

Womens VOICE

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Issue No 1



'Can man be free if woman be a slave?'

Margaret Renn
womens organiser SWP

"1977—How to Survive it. If you have to employ people, employ women. They work harder, faster and better. They are cheaper and do not strike unless really badly treated. They are also prettier."

That isn't a sick joke, it is serious advice to businessmen from the Sunday Times. That's how they see working women.

Ignorant—women must be to work harder for lower wages; downtrodden; disinterested in union matters. Women's only saving grace is that they are pretty. Tough if they're not.

The problem is the gentleman who wrote this piece of brilliance believes what he sees. The fact is that women *do* work for lower wages, because they are not skilled. They *do* all the crumby jobs without complaint. They *are* badly organised into trade unions. They *don't* get promotion because they have time off to have children. And things are getting worse.

In the last year the gap between mens and womens wages *has widened*. Unemployment has hit women harder than even the figures tell. The hospitals close their wards, and send the sick home. The nursery schools close, and send the kids home. The old peoples homes close and send the old people back to be looked after at home. And women find themselves doing, unpaid, what they used to go out to work to do. Women find themselves under more pressure than ever to take odd jobs, with low wages, and rotten hours to try and keep the family together as more and more men find themselves permanently without work.

Prices go up, and its the woman who is left to make an ever decreasing amount of money feed the family, pay the bills, meet the rent. So they take it out on their kids and husbands. Because there is no one else to blame.

But 1976 was supposed to be the year, above all years, when things got better for women. It was the first year of the Equal Pay Act and The Sex Discrimination Act. Acts brought into life by people who said that womens problems could be solved by passing laws to force equal pay, maternity leave, better job opportunity, or by electing a Labour Government committed, as it was in 1974, to 'an extensive programme of nursery school development.' These were the ways to liberate women. Without touching the social system we live in.

Why haven't all these laws and promises made any difference? Why have things now got worse? The answer is simple—there is an economic crisis. And whatever you may promise when things are going well, we now have 'our backs to the wall', we all have to 'tighten our belts' and the promises suddenly count for nothing.

Working men are not to blame for it. They are hit hard by the crisis. Unemployment and low wages are grinding them down. The miners are begging to be allowed to crawl out of the pits just a few years early to see just a year or two of life above the ground. Black men, women and children are fighting in South Africa to be free from the shackles of the whites.



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Wherever you look you see the hierarchical, despotic system at work, that says that class and property shall decide who has the power to run things. Men, women and children suffer because of a system run for profit.

That's why we are socialists. Because we do believe the world we live in has to be changed, from top to bottom. Not just one little bit of it. We don't think you can vote in Governments, or good laws, which will change things. They won't. Only the rank and file in the unions, only working class men and women fighting together for a revolutionary change in society will open the way for the sort of liberation that we really want.

That's why we are members of the Socialist Workers Party, and why we are trying to build a new sort of socialist party. That's why we sell and organise with Socialist Worker. They are the paper and the party that will see the struggle for socialism through to the end, no matter how hard the fight.

So why then do socialist women need their own paper?

Because the same ideas that are written into the Sunday Times article go right through our society. Often many good socialists, men and women, with very radical ideas about the need for workers to take control of industry and finance, are still trapped in those old reactionary ideas about women and the family.

Too often women in socialist organisations are looked on, or even see themselves, as the typists, the tea makers, the secretaries and girl friends and wives. It's not just humiliating, it's a dreadful waste of resources. The struggle for womens rights and socialism suffer. Issues don't get raised. Women get in the habit of thinking the issues that affect them aren't important.

Unemployment pay is being cut off for thousands of married men. They'll protest. We'll protest. But we never protested that married women never got unemployment pay. We just accepted it. That is the way of things. We are used to having to ask for money and we are not used to fighting for womens rights.

"Can man be free if woman be a slave?" The answer is simply **no**. There will be no socialism as long as women are considered unequal. And no organisation is really socialist so long as women are patronised, so long as they are left to see themselves as second class. The only people who can do anything to change that are women themselves.

That's what our paper is for. To build up our own confidence, to pool our experiences, to show each other how to fight so that we can organise a more effective battle for womens rights, *and* for a socialist society. We need to organise socialist women to fight every little battle for womens rights so that we can more easily win the main one.

