socialists.

Name _____
Address _____

To International Socialists, 6
Cottons Gardens, London E2 8DN.
I would like to join the International
Socialists.

Name _____
Address _____
