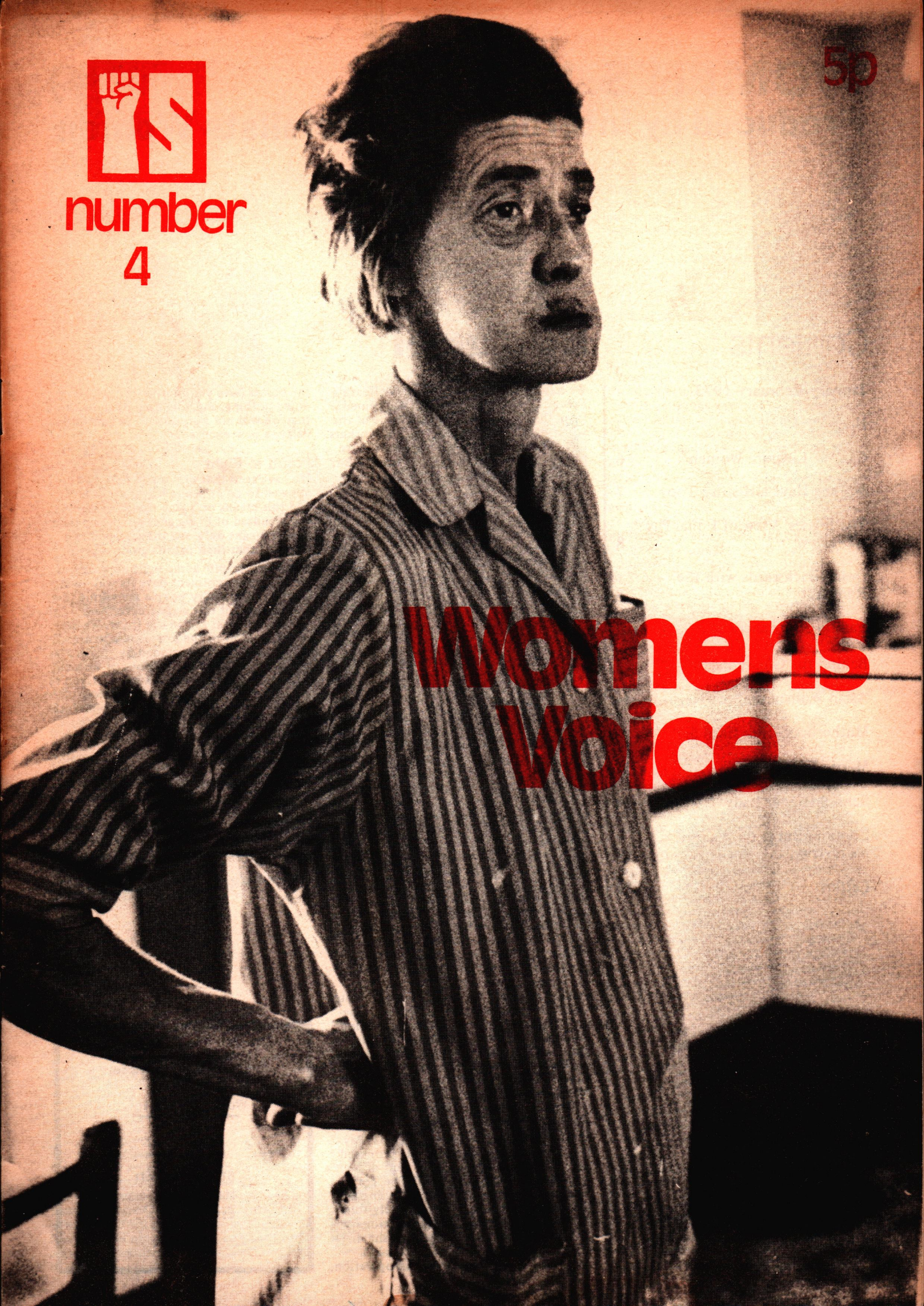




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Womens Voice



WOMEN'S VOICE 4

Produced by International Socialists Women

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Editorial

We have seen the first 90 days of Heath's Freeze and it is obvious who has gained from this crafty Tory tactic. Some of the worst-paid and most deserving of workers, like the hospital and farm workers, have had their modest wage claims frozen. But the so-called 'freeze on prices' has been hardly noticeable. Every woman reading this will know that food prices have continued to rise, partly because such vital things as milk, eggs, butter, meat, fresh fruit and vegetables aren't covered by the freeze anyway.

Heath (salary £20,000 a year) and his government, with the help of the newspapers, have tried to sell us the idea that the Freeze is for the good of us all, that it will help 'the nation' to recover. We are told that it is the greed of the unions and the workers that has sent prices rocketing up.

Very Prosperous

If there are two industries which particularly concern women they must be those producing food and clothing. This is where our money is spent every week. And, just as important, vast numbers of women work in these very prosperous industries. *There is a link here that women should examine carefully, for just as we see that prices for food and clothes are much too high, we can also see that the women who work in these industries are paid a weekly wage that wouldn't keep the boss in cigarettes.* It is not uncommon for shop assistants to earn as little as £10 a week, a woman in a food-producing plant can expect about the same, a man working on the land gets £16.20 for a seven day week. In this Women's Voice you can read about the conditions in a factory producing undies for Marks & Spencers, and about girls making rainwear for £10.60 for a 40 hour week. Does Heath really expect us to believe that these sort of wages are causing the high prices we have to pay for our groceries and clothes? A big London bakery pays women £14.75 and men £19.50. Their pay rise has been frozen. What justification are these bakery monopolies using for their increase of a penny on each loaf in February?

And what a clever way out of Equal Pay too. What has happened to our promised rises to bring us up to 90 per cent of men's rates by the end of this year? The Tory minister who is supposed to be doing us this big favour has already privately told the TUC 'I foresee immense inflationary problems if I were to implement the discretionary powers under the Equal Pay Act.' And with a wage freeze in operation,

the bosses have yet another reason for doing nothing. But it is time to show them that we will not put up with yet another delay, a new excuse.

Proud to Fight

We have seen that prices and rents are allowed to go up while wages are frozen, and this means only one thing for us—that our standard of living goes down and down. And it means only one thing for the employers—that their profits go up and up.

The TUC, despite some fighting words, is letting the government have its way. But all sorts of ordinary people are saying they will not accept this wage freeze. And women are right out in the front. We are seeing a revolt of the low-paid who are being most deeply wounded by Heath's policies, and there are millions of women among the ranks of the low-paid. Haven't women been pushed around in these rotten jobs for long enough? Look at the pictures of the hospital workers and you'll see many women, proud to be counted among those fighting this vicious government.

We must go on pushing for our pay rises. We must continue to demand equal pay NOW! To accept the Tories' wage freeze is to sit back and see what little we have got demolished in front of our eyes.

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Photo by Nancy Hellebrand

News

WELCOME TO EUROPE

The Government itself has admitted that the price of milk, butter, eggs, cheese and meat will rise quite sharply in April 'to bring us into line with Europe'. A few months later, other foodstuffs, including cereals and fruit and vegetables will also rise. Experts predict that food prices will increase by more than 5 per cent over the next year.

It is also estimated that the new Value Added Tax will add about 1 per cent to the cost of living, and will mean large price increases on items like children's shoes and clothes. But, perhaps more dangerous, it will be difficult for women to tell whether prices have risen because of VAT or not. As happened with decimalisation, in the general confusion it will be easy for firms to raise their prices (and their profits) without a murmur of protest from the housewife.

We hope to soon have an article about what Continental housewives feel about the situation, for—like us—they too are faced with rapidly-rising prices and a drastic housing shortage.

ACTION AT LAST

The Health Service is an industry where cheap female labour is at its most exploited. 75 per cent of hospital workers are women, usually in jobs which are a natural extension of the drudgery in the home—cleaning, cooking, laundry, caring for the sick. For the privilege of carrying out some of the dirtiest, most degrading, germ-ridden tasks, a female domestic enjoys a basic wage of £14.50, a laundry assistant £15, and a catering assistant £14.50. Men do little better—an average porter's basic is £18, a cook's £19.80. Four out of every five hospital ancillary workers earn less than £20 a week.

This results in two things. Many female jobs are done by married women working part-time to supplement their husband's wages. Not many single women could afford to keep themselves on wages like that! Because the married woman's income is only supplementary she will often accept poor rates of pay without a murmur, because any extra is better than none.

Secondly, overtime is almost compulsory, to cover up the extreme understaffing in hospitals. If basic rates are low, workers are only too willing to suffer the strain on health and family life caused by overtime, just to earn enough to keep their families. Productivity deals are easily pushed on to workers with little experience of management tricks, and to whom an extra couple of quid a week seems like a fortune. Until recently, hospital workers have been unorganised and in no position to fight for better wages and conditions. This is for many reasons. The main one being that of real fear, carefully fostered by governments, the press and hospital managements, that any industrial action is 'unethical' and threatens the lives of patients. Another aspect is the rigid hierarchy in the health service, with its emphasis on professionalism and its division of the workforce into exclusive layers, each mortally afraid of the one above it and extremely intolerant of the one below. This is even expressed in the number of different canteens, thus ensuring that there is no cross-mixing of staff. Shift working also prevents this. The high proportion of black workers has also prevented good organisation—racism is fostered amongst the staff to keep them divided, and many foreign workers are so afraid of being sacked or worse, deported, that they will not take action that could jeopardise their positions. Many are grateful for any job going, and want to work as long and as hard as possible to escape back to their countries eventually.