That's what Women's Voice is for. But Women's Voice can never be successful unless socialist women everywhere see it as their paper, and use it as their paper. That doesn't just mean selling it. It means writing for it, organising with it, now.

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Womens world

by Judith Condon

Scrooge bosses

We were robbed! To the tune of £12 million last year alone.

That's the amount thieving bosses in 43 industries failed to pay to workers entitled to it.

Three million workers in Britain are sweat-shop workers. Two million of them are women. Their minimum pay is set down by wages councils in 43 industries, including shops, hotels, and hairdressing.

These minimum rates are appallingly low.

Bottom of the pile are 140,000 adult hairdressers at £23.55 a week. Then came laundry workers at £27.90. And clothing industry workers at £27.90—29.70. And agricultural workers with the fabulous sum of £36.50.

This when average pay in Britain is £74.70 for men and £48 for women.

Yet even these minimum rates are not being paid. In town

after town, the bosses are getting away with daylight robbery.

Skilled workers suffer just as unskilled ones do. Remember hairdressing?—the one trade in which women could traditionally get apprenticeships. So they serve three years training for a lousy £23.50 or less!

Where families depend on such wages, they are suffering poverty and hardship equalled only by old age pensioners and the unemployed. And the thieving bosses are being subsidised by us! Families are forced to turn to income supplement benefits. Those benefits are paid for by taxation drawn from workers.

So the bosses saves a lot of money. The workers lose all around. And the people who suffer most get dubbed as 'scroungers'.

Spare a thought for Debra Ann. Schoolgirl bride they call her, married at sixteen and absent from class.

'She doesn't want to know about the Battle of Hastings. She wants a quiet life at home looking after me', proudly states her husband. He's Alan Groves, plays football for Oldham Athletic.

So they've fined her father £5 for failing to send her to school. Only, he knows how to duck. Or to put it another way 'She would be breaking her marriage vows if she took any notice of me'.

Swift-footed Alan boots it home. 'If I was told by my father-in-law to send my wife to school I would tell him where to go.'

But unflinching Authority, big-handed and reliable, makes a fine save. 'Being married does not entitle a pupil to say 'That's it, my school days are over.' " says their man, Ronald Fletcher. What a match.

Foot balls to you!



The American Woman spends
3 3.6 hours per week
in personal grooming;
9 9.6 hours per week
performing household duties.

you've only got one life to live.

Women's liberation.

Alan gets the rebound. He doesn't want his wife coming home at four o'clock having to start housework. (Oh the fondness of new husbands!)

'I won't have her cleaning round my feet in the evenings.' (So considerate, so sensitive!)

Notice who hasn't spoken yet?

'My life is looking after Alan and our home', says Debra Ann. 'I spend my days cleaning the flat, washing and making meals—that takes up all my time.' An own goal, bounced right off her.

... They call it team work. I'm twenty-seven, pretty successful, and old enough to know what I want. You're sixteen, and need a simple life looking after me. Oh, and by the way, don't be cleaning round my famous feet when I come home, child-bride of mine. Night-time is for being the doormat, not cleaning it.

Footballs to you Alan Groves.

What do you know

- 1 What important right was granted to rape victims, from December 22nd, 1976?
- 2 2,000 women have applied to take their claims for equal pay before the tribunal during the last year. 598 cases have been heard. How many were victories for the women?
- 3 Who received the largest salary in the United States last year, almost ten times as much as the president gets?
- 4 Between 1975 and 1976, the gap between the hourly earnings of men and women workers in Britain INCREASED. To what?
- 5 A Coventry employer recently sacked a woman worker on the spot for wearing trousers at her job. The woman won her case for reinstatement at an Industrial Tribunal. Who did she work for?
- 6 One unlikely farmer has been exempted from the provisions of the Rent (Agriculture) Act—the act which gives more security to farm workers in tied cottages—which comes into force on January 1st. Who is she?

Frozen to death

Little Stephen McDonald was just six-months old.

On a cold night just before Christmas his parents put him to bed. They wrapped him in three jerseys, some blankets and a quilt, and left on his hat for good measure. But at six months old, on that cold night, Stephen froze to death.