The majority of women hospital workers have not fought in their union, feeling that their first loyalty was to their home. The fact that staff are easily replaced from the pool of unemployed doesn't encourage you to open your mouth too often! Union leaders have complained of the difficulties of organising women and black workers and have accepted wage settlements giving their members a very low position in the wages league. Needless to say, not many actually ventured into the hospitals on the night shift or early morning to find out the needs of their members and the reasons for the apathy.

Action

But things are changing. The four unions produced a document containing servile

arguments as to why hospital workers needed a wage increase to counter inflation, to bring them up to the average semi-skilled workers' wage (as if that were enough to live on!) and to the TUC target minimum of £23.30. *The proposed wage rise—£4 per week! which brings hospital workers nowhere near the TUC figure, or a semi-skilled industrial workers' pay, and only gives back hospital workers the standards of living they put up with in 1970.*

Much to their amazement their members in Bristol and Gloucester immediately went on strike demanding a revised claim of £8, closely followed by hospitals in London which had formed a rank and file group called LASH (London Alliance of Shop Stewards for Health Workers) around the demands for £8 per week, a 35 hour week, equal pay and job opportunities for women, and longer holidays.

It was no accident that hospital workers were put in the front line of the wage freeze—the Tories had hoped to subdue a weak section of workers as an example to the rest. The union leaders accepted this—it was their mistake. Women health workers faced with rising prices whenever they went shopping finally shook off the years of brainwashing. As one said 'We are not going to let our concern for the patients be exploited any longer.' They

Women Hospital Workers demonstrate



began to demand action against the freeze and when the union leaders hesitated, hospitals waged their unofficial token stoppages. Support for LASH grew and union membership suddenly increased. At last the answer to the workers' apathy was ACTION.

To stem the tide of unofficial militancy the unions called for a half day national demonstration on December 13th, but made little effort to actually organise the stoppage. Close on 200,000 workers stopped work that day, many of them defying the unions and coming out for 24 hours. About 100,000 took part in the demonstrations in all major towns and in the forefront of all were the women chanting 'Heath out, fight the freeze', 'We want £8'.

We should not have any illusions about the value of a token demonstration. LASH and other alliances throughout the country have been demanding immediate all-out strikes. As they continue to put pressure on the union leadership they are having to comply with the members' wishes.

Now that health workers have seen the need to build strong union branches and form local rank and file alliances, they are preparing to wage a *real* fight against the attacks of this Tory government.

Sandra Peers

EQUAL PAY CAMPAIGN IN TYNESIDE

The latest figures (July 1972) show that women's hourly rates, excluding overtime and shift bonuses, are 65 per cent of men's; an improvement of 1 per cent over the previous year. At that rate it will be 35 years before we get full equality, or to look at it more practically, my nine year old daughter will be 44. It is too long, even if we assume that it will happen naturally, without anybody fighting for it. But in any case, this kind of social change never does happen automatically—we have got to make it happen. This broadly is the aim of the campaign launched on Tyneside by the Newcastle Trades Council. Formally, it is called the Tyneside Campaign for Working Women's Rights; it is open to affiliation from all other trades councils, TU branches, and organisations of the Labour Movement; and its stated aims are 'to secure for women equality with men in respect of pay, education, training and job opportunities.'

It is important that we understand that the 35 per cent gap between men and women's pay does not derive only—or even mainly—from unequal rates for the same or similar work. The really big problem is that of job opportunities—that women are offered and accept jobs at rates of pay that would be totally unacceptable to men; that in fact we don't have any real option about accepting such jobs, because there is a de facto division of jobs into men-only and women-only, the latter being of course much worse paid even where they demand a similar degree of skill to men's jobs. And there is the associated problem that in general the level of skill and training of women is less than that of men. A campaign for full equality with men must therefore tackle not just the question of unequal pay for the same work, but also these other questions of job opportunities and training; since also there is little point in having good policies if you lack the means to fight for them, we must also give considerable attention to getting women into TUs and getting the TUs to take the recruitment, and involvement of women seriously.

These are the broad areas in which we will be working in the campaign. Our immediate plans are, firstly, to send a speaker to every single TU branch on Tyneside; to help with this we will hold speakers classes in all areas of Tyneside, produce speakers notes, and we hope that by the end of January the local Socialist Women's Action Group will have published a pamphlet on Equal Pay Act, but covering all other questions of interest to working women. Our second immediate task is to press within our TUs for the TUC to launch a national campaign to secure an interim order under the Equal Pay Act. We are in the process of producing information sheets to assist in framing resolutions etc on this question, and ideally we would want to get resolutions in to our union leaders before the TUC special conference on 18 January. If there is to be a campaign for an interim order it will certainly need to be launched early in the year, at very latest at the Women's TUC at Easter.

In the longer term we plan to set up working parties on educational discrimination, job discrimination and on what the TUs can do to recruit and involve more women. All of these have long been the subjects of pious resolutions at successive conferences, we hope to be able to make practical proposals on them, that can be acted upon by our unions or the labour movement generally. And finally, we must be organised to provide advice and practical assistance to women in disputes.

It all adds up to a tremendous amount of work, but it has to be done and if women trade unionists don't do it, I cannot see who will.

SILVER LINING



Barbours rainwear factory in South Shields didn't pay well—£10.60 gross for a 40-hour week—and the managing director refused to recognise the union. 60 women struck in November and after seven weeks on strike they won recognition for their union and a £2 a week pay rise.

Support from other workers brought victory for the striking women, members of the Transport Workers' Union, after reports that the management was trying to recruit scabs. Forty other workers joined the women's picket line and prevented the employer, local Tory councillor Kenneth Charlton from opening the factory. The pickets refused to give ground when police were called. And when the police called for reinforcements, so did the workers. Fifty sheet-metal workers from the next-door factory of Elsy and Gibbons came out and joined the picket line. After two hours management attempts to get into the factory.

FREE JACKIE

Southend Women's Liberation Group are fighting for the release from prison of 19-year-old Jackie Paddon, jailed for 21 months for taking a friend's baby for 15 minutes. The Women's Lib Group has gained a lot of local support from ordinary people stirred by the injustice of Jackie's sentence. They say the case is one of mishandling from start to finish.

Jackie Paddon is an extremely maladjusted girl from an unhappy home. She has suffered repeated mental breakdowns since early adolescence. Jackie's own baby was taken away from her by the Social Welfare authorities who said she was an inadequate mother. Instead of helping her to become a better mother, they deprived her of her baby, the only being she could love and who offered her love. So Jackie took her friend's baby, and although it was only for 15 minutes and done in desperation, she received a savage jail sentence.

The psychiatric help she is said to be receiving is conducted within the walls of a prison, in an atmosphere of harsh repression. Surely this is not the correct way to help her? There are residential care centres where patients are offered tolerance and guidance. So why is Jackie Paddon, so much in need of love, kindness and understanding, locked away behind bars where discipline and regimentation are the order of the day?

Southend Women's Lib think this shows that society offers one answer for those who are inadequate, deprived or desperate—lock them up and forget them. They want to stop this happening to Jackie and they are demanding that she should be released from prison and receive the sympathetic psychiatric care she needs in kindly surroundings. Anyone interested in joining the campaign, can contact them at 72 Southview Road, Benfleet, Essex.

COUNTER OFFENSIVE

In the four days before Heath's Freeze set in, the manufacturers rushed in and raised the prices on 6000 household goods and food items. Unfortunately, the people who have the job of selling them weren't as quick off the mark with their pay rise. The shop workers, one of the most exploited and lowest-paid groups of workers, are now preparing to move against the Tory wage freeze. No workers have a better case. *Their modest demand is for a minimum wage of £20 and a 40 hour week.* The employers' offer is an insult, for it would mean that a worker now earning the pittance of £14 would only be brought up to the magnificent wage of £16.30. The Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers has called for official strike action. So if one day you find your local supermarket closed because the workers are on strike, don't just grumble—see if there's anything you can do to support them. Remember, a very large number of these badly-treated workers are women. *The chain stores and multiple grocers are declaring record profits, and food prices are continuing to soar (since fresh food prices are cleverly not included in the price freeze).* At the wages they pay shop girls, they certainly can't blame these price rises on high wages.

ROBBERY AT

TORY NIRC

The week before Christmas hundreds of thousands of engineering workers all over the country were on a one day strike against the £50,000 fine imposed on the AUEW by the NIRC—the famous Kangaroo court of the Tory government.

The issue involved is whether union members have the right to control their own unions, or whether the Tory government has.

The Industrial Relations Act is one of the most vicious of anti-trade union legislation in the long history of attacks of governments on the labour movement. The Act's overall intention is to weaken the grass roots of our organisation and turn the union structure into a form of shop floor police force.

After the victory of the release of the five dockers from Pentonville Prison the Tories went into a retreat—until a Mr James Goad came onto the scene. After refusing to join his CAV workmates on strike in 1967 Mr Goad let his union dues fall into arrears and his union membership lapsed, not once but three times. When his workmates decided they'd had enough and



Goad brandishing his union card.

democratically excluded him from union branch meetings, Goad decided to show how badly he wanted to rejoin by trying to get the union to crawl before the NIRC. His workmates then decided that they couldn't work in the same factory and threatened to strike.

A Goad for Sale

The management gave him 'leave of absence' on full pay. Although he has had no offers laypreacher Goad has since decided to sell what principle he ever had for £30,000!

And now at Coventry a Mr Joseph Langston has decided to jump on the union bashing bandwagon contesting the rights of his workmates to have a closed shop. The management also threatened by strike action, have sent him home on full pay.

As yet Mr Langston has not named his 'price'.

The AUEW has already taken part in three one day strikes costing thousands of pounds to the engineering industry, but one day strikes are not enough to defeat the Industrial Relations Act, and they don't really affect the profits of the bosses. It has also become obvious to a lot of workers over the last few weeks that the AUEW leadership sitting at their desks at Pecham Road, verbally refusing to pay the fine when the NIRC has already stolen £50,000 isn't enough either *and certainly not what we elected them to do.* Shop stewards and district committees have already sent resolutions to their head office calling on the EC to call for and organise a national strike against the NIRC. In many areas the rank and file have been giving the lead. We should also demand that the union fight to recover the money already stolen from us.

Kathleen Ennis

CAN WE LIBERATE WOMEN?

Many women look on women's situation as a fact of nature: women, they think, have always lived this way and always will do.

But through the ages there has in fact been a startling diversity in the kinds of lives women have led. At the very beginning of history, not only were women the main breadwinners, they were also responsible for the elementary technological inventions and scientific discoveries of the time.

In very early societies women did not simply look after their own children. They all worked together to provide for everyone's needs. In many of the tribes and clans of those times, children traced their descent not through their fathers but through their mothers and it was her brothers who took on the father's responsibilities.

In Britain at the beginning of the 19th century women often spent 16 hours a day working in the factories. In some areas where there were always more jobs for women than for men, women were the main family breadwinners. With women working such long hours, children at work—sometimes from the age of three—and the family living in abysmal poverty, housework as we know it just wouldn't have existed.

People who argue that women's situation will always be the same, also forget that there are parts of the world where polygamy still goes on. Where women have to wear a veil over their faces and can be stoned to death for adultery. Where women have their marriage partners chosen by their parents. Certainly there is nothing natural and god-given about the way we live today. In fact everything seems to point to the likelihood that in 50 years' time women's lives will be very different from what they are at present.

Immensely rich world

Today society is moving at a pace faster than ever before. Remember that factories and big cities began only 200 years ago. Yet development has been so fast that by 1963 in the USA, the average worker produced *ten times* as much as he did in 1870. A staggering fact when you think that for centuries before this the lives and incomes of working people hardly changed at all. As a result of this development we live in an *immensely* rich world today. Nothing like it has been known in history. But working people as a whole see very little of this wealth. Women see even less.

* *One tenth* of world production is devoted to bombs and the space race.

* It has been estimated that half the money spent on Concorde *alone* would have been enough to completely rehouse the city of Glasgow, rebuild every slum school in London, and wholly refurbish the National Health Service with new hospitals and modern equipment.

* In Britain a few thousand rich families own more than all the rest of us put together.

Those who own the wealth use it not to satisfy the needs of the mass of the people but solely to make bigger profits for themselves. In fact because they do this, they actually *hold back* the rate at which wealth could be created. To take but one example: for most of this year unemployment in this country has been near the million mark. If there had been jobs for these people *500 million poundsworth* of extra goods would have been produced.

If the wealth in the world *was* used to satisfy human needs, women's lives could be transformed. Good housing and a genuinely free health service would be a priority in society. Free contraceptive facilities would not only be easily available to all women, but with more scientific research devoted to perfecting them, the number of unwanted pregnancies and abortions could be dramatically reduced.

Real equal pay—including an end to low pay—and family allowances sufficient to cover the total cost of bringing up a child would enable women to be financially independent of men. Free laundries and free restaurants would mean that

women would no longer need to spend hours washing and cooking every day. Housework could be mechanised almost out of existence.

Great Benefit

The performance of these tasks would no longer be unpaid jobs separate from all the other work which goes on in society. Just as today few people make their own furniture or grow their own food but rely on others being paid to do this on a mass scale, so in the future few people would do their own washing or cooking.

Nursery places would be available for all pre-school children. Mothers would have no need to fear these as dumping grounds for their children—as they tend to at the moment. With sufficient money spent on them and adequate research on the needs of young children, they could be places to which children would enjoy going and from which they would derive great benefit. Play centres for school age children—with free cinemas, swimming pools, sports grounds, etc—would also take some of the burden off mothers. As for babies and very young children, we still know very little about what is really best for them. But so long as it was necessary for women to stay at home looking after them an allowance would be paid equivalent to the wage the women would be earning if she were working. In fact in a society where human needs came first, a shorter working week and flexible working hours together with the changes in women's situation described above would enable *men* to take an *equal* share in the rearing of children.

All this would not only mean that the misery and drudgery could be taken out of women's lives. It would also mean that the *whole* of women's lives would no longer need to revolve around the role of housewife and mother.

Women's second-class status would not, of course, be eliminated overnight—the attitudes men and women have towards each other in present-day society cannot be wiped out at a stroke. But the material changes in women's situation would lay the basis for relationships between men and women to become, in time, relationships between *equal human beings*; not as they are today—relationships between superior and inferior, oppressor and oppressed.

Real possibility

Relieved of the indignity of financial dependence on the man and the double burden of work and home, women would be able to live their lives as human beings in their own right. In the home, men and children's needs would no longer be satisfied at women's expense. And at work women would have an equal status with men—women's job and women's wages would be just as important as men's.

This is not simply an idealist's dream. *It's a real possibility.* Putting men on the moon and creating nuclear weapons capable of destroying the entire population of the earth many times over, are in purely technical terms far more mind-boggling achievements.

Most of us haven't a clue as to how these things are possible. Yet we take them for granted simply because we've lived with them for a while. Imagine talking to a woman in the Middle Ages and think which *she* would find more difficult to imagine: nuclear weapons or the comparatively simple changes in women's situation which we've outlined above.

In terms of the quality of human life the transformation in women's situation would of course be an infinitely greater achievement. It is a damning indictment of our type of society—capitalist society—that it can afford the massive expense of the arms race but claims not to be able to afford to satisfy women's needs. The truth of the matter is that liberating women can become a real possibility only in a socialist society. Only in a society where the wealth is controlled by ordinary people and produced for their needs—not for the needs of a small rich and powerful employing class. In the next issue of WOMEN'S VOICE we will be looking at the reasons for this.



Kathy Sims

Women Have a History Too

Bryant & May's match-making factory in London and the year 1888 are significant for women, and indeed the whole labour movement. Here was a victorious breakthrough for trade union militancy. The matchgirls of the East End struck for better wages and conditions.

They were unorganised—but full of indignation at the way management exploited them. They had a highly developed awareness of why they were being exploited. Before their famous strike they had complained bitterly that one of Bryant & May's directors, a great admirer of Gladstone, had erected a statue to him in the forecourt. The money had been taken from the girls' wages. They had been given a 'holiday' without pay on the day of the unveiling. But many of them went to the ceremony, armed with bricks and stones, prepared to hurl them at the offending piece of granite. And they leapt, kicking and screaming, at the statue.

The matchgirls were organised by a woman who immediately saw the potential in their anger. She was Annie Besant, a name still remembered in London's East End. With her experience and knowledge and the matchgirls' fierce determination, they abolished the illegal docking of wages. They also won a canteen in which to eat their sandwiches, thereby reducing the risk of phosphorous poisoning, and were given barrows to wheel the boxes of matches in, no longer having to carry them on their heads (a practice which had led to premature baldness).

Inspired

The most important outcome of the strike was the formation of a trade union. The historical significance of the matchgirls' triumph can be summed up by Ben Tillett, dockers' leader, who said their strike was 'the beginning of the social convulsions which produced the "New" Unionism, the new Dockers' Union, the great Dockers Strike of 1889...'

The victory of the matchgirls inspired all manner of weak and downtrodden workers to demand better conditions and to form unions.

The matchgirls' action is only one example in the history of women's struggle for rights. At every dress rehearsal for the workers' revolution, women were among the first on the stage.

In the Paris Commune of 1871, the prostitutes, the most degraded and poorest women of Paris, fought and died on the barricades alongside the men.

In Russia in 1905 the starving women of Petrograd left the bread queues to march to the Winter Palace to ask the Tsar for bread. The outcome was bloodshed and the setting of the stage for the 1917 Revolution. This greatest of all social upheavals began on International Women's Day. Women textile workers were the first to strike, sending a delegation to the metalworkers asking for support. The metalworkers reluctantly agreed to support them. Many workers believed that the time was not right to take to the streets. But the women had given the lead and the events that followed are written on the pages of working-class history.

There is a strong thread of militancy linking working women in the past to their comrades today. The matchgirls' struggle connects with that of the Leeds clothing workers, who in February 1970 took the city by storm when they suddenly went on strike for another shilling an hour. The clothing industry had seen nothing like it for 30 years. The managers were stunned.

Bitter yoke

Earlier, in July 1968, women sewing machinists at Ford's Dagenham had come out, demanding equal grading with men machinists. Their determination led to the introduction of the Equal Pay Act, which Parliament had been promising women for decades. The strike also injected confidence into the male work force at Ford's to face the management once more after the tragic defeat of 1962.

How is it that working women, thought of as humble, docile creatures, suddenly burst out of their apathy to put the most militant men to shame? The answer is because they are over-worked, under-paid and extremely exploited. There are no half-measures for people who have had no reforms, who have never experienced the 'freedom' to be fully unionised and to work in an atmosphere where asserting oneself is part of the daily battle with management.

Carrying the double burden of being both housewife and worker, women understand very well this most bitter yoke thrust upon them by the ruling class. Yet, unlike men, they have rarely had the experience of going through the 'usual channels' of trade union procedure. So when women do fight, the result is uncompromising, 'on the nail' and no messing. *Then the pent-up frustrations burst out in a show of militancy that nearly always has far-reaching effects for the whole labour movement.*

Working class women have a long history of revolutionary activity. Of all sections and classes of womankind, working women hold the key to changing society. They are united in their workplace and can learn that 'unity is strength'. Because they are directly involved in day-to-day issues they have a better chance of developing politically than women who spend their days isolated in the home. *The women's liberation movement can fan the flames of revolt, but without the vast conflagration of women organised at their places of work, society cannot be changed for good and all.*

The courage and confidence to fight for this change can be built up if lessons are learned from the generations of women who have fought in strikes and revolutions all over the world. Looking back at history, women see that they have much to be proud of—and much to live up to.

This article first appeared in 'Socialist Worker'.



The matchgirls of Bryant and May: they got 4s a week, shareholders got 23 per cent dividends

Going Backwards with the Rent Act

Eileen Cox and Jess Rose are tenants on the de Beauvoir Estate in Hackney, north-east London. They've been involved in the tenants' struggle long before it turned into a real protest. 'We had the MP down to ward meeting, and bought the White Paper. We went round collecting petitions for the Labour Party. We had a good old sign-up—everybody signed the petition. They knew our feelings at ward meetings for months.' When asked what she thought of the Rent Act, Eileen replied sharply, 'It stinks! It's a confidence trick by the government to make us pay an economic rent. It's not a fair rent, it's what this flat here would bring on the open market—and I couldn't afford it. We're paying £8.69 all in now.' Jess felt the Act should be fought because it lowers the living standards of ordinary people. 'This rise makes a drop of £4 a month in your actual earnings. Next year it'll be £8 a month. The working class family just can't afford this. It's not only your rent that's going up. It's your food and every other thing, so that you're not just losing out on this—you're losing out on everything. And we're working. Now I've been off sick I realise what it must be like for those that've only got their sick money to rely on for months and years.'

Means Test

Jess and Eileen have no time for the Tories' much-publicised rebate scheme. 'It's a means-tested one,' said Jess, 'and it'll never work. Every six months you've got this form to fill in and take to your employer. There's a lot of men that wouldn't take it to their employer. They feel degraded. The government don't want to know what your take-home pay is. Well, my husband's a postman and he earns about £25 a week before stoppages. But by the time they take off tax, pension and insurance, on a flat week he brings home about £18. It's absolutely useless because we cannot pay our way out of that money.'

Eileen talked of a woman whose husband is bringing home £17 a week and out of that £8.69 goes on rent. She applied for a rebate seven months ago and still hasn't had it. 'The whole thing is, this is a confidence trick. They say you will get this and get that but they know only a third will get, because only one third will say "I want". The rest will say "Stick it, mate, I don't want it. However poor I am, I don't want your charity." They will not claim it because their pride is more important to them than a handout from any town hall or any government.' 'We're going backwards, let's face it,' said Jess. 'I went out to work six years ago and I used to have spending money. I don't have it now.' And Eileen added, 'You have to cut out things like insurance, holidays, things that used to be something you could have.'

Rent Strike

The women didn't feel enough people realised what the new Rent Act meant and that more people should be fighting it. They went on a two week rent strike and say they'll stay two weeks in arrears 'because I'm against the whole policy.' Hackney Borough Council are prepared to use the Full Tenement Recovery Act of 1938, a law modernised in October last year. It will not apply to people with ordinary rent arrears because they are given notice to quit if they do not pay. But the rent strikers can be taken to court, instructed to pay their two weeks' arrears and if they don't, the Council can ask their employers to stop it from wages. This was voted on and passed at Hackney Borough Council.

Eileen said she had confronted the chairman of the Housing Committee. 'He didn't know I knew, but I brought it up at the Tenants Association. His answer was—we've done it to protect the tenant! This will stop them evicting you, and if you go to court perhaps someone will listen to you! They're just passing the buck. Now we had a shop steward at the meeting and he

Anna Paczuska

The Bosses View of Equal Pay— a review

Ever since Barbara Castle announced her plans for an Equal Pay Act to ensure equal pay for all women, the more militant among us have been sceptical. While union officials emphasised that vigilance was needed to make sure that the Act was indeed implemented, we criticised the Act itself and tried to show what a rotten piece of legislation it was. We pointed out that it contained dozens of loop-holes for employers and the dangers of the management methods written into the Act. We showed how it had been drawn up to cater for the needs of the profitability of British industry as it is now developing. We emphasised that far from being a progress on the road to equal pay, this Act was, if anything, a hindrance—even a dangerous diversion.

A recent book on the subject, written not for us but for the bosses, confirms all our worst fears. It is 'An Employers Guide to Equal Pay' by Peter Patterson and Michael Armstrong, published by Kogan Page. We can hardly resist saying 'I told you so' to those who said we were being far too hard on Barbara Castle (the same darling who drew up 'In Place of Strife' and paved the way for the Industrial Relations Act, remember).

The authors of the book, a Fleet Street reporter and a management expert, have a modern attitude towards women. They understand that Women's Lib has had a tremendous effect on women, and that it has broadened the equal pay issue into a question of training and opportunity as well. These kindly souls actually think it is quite reasonable for women to expect to be treated like human beings and they gently point out that managements who fail to do so may be sowing the seeds of considerable industrial strife. Such a mild warning, however, is hardly likely to dissuade employers from their traditional haughty and contemptuous attitudes towards women workers, Arnold Weinstock, head of the multi-million pound GEC

stood up and said, "If I hear one tenant has been taken to court I shall bring all my men out." And he will.' Eileen added, 'We did not mandate our councillors. We've learnt that lesson so any other important vote that we've got to make—we'll mandate them.'

The women were becoming disillusioned with the Labour councillors. 'We put these councillors in to represent us as working people,' said Jess. 'They voted to implement the bill and now they're digging up laws 100 years old against us. So we're losing confidence in our own Labour Party. I would have expected any Labour councillors to throw it out right away—I have lost all confidence in them.' And Eileen, who canvassed for the Labour Party, said 'All the election addresses said *We will fight the rent increases*. When we put this to them, they said it didn't include breaking the law.' We asked them how they felt about breaking the law. 'I don't care,' said Eileen. And Jess, 'That kind of law is there to be broken.'

Women have always played a really important part in all rent battles. Why is this? Because we have to pay the rent. We're the ones left with the bills at the end of the week. It's this thing of double wage earners. The woman has to help. I can understand if a man feels inadequate because he can't do what he's got to do on the money he gets. Women are sitting up and saying, "We're putting in our lot every week and paying our way so we're going to have our say." We're not the Victorian types now that would shut up and be told what to do. We're going out to work now and we're the ones at the end of the week have to work out what expenses we've got and pay the bills. Women are saying "This Rent Act is a deliberate assault on our finances and we're not having it!"

empire, was asked about Equal Pay. He said he was all in favour of it—provided the men's pay was brought down to the level of the women's. The authors of this book try to persuade such employers that their attitudes are mistaken and foolish.

To start with they present many statistics and arguments to dispel the old myths about women workers. *They show that the figures for absenteeism, unreliability and so on do not justify the prejudice shown to women at work.* They also point out that the female sector is seriously under-used, its talents wasted, and so a huge potential for British industry remains untapped. Women are cheap labour, and therefore few employers have bothered about getting the most out of them. The gallant authors say that any increased labour costs resulting from equal pay can easily be off-set by making women workers 'more efficient', and much of their book is devoted to telling the bosses how to do this.

One little phrase sums it all up, and also shows what was unique about the Equal Pay Act. 'For the first time, a tool for management efficiency, job evaluation, has been written into a statute'. *Many people have said that job evaluation would never present a serious problem for women workers—this book indicates the opposite.* Details are given about different types of job evaluation schemes. The aim of all this is to show the bosses that, *contrary to what the Equal Pay Act says, job evaluation doesn't have to benefit the women workers.* On the contrary, the book gives plenty of advice to show employers how they can always win. If this advice is followed, then women will have to learn much more about job evaluation and what it really is. We must learn to defend ourselves and not to fall for all the phoney arguments about equal pay.

All the usual dodges are listed. Conveniently, they are neatly summarised in the short sections at the end of each chapter. A brief glance through it is enough to convince anyone that women are not going to get equal pay out of the Act. And the average employer who makes money out of underpaying women workers, should feel much comforted on reading the advice in this book.

We should read it too. Get it from your local library. If you know what the enemy is up to you can keep one jump ahead. After reading this, no women will ever trust to the goodwill of the employers or the government again. No bad thing. It is about time we all realised that the only women who will get equal pay are those who'll fight for it.

The only thing left out is the question of shift working. The implications of the Equal Pay Act on this question are quite far-reaching. But maybe the authors are saving that up for a follow-up volume to this book on 'How to Bash Your Women Workers'.

Valerie Clark

Family Allowances

facts & action

In our last issue we printed the remarks of some women on hearing that the Tories' new tax scheme will abolish the Family Allowance. They were all firmly against it. *'Women buy the food and clothes and they should get the allowance.'* *'Nine out of ten wives wouldn't get the extra money off the husband.'* *'We get the allowance on Tuesday from the Post Office. That comes in very handy when Friday's money's been spent.'*

Since then several special surveys have been done and they have produced facts and figures which show that these ordinary Salford women knew as much about it as the experts! The surveys back up their conclusions to the hilt. Women simply do not believe they will see a penny of the Family Allowance if the Tories' tax-credit scheme puts it in the man's wage packet. *The unique feature of the Family Allowance is that it is payable to the woman and this is terribly important.* Three-quarters of women interviewed thought the new scheme was disastrous. *'It's my only independent source of income.'* A third

did not think they or their children would get any money at all. *'If it's in his wage packet he'll think he's earned it.'*

The report from the Child Poverty Action Group reveals that many wives of lower-paid workers would be really desperate if they were deprived of their Allowance. *'My husband never earned a proper wage every week. I pawned my wedding ring twice.'* Over half the women interviewed said that on occasions the Family Allowance had been their sole source of income for a week. And what chance of getting extra money from a husband who says (as one did), *'I give her a flat wage, no overtime. The only time she gets a rise is when she's in the family way. The Family Allowance is nothing to do with me.'*

Apart from the obvious advantage of getting the Allowance on Tuesday, when your money's just about running out, the other advantage of Family Allowance is that it can be saved. *'If you have the money every week in your hand you spend it—like this it's easier not to touch it. I leave it for my electricity bill and if there's money over I spend it on the children.'* Other women saved up the Allowance for children's shoes, coats, school trips, Christmas, even to pay off rent arrears.

Another problem is the separated or divorced mother. At the moment she gets her Family Allowance, no questions asked. But as one woman said, *'He doesn't pay me maintenance—so how can I get any family allowance from him?'* And Child Poverty Action says unmarried mothers may have problems getting their money under the new scheme, unless they're working. The trouble is more than half of them are not working.

The social workers are doing good work in opening people's eyes. But other questions are involved.

Lose control

The only fast-growing field of employment is women's employment—cheap, docile labour as the employers would like to have it. The government has made grants of some money for birth control, and some more nursery provision, and these will make it a little easier for more women to enter the labour market. If Family Allowances are taken away from the mother, the woman in the house will lose control of her only independent income. She may find herself in desperate financial difficulties without the Allowance, and this will be an extra incentive for her to go out to work whatever low wages she is offered.

Another point that concerns us is that, in taking away the Allowance, the government forces the woman to become even more financially dependent on the man, weakening her position in the home.

The Tories justify this change in tax arrangements by saying that it will save money because of 'administrative convenience'. But Child Poverty Action group states 'It would however be possible to separate Family Allowances from a tax credit scheme... It is doubtful whether a single payment tax credit system could have as many advantages as a system retaining weekly family payments to the mother.'

Resentment and anger

Women's Lib groups up and down the country are already organising. So is the Women's Institute. The poverty charities and MPs are kicking up a fuss in the newspapers. In towns as far apart as Southampton and Leicester, full-scale campaigns are being mounted to bring home to women that they really are in danger of losing their Family Allowances, and to bring women together to make their views known and to fight back against this great leap backwards in our tax system. The Government have a committee investigating the question. We should let them know our views (write to the Select Committee on Tax Credits Proposals, House of Commons, London SW1).

Petitions to the Select Committee and to local MPs might be useful rallying tactics, and also show the strength of our feelings. Signatures would come flooding in to anyone who stood outside the Post Office with a petition form on a Tuesday, or outside the local infants school when mums are collecting their children. Some groups have already organised meetings and are preparing for local demonstrations.

The TUC has shown interest, and any working woman worth her salt should do her best to persuade her work-mates and her union to take up the campaign to keep the Family Allowance. *If we can show the Tories what a wave of resentment and anger they have aroused, we can win.* But this is certainly a battle that women will have to fight for themselves. We have a lot at stake. This is money we rely on, that we and our children are entitled to. We're not going to see it sacrificed for the sake of the Tories' bureaucratic convenience and their desire to see even more women forced into jobs paying slaves' rates.

Child Poverty Action's report (price 10p) can be obtained from 1 Macklin Street, London WC2.

A look at women's magazines, written by a member of the Women Workers Group in Harlow, Essex.

BEHIND THE GLOSSY PAGES

Over 15 million women in Britain read magazines. Thousands of them write for advice each week. Have you ever seen a reply to a reader urging her to join a trade union or a political organisation which might help her overcome her difficulty? No. Such replies are never given. Every problem is treated as 'personal', with a private solution. In most cases it is assumed the letter-writer is at fault and should adjust her behaviour.

Anyone reading women's magazines would think that women are only interested in clothes, cooking and men; in that order. Other subjects are rarely mentioned. By implication, in the stories, it is suggested that women are only happy when looking for a man or, having caught one, washing his clothes and preparing his meals. Some would call this domestic bliss, others a life sentence.

The 'feminine mystique', or fairy story, denies women careers or commitments outside their homes. The magazines would like to turn us all into 'captive housewives'. *This is because the editors of the magazines are not interested in putting forward ideas; rather they try to sell detergents, beauty aids and household appliances.*

In a consumer society all firms try to persuade people that they will not be happy until they have bought one more new gadget. Satisfaction is equated with spending money and piling up goods. But, love, dignity, self-respect and creativity cannot be bought. Love in particular cannot be purchased. You can only exchange love for love. This is difficult for the owners of women's magazines to understand, as their main aim is to communicate for profit. *It is claimed that the magazines are not political. In fact, they are an important means of spreading capitalist ideas.* In the stories, social success and personal competitiveness are praised. We should not be surprised by this because the publishing of women's magazines is done by a few firms which have a virtual monopoly in this field. They speak for themselves and their fellow-capitalists.

Fairy story

The hero in nearly all the stories is a professional or businessman. It seems strange that although 70 per cent of the people in Britain are manual workers they do not find themselves in women's fiction. Perhaps this is just as well, for most ordinary women's homes and jobs are similarly excluded. **In real life, many women spend their lives in loneliness, poverty and unhappiness, caught in the traps of our society: low wages, high prices, housing shortage. But the dream world of magazines cannot allow any kind of persistent problem or permanently difficult relationship. Fairy stories have to have happy endings.**

To catch a man, the magazines indicate that women must spend time and money on their appearance. Many advertisements make women feel inferior because no amount of cosmetics could turn a real woman into the ideal type shown in the photographs.

Even more serious is the idea peddled in the magazines that the role of women should be confined to the home. Women should be wives, mothers, playing a subordinate part to their menfolk. Fulfilment of life for women can only be found in giving birth to, and rearing children. That a woman's true place is in the home is a key concept in the magazines. All these ideas are part of the capitalist mythology. They do not necessarily lead to happiness or freedom for women. On the contrary, they are a means of keeping us enslaved.

Real problems

The magazines ignore the real problems of women and concen-

trate on superficial ones. Today nearly nine million women go out to work: one third of the labour force in this country. Many of them also look after a home and children. I feel that this is the situation which WOMEN'S VOICE faces up to. Whilst most women's magazines put forward capitalist ideas, WOMEN'S VOICE supports socialism.

We are not put off by accusations that socialist women are not 'feminine'. Of course they are. But femininity does not mean passivity, dependency, superficiality and acceptance of inferior status to men. Unlike other magazines we see the emancipation of women will take place when women are engaged in co-operative, necessary work. Rather than encouraging women to glorify and enjoy household tasks, we think that domestic work is menial, dull, repetitive and boring. Much of it could be done away with. Restaurants, cafes, laundries, could be run as non-profit-making community services. At present, women do housework in isolation from one another, and are prevented from using their talents, abilities or energies to the full. Women who are capable of everything are permitted to do nothing. Therein lies their bondage.

Participation

Women's magazines are not the slightest bit interested in women, their happiness or their sorrows. The magazines are run for profit, they act as advertising agencies, and they dehumanise women by saying that happiness is to be found in consuming rather than producing. Editors urge women to concentrate on personal happiness and ignore social problems. The magazines stand for everything which is the very opposite to Socialism.

Contrary to these views, WOMEN'S VOICE aims to put forward the ideas of Socialism. It looks at the real problems of women and attempts to point out solutions. It gives readers and contributors participation in the contents. It is not beholden to big business or advertisers. It invites all readers to become authors and correspondents, and also to introduce the paper to more people. By such activity, women can help to bring about their own emancipation.

Harlow Women Workers Group was formed in November 1972 as a result of a meeting held by Harlow IS on Women at Work. It is made up of local women, some of whom work at the British Oxygen and Cosser factories. They plan to start a campaign on family allowances soon.

Advice to the lovelorn

I'm Blue Eyes of Scunthorpe, I need some advice,
For I've been a bad girl (why was it nice?).
I've no one to turn to in this modern age
So all that is left is the Lonely Hearts Page.

CHORUS: And Miss Home, Home, Evelyn Home

Dear Evelyn Home, I've a problem for you
I've slept with my boyfriend (he slept with me too).
His parents found out and blamed it on me
And completely ignore me when I go to tea.

Dear Blue Eyes of Scunthorpe, I can't understand
Why you, and you only, are taking a stand,
It takes two to go wrong, apportion the guilt,
Your boyfriend was in it, right up to the hilt.

Dear Blue Eyes of Scunthorpe, hear what I must state
For grief and contrition it's really too late.
Unless you get married as soon as you can
You'll regret having had carnal knowledge of man.

Oh dear, sighed Miss Home, as she lay down her pen,
The troubles these young women have with their men.
It's sordid, immoral and I really can't see
Why all of these things never happened to me.
J Fryer

ASIAN WOMEN ON STRIKE

Women do not often go on strike, Asian women even less often. But at Mansfield Hosiery mill in Loughborough over a hundred women and three hundred men went on strike in October in support of a wage claim by 120 Asian bar-loaders for a £5 a week pay increase and access to the high-paid knitting jobs which are all filled by white workers.

The strike began at the Trinity Street factory where about 50 women came out with over 250 men. They immediately got the sack. Three days later, 80 women at the Clarence Street factory came out in sympathy. The National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers refused to make the strike official even after it was found guilty, together with the management, of contravening sections of the Race Relations Act. It eventually made the strike official on 5th December.

Solidarity

Although the women struck in support of the men's wage claim, they recognised that the strike has turned into a fight against racial discrimination. As Bhanu Mistry, a cutter at Clarence Street, said, *'The colour bar applies to us all. If our brothers are on strike we have to give them support. They need to feel self-respect when they are treated like dogs. How can we go in, if our brothers are out?'*

The Asians live near the factory and form a tightly-knit community which feels that an attack on one is an attack on all. This makes for strong feelings of solidarity in the strike. For most of the women it is the first time they have been on strike. There are no women on the strike committee, although women have been invited to join it. But a few stood up and spoke at strike meetings. Many women have shown their support in the traditional ways of making tea and food for the picket. But others have gone beyond this and stood on the picket line themselves. *This was particularly hard for Asian women who generally feel shy when dealing with matters outside the home.* At the Clarence Street factory, twenty women formed a picket to prevent others from scabbing. They argued that even though the women needed the money to get by in these hard times, they should realise that it was only by sticking together that they would win.

But old customs retain their hold. For instance, men and women sit on opposite sides of the hall during strike meetings. This means that there is even more attention put on a woman if she does get up and speak. The few women who have done this are greatly admired by the other women for their courage and outspokenness, and have won the respect of the men.

Breadwinners

Three women who went to strike meetings and joined the picket talked, with the help of an interpreter, to WOMEN'S VOICE. They are all the breadwinner in their particular family, and being on strike is no picnic for them. Mrs P, now nearly 40, has brought up her two teenage daughters since she was widowed in her early twenties. Bhanu Mistry is bringing up a small daughter. Shantaban Patel's husband is one of the growing number of unemployed—he was made redundant at Fison's Chemical Company—and she has three school-age children to support. *'I am very careful with my money but it is hard with growing children. It is good that my husband supports the strike.'*

Asian women suffer at work, first of all because they are workers, then because they are women, and again because they are black.

Mansfield Hosiery Mill is known locally as a bad employer for both black and white. Young white girls leaving school try the other big hosiery firms first. The women there probably made the jumper or knickers you are wearing if you bought them at Marks & Spencers: they own 20 per cent of the shares in Mansfield Hosiery and 90 per cent of the work turned out goes to them. Other local factories which supply Marks & Sparks pay about £3-4 a week more.

When Asian women first started working at Mansfield about 8 or 9 years ago, all the women's sections in the factory were mixed: black and white women worked together. Now, without a squeak from the union, the white women get the better jobs. In the low-paid cutting department at Clarence Street there are 28 Asian women and only two white women. At Trinity Street, two low-paid sections are now all black. Shantaban Patel, an Indian from Trinidad, said *'I've never known a place like this. I've worked in Preston and in Luton.*

I've worked in an electrical factory, Brush, in Loughborough and even for a year in a small sweatshop. But I've never met with anything like this. They treat you like dogs.'

Harassment

If you try to change the situation at Mansfield you find things are made very awkward for you. Fear of harassment is strong and the women are worried about what might happen to them for taking part in the strike. One only talked to WOMEN'S VOICE because she hoped that other women, particularly hosiery workers, both black and white, would read her story. Another has suffered insult after insult from management and union because she has dared to raise her voice on one or two issues in the five years she has worked for the firm. She used to be a nursery school teacher in Kenya and did not expect the treatment handed out to her at Mansfield Hosiery. Some time ago she managed to transfer to a new job, overlocking, because the supervisor of her section was making her life miserable. But the harassment did not stop. She was told that she could not wear her sari on the new job. They quoted industrial safety regulations and told her to wear 'English' clothes or trousers. (You will have already gathered just how much Mansfield Hosiery Mill really cares for the safety of its women workers, but read on . . .)

'I pointed out to management that this was against our customs and told the union four or five times, but they did nothing. Then union and management promised me £24 a week if I dropped the question and went back to my old job. I agreed, but what did they do? I got back and found I only had £18. The union? I went to them but I got the "ice cubes".'



Cold Shoulder Union

The 'ice cubes' treatment is all the Asian workers get from their union. 47,147 of the union's 64,372 members are women, and the union boasts that it has a policy of equal pay. Yet the fact remains that the vast majority of skilled, high-paid jobs are still reserved for men. If the union has done little for its women members, its attitude towards black workers is even more shameful. A large number of hosiery workers are immigrants, mainly Asians, yet the union's Secretary admits that not a single member of any of the union's district committees is an immigrant worker. And not once in the last ten years has union conference discussed integrating immigrant labour into the trade union movement. The women on strike all agreed about one thing and that was the union. *Rubbish* is the first word which springs to their lips when you ask about it. *Hopeless*, is the next. One said, *'This is the first time I see the union at work. When I complain they don't listen. It's ridiculous, that's what it is!'*

Two jobs

The women all do two jobs: one as mother and housekeeper, the other as a hosiery worker. Asian families are closely-knit and the children well-loved. The women take enormous pride in making their homes comfortable and attractive and so it was

not surprising that we got round to talking about the problems of looking after a home and children when you go out to work. They all repeated that they needed the money to support their families, but the younger women said they enjoyed getting outside the home and meeting other people. Mrs P was less attracted to going out to work in a factory. She stressed how heavy and tiring her job was and that she met other people anyway through her work in the Indian community. She was also rather more worried about mothers going out to work even though she had been forced to herself. She remarked that Asian working mums are often better off than English ones because they at least have relatives willing to look after the children. Her last words were to urge the need for good nursery schools for the good of children and mothers of all races.

Confidence to organise

All the strikers realise that a huge campaign for union democracy is needed before they can have any say in their own trade union—they do not even have branch meetings at the moment. It will be hard enough for the men to fight for this, but for women, traditionally less involved in union affairs, it will be even more difficult. The women at Mansfield can see the task ahead but most feel it is still beyond them. The women mentioned the confidence they had gained in the strike but one admitted she was still not bold enough to organise women around her in the factory. *But they all agreed it would be harder to push them around in future.*

Merrie England!

The scene is the Christmas rush at the famous mail order firm of John England, the women are just finishing their annual stint. The girls pictured in John England catalogues are always smiling and happy. But conditions at the Wigan warehouse are more likely to make you scream with frustration than beam with joy. For a magnificent 35 pence per hour women workers are expected to put up with Colditz-type supervision, prying and a host of petty indignities. To make up for it, the management lets you off an hour early on your last day, with no loss of pay. You push off, duly grateful. And that just about sums up the Victorian conditions within the warehouse.

An overlooker stands on a raised platform in the centre of the warehouse spying on the workers. His beady eyes search out those who may be shirking. Quite aptly he is nicknamed Hitler.

If a girl visits the toilet, she may be followed by a supervisor. Girls have been asked to uncurl their hands and prove they are not holding cigarettes and contemplating the ghastly crime of a quick smoke in the lav.

Management abides rigidly by the rule that workers employed for four hours or less per day are not legally entitled to a tea break. Girls on the evening shift grovel beneath the counters with their flasks, hastily choking down their sandwiches, terrified of being caught and dismissed for taking a break.

The management seem convinced that all workers are potential criminals. There is a rule that no-one should enter the premises with a handbag of any kind. Instead they issue you with plastic 'string' bags. Your belongings are then easily scrutinised, so they can be sure you haven't stolen anything. Some girls go to work without any possessions rather than have their personal belongings searched publicly. Workers are regularly searched on leaving the premises. One girl was found to have a single Roses chocolate in her pocket. She was instantly dismissed and taken to the police station. There she was charged with theft. Hope the management was well satisfied with catching this big-time crook!

But the management are conscientious about wages. One girl left and was aroused by the postman knocking at her door some days later. Meticulous to the last, John England had sent a registered envelope containing a note telling her that they owed her no money and she owed them none! They've probably got the money to waste on such formalities when you consider how small their wages bill must be.

Very little seems to be done to combat the petty rules and restrictions. Most of the girls are desperate for the money and scared stiff of opening their mouths to complain in case they get fired. One girl asked about the union and said she was treated like she was mad. On the day shift a GMWU official did show her face. She assured the workforce that their interests were being well represented. Meanwhile, back in the warehouse, life grinds on. Next time you are being tempted with the glossy pictures and reasonable terms in the John England catalogue—remember the girls behind the scene.

Anna Kerr

MOTHERHOOD- The Hard Sell

'These are his Golden Days . . . so you choose Golden Ostermilk' ran an advertisement in a recent issue of *Maternity & Mothercraft*, a paper almost entirely devoted to advertising and distributed free to new and expectant mothers. The picture of a glamorous, beautifully dressed young mother changing the nappy of her smiling, contented baby is typical of the vision of motherhood presented to us by advertisers, by articles and stories in many women's magazines, and often by our friends and relatives too.

But as we all know, babies are not always contented, clean, laughing and healthy, and his 'Golden Days' are often golden neither for baby nor for mother. Babies cry a lot, often in the night. They refuse food, they vomit, they make a mess in the middle of a nappy change, they get ill, they keep awake their parents and neighbours, they do not respond as they should. And above all, they do not always provide the satisfying experience that all the young mother has read, seen and heard has led her to expect.

It is not surprising that many mothers are disappointed when their baby is born. Where is the pink and white bundle dressed in the delicate little garments of the Mothercare ad? Who is this screaming, blotchy, hairless stranger wearing the flannel hospital nightgown? As one young mother said, *'When my baby was born, I looked at her, and thought "Who are you? I don't feel anything for you at all." And I felt so guilty. I had to pretend I loved her. I couldn't let any of the other mothers or nurses know how I felt. And the visiting hours were the worst when my mum and my husband went mad over her and I had to pretend I felt the same.'*

And when the mother goes home with her baby, the situation can become worse. There are the constant feeds, the tiring nights, the dirty bottoms, the endless washing—and the realisation that you're no longer free, that you're bound to and responsible for this little thing for a long time, it seems like forever. It often feels as if there's no-one to turn to. The midwives and health visitors who come are often no help at all. They seem to expect such a lot and their own efficiency with the baby only serves to increase the mother's guilt.

Battered babies

It is hardly surprising that quite a large number of mothers become depressed after giving birth and reject the baby, and even injure it if the strain becomes too great. The peak age at which babies are battered by their parents is very young—between five and eight months—and many babies even younger receive serious injuries. *Very commonly the mothers talk of their isolation.* They feel they have no-one to turn to, the Health Visitor and family doctor are too busy and 'don't understand'. Mother either lives too far away, or lives near and 'makes it worse because she's always criticising me'. The neighbours are unknown except as angry banging on the walls or ceiling when the baby cries at night.

'Battered babies' are not only found in poor homes. The mothers may be living on their own, or getting on badly with their husbands, or living in cramped and unhealthy accommodation on very low wages. Or they may be mothers living in apparently 'normal happy' families, in reasonable homes, with enough money. *But they find motherhood a great strain, because of all that is expected of them, and all they expect of themselves.*

As one mother said, 'Maybe things would have been better if I'd been alone on a desert island with my baby. But as it was I felt all the times that I wasn't doing enough. My husband and my mother seemed to be criticising all the time. And I always felt that the mother in the next flat was giving her baby more than I was mine. I just didn't know what was right and what was wrong.'

Guilt

It is quite easy to understand why advertisers present this unreal picture of blissful motherhood. They are trying to sell us their product. They are trying to make us believe that if we buy it we will be like the mother and baby in their picture, and if we don't we are in some way failing our baby. Very cleverly, advertisers of baby products produce a sense of guilt. By implication they are telling us, 'You are not a good mother if your baby doesn't have all these clothes and gadgets and isn't fed on these foods, and other mothers' babies will be better than yours.' Thus, feelings of guilt and competitiveness are



Photo by Nancy Hellebrand

instilled in the mothers who don't have the money to respond to advertising, and millions of pounds of profit are made out of the business of motherhood.

We should consider whether there are different ways of looking at these things. Are we abnormal if we find our babies difficult or unsatisfying, and is it not better to try to share our feelings with others rather than try and cope on our own. Isolation can be broken down by efforts to share our experience with others.

Is there not something lonely and depressing about the usual small closed family where the mother has no friend except her husband and children who are sometimes not friends but enemies? Should we feel that we have to devote ourselves twenty-four hours a day to our baby and that the baby will suffer if we don't? Many women have to work because their husbands' wages are low, and are made to feel guilty about

leaving their children. Others want to work or to go out sometimes to relieve the monotony of their days. Facilities for young children are inadequate and often very expensive. Should we feel that we are failing our baby if we aren't constantly buying him new clothes, food and toys?

Choice

A mother who came very near to injuring her two-month old baby said, 'When he was small I was so desperate and alone I thought I'd go mad. I had no-one to turn to except my husband and he was out all the time working overtime. I thought it was all one big con—this mother bit. They'd just made me think it would be so easy and lovely and most of all that I *had* to do it, that there was something wrong with me if I didn't. I'd never thought that I had any choice.'

Being a mother is not easy and automatic. Above all it is not easy in a society which is geared to making money for the producers of baby goods instead of helping women with the strains of motherhood; a society which will not give us the chance to make genuine choices about *whether* we want to have babies, *when* we want to have them and *how* we want to look after them.



"I only go to work for luxuries, really. You know, chops, tomatoes, things like that"

Information

I would like to know more about

IS WOMEN
 IS

Name

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Send to: Margaret Falshaw,

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Photo by Nancy Hellebrand

Jean Parkin

School Dinner Lady-

MY EXPERIENCE

I will never forget my first day's work in a school kitchen. I am used to hard work, but at the end of that first day every muscle in my body ached.

There were seven of us (one was only part-time) to prepare, cook, serve, and wash up afterwards. It was a large school, catering for 1700 but divided into two parts, one larger than the other. The kitchen in which I worked catered for 800-900 pupils and staff. We also had to cook for 200 at another nearby school which had no kitchen.

As we had a deadline to meet and were so short-staffed, we had to constantly rush which made us accident-prone. Minor cuts, burns and scalds were a daily hazard and, not infrequently, more serious accidents happened such as someone slipping on a wet floor. There was one awful occasion when a woman lost part of her finger in a mixing machine. True enough it was her own fault as we were not supposed to touch the machine while in motion, but accidents are more liable to happen when you are flustered and over-tired.

For all this we got the princely sum of 3s 6d or 17½p in decimal money, although I believe they have since had a raise (that was two years ago). Every time the dustmen got one, we did, as we were classed with them as municipal workers, but needless to say they didn't get one often.

The women at this particular kitchen were not in the union. Despite constant urging from me, they would not join, seeming to think that the union wouldn't help them in any way.

However, I think the real reason was, as it is with so many women in hard low-paid jobs, that they were too tired and apathetic to bother.

Women must be somehow made to realise that they *can* alter the system if they rouse themselves from their inertia. Women in industry have for too long been cinderellas and second-class citizens, and it is about time the exploiters and near slave-masters were made aware of it.

REVIEW-

Communism & The Family by Alexandra Kollontai

Alexandra Kollontai was a leading member of the Bolshevik Party in Russia and aimed to make the emancipation of women an essential part of the Party's programme.

Immediately after the 1917 Revolution, legal and social changes were made which drastically altered the position of women. Many Russian women found their new freedom frightening. Alexandra Kollontai shows great understanding of these anxieties. She explains how freedom will benefit women, taking as her starting point the problems they actually face—marriage, children, housework. The strong belief in the small close-knit family is challenged, and she backs up her arguments with readable accounts of families found in different countries and at various times in history.

She wrote this pamphlet in the glowing optimism of the Revolution. At that time, she could not know that the Civil War and famine which followed it, the isolation of Russia when the Revolution failed to spread, the harsh rule of Stalin, would mean the crushing of the wonderful advances she describes. *The defeat of the Russian workers' heroic attempt to establish socialism also meant the defeat of women's liberation in Russia.* The inspiring vision of a free relationship between man and woman based on love, comradeship and equality was briefly glimpsed during those years just after the Revolution. But there is little of it left now. There are more nursery schools and women doctors in the USSR than there are here: girls can more easily train for scientific and technical jobs. *But Russian women are still in a similar situation to their sisters in the western world—they usually go out to work and also bear the responsibility for running the home.*

Our criticisms of this pamphlet would probably be that Alexandra Kollontai places too much emphasis on the role of the State in caring for children. We would certainly agree that the system of each individual mother caring only for her own children, each small family cut off from other, is stifling and breeds loneliness, selfishness and greed. But Alexandra Kollontai's alternatives sound a bit too much like institutions. Nowadays we think not only of freeing mothers from their children, but of *freeing children themselves*, to develop their own ideas and interests, freeing them from the regimentation and petty discipline we see in our state schools. We believe that men should play a much bigger part in their children's lives, which is yet another good reason to demand shorter working hours and an end to the shift system. And we believe that child-minding and children's activities could be organised more on a community basis, as children themselves tend to organise if left to their own devices. We want more parks and buildings, work-rooms and play materials, by all means. But the control of these must be in the hands of the parents, teachers and children—not 'the State'.

Technology has made possible many things Alexandra Kollontai could not have dreamed of. Events have overtaken some of her ideas. But others are as urgent today as they were when she wrote the pamphlet fifty years ago. You won't agree with everything she says, but it makes thought-provoking reading for all women interested in women's liberation and socialism.

Communism and the Family is available from Pluto Press, Unit 10 Spencer Court, 7 Chalcot Road, London NW1 8LH. Price 12p plus 3p postage.



LETTERS

HOUSES FOR PEOPLE NOT PROFIT

In Kathleen Ennis's article there was a lot that I agreed with wholeheartedly; anyone travelling by bus or train with small children knows what an ordeal that can be—try carrying two small children, push-chair and parcels onto an escalator and you'll know that they are designed without any thought for the users. But as the wife of a shift-worker with three young children, I must disagree when she says, 'blocks of flats are built only with people in the workforce in mind'. Not even that. Society demands that men work shift systems; yet workers' houses and flats get ever smaller and soundproofing just isn't considered. It's just as difficult as ever to sleep during the day with the noise of three active children confined in small rooms with walls so thick you think they're only wallpaper. Countless families all over the country have to creep about while Dad sleeps, as much in modern flats as in the slums put up as suitable houses for workers in the last century.

Society produces for profit not to suit people's needs. Houses and flats are being built only with the profit of the building speculator in mind, or if it's council, minimum cost to cut down on the vast interest repayments on loans needed to build. Builders' profits depend on cutting corners, skimping on materials. And the workers who live in them have to put up with the thin walls, badly fitting windows, doors, cracks etc. Whilst women are especially exploited, we must always stress that *all* workers, both members of the 'workforce' and housewives, will suffer so long as housing or indeed anything else is produced for profit and not to suit working people's needs.

Jenny Davison

SCANDALISING THE BOSS

I should like to tell you about my attempts to unionise the office where I work, as I feel that my situation must be very typical of women workers everywhere, but especially with office workers. I work for ACT, a shipping firm who export cargo to Australia and New Zealand in containers. I commenced work in September and on joining the company I was told repeatedly what a happy little place the office was. However, within a few weeks, I soon realised that whilst it may be a fine place to work for some, it was definitely not for others.

The first chance to come for me to get some of the women interested was when two of the girls were 'promoted' with no extra money. The outcome was that five women decided to join a union, and APEX was the one we decided on. Within four days of my sending off the union

application forms to APEX, I was summoned into the Boss's office who declared that he was scandalised, shocked and disappointed. I was called the 'ring-leader' and promptly warned that if I mentioned unions during working hours, then he 'would not tolerate it'.

The real issues that we few are trying to fight for are to smash this attitude of being told that we work in a happy little place, where wages are a very personal thing, and certain workers are looked after and receive the cream while others suffer. This false illusion is put over and it separates the workers who are having a good deal so making them selfish and obedient to the Boss.

The women have now been warned off joining the union and so things at the moment are very difficult for us. Society does not expect women to organise themselves and unfortunately this view has rubbed off on to the women themselves.
Linda Pedley, Birmingham 23.

One of the reasons I buy Women's Voice is because it makes *working class* women aware that they are being exploited. Middle class women have plenty of money to liberate themselves. They employ house-helpers, and use aids such as tumbler-dryers. If they become bored with their life of leisure, they can always go out and find themselves a nice, clean and respectable part-time job. A working class woman's main concern is money. In order to supplement her husband's mediocre earnings she has to do either a dirty and laborious job, or something like winding wire on thousands of bobbins daily. She has to take whatever job is going, unlike the middle-class woman who can afford to wait until her type of job turns up. In the evening a working-class woman often has to face chores in the house, not assisted by house-helpers and washing machines.

Women's Voice is ideal for working class women, because it deals with subjects that concern working class women most and in such a way that it can easily be read and understood by people with a working class education.

Women have been indoctrinated with the idea that they are inferior for far too long. Women's Voice has a difficult job in trying to counteract this indoctrination but I believe that it is gradually succeeding, and I wish it all the best!

(Mrs I E Quint, Southsea, Hants.)

LET'S PUT UP A FIGHT FOR FAMILY ALLOWANCES

I was very pleased to see your interviews with women about the government doing away with Family Allowances. The papers and even the left-wing papers seem to ignore this, but it is a thing that is going to affect all the mothers in the country. I have showed a lot of women at work your article about this and it was amazing how many of them didn't realise that the Family Allowance is going to be got rid of. I think women are going to be very annoyed about this and that we should get up some sort of

campaign. I have not got ideas about what we could do except for petitions etc. Maybe you will say this will not do much good. But I think women should try to show this government that we have had enough and that this is the last straw for us. Maybe it will not do much good, but I think that anything is worth trying. They are always saying that mothers are wonderful people and now they are treating us like dirt.

(Mrs) Carole Hinchliffe, Nelson, Lancs.

Dear Comrades,
Despite the fact that the editorial in the November/December issue was, in the main, very good, we feel we have to disagree with the comments about racialism and militancy.

While it is true that many things are learned through struggle, we feel that the implication that militancy alone can defeat racialism is both wrong and a dangerous illusion to spread.

The truth of the events in Birmingham during the building strike is somewhat different from the picture painted by your article.

First of all, the racist march that was broken up, was broken up not by hundreds of building workers but by 12 men who had been on picket duty nearby that morning.

While it is true that many men recognised that their interest as workers were the same during the strike, the sad fact is that when some stewards tried to introduce the subject of racialism and the Uganda asians at the strike committee there was much adverse reaction and the meeting broke up in disarray. At a later meeting there was a vote against even discussing it.

You quite correctly make the point earlier in the article about Britain's imperialist heritage but seem to forget it later on, by suggesting that a problem as deep-rooted as racialism can suddenly be eradicated in a wages struggle. Male chauvinism is a similarly deep-rooted problem in our society. Are you suggesting that the differences between men and women engineering workers were sunk during the sit-ins in Manchester and the struggle for the engineering pay claim? Surely not, when everywhere, the first demand to be dropped was that of Equal Pay for women?

The whole point is one which your editorial failed to pin down and that is, that racialism is a political problem and must be answered and fought politically. You correctly point out that racialism is a product of class society but it was never said that it cannot be defeated under capitalism and that only when we rid ourselves of this filthy system can we hope to achieve equality for women.

Having said all this, we would like to finish by wishing Women's Voice every success in the future. A women's paper which propagates socialist ideas is a vital necessity to the movement for women's liberation and socialism.

Yours fraternally,
Gerry Kelly (UCATT) and Claire Norris

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