The coroner said it was accidental death. He advised parents to take their children into their own beds if there was nothing else they could do. He assured those parents that Stephen's parents were not to blame.

AS WELL HE MIGHT. For Stephen McDonald, six months of age, froze to death last month in Ilford, Essex, IN A COUNCIL HOUSE.

For the very young, the old and the sick, the cuts can bring death. For others, they just wear away at life and hope. As part of its economy measures, Strathclyde Education Committee is to close five residential schools. These are places where children from deprived areas of Glasgow have been cared for in the past. One of the schools is for asthmatic and delicate children. Others are for the maladjusted or handicapped,—to take them out of the crumbling inner city and give them fresh air and light.

Perhaps in years to come they'll be organising, at great expense, an adult illiteracy scheme like 'On the Move' (for all those who never learned to read in the over-crowded, under-staffed class rooms of the early seventies. Will they try to organise a second-chance scheme for fresh air for the asthmatic children of Strathclyde?

The ^{womens} VOICE Interview

In April last year Nigel Dempster, a snivelling gossip columnist on the Daily Mail, wrote an article about Maureen Colquhoun. She had left her husband and gone to live in her London house, which she shares with a friend. A woman friend.

Maureen Colquhoun felt some protest had to be made about the methods Nigel Dempster used to get his story. So she took her case to the Press Council, a supposedly independent body that looks into complaints against the press.

The Press Council decided:

'She is a member of Parliament who has taken a very strong stand on feminist issues and has not been loath to publicise her views upon them. This brings the breakdown of her marriage and the fact that she had left what had been a matrimonial home to live in that of another woman into the area of those matters which the public is entitled to know.'

A triumph for everything that is male chauvinist about the national press we thought, so we went to see Maureen Colquhoun to find out what she had to say.

'Nigel Dempster's piece in the gossip column of the Daily Mail was merely a piece of sexual titillation for Daily Mail readers. I had run off to live with another woman, rejected men and so forth.

My answer to that is, so what. The Daily Mail can say anything it wants to about my political work, my opinions on politicians and politics. But what I do in my private life is my business.

Jeremy Thorpe was hounded out of his job because he issued a categorical denial when it was suggested that he had had a homosexual relationship. He should have told them to mind their own business, because it is no business of their what his sexuality is.

WV: There is a terrible right wing backlash, and an enormous backlash against women. The establishment is frightened: they're saying that because you are a feminist, and you believe in women's liberation and rights for women, they you are a danger to the accepted order of things, and must be put down as quickly as possible.

The Press Council decided that because I had asked the speaker of the House of Commons to call me Ms instead of Mrs then I was a danger to society. I don't mind, because being a danger to this rotten society we live in is a good thing.

All my life I have cared about women. It's not something new because I've gone off to live with another woman as

picture: Andy Ward (Report)



Maureen Colquhoun MP

Maureen Colquhoun

Interview

Nigel Dempster would like you to believe.

Is it feminist to support women? If it is then I'm guilty of being a feminist. Is it feminist to believe that women should have equal pay, equal rights, equal social security? Of course it's important that there should be women fighting for these things, and women MPs fighting for them.

The attitude of women MPs should be that we're women and glad to be so. If you look at all these rows of colourless men you're even gladder.

'Is it feminist to support women?'

WV: How do you see women fighting for women's liberation, and the things you have talked about, equal rights, equal social security?

The Equal Opportunities Commission hasn't achieved much this year. They are doing things in a rather wet way. They won't touch womens lib. It needs some full time commissioners, with dedicated feminist ideas among them. It's no good having these eminent people from the TUC, as part time commissioners, with a little sinecure, popping up to Manchester once a month to receive a report, get their expenses, eat a big lunch and go home happy.

I understand the staff are not allowed to speak at the meetings of commissioners! It's ridiculous.

WV: How does the Labour Party fight for womens rights?

It doesn't have a good record. Although a lot of women in the Labour Party in the past had had feminist ideas. Mind you, if you called them feminists they'd run a mile. But they were concerned about women.

There are a lot of good young women who wouldn't touch the party with a barge pole. I don't know how long it would take to evolve another structure that would become as immediately established as the Labour Party is. What we need is radical people to come in and argue forcibly for the issues they think need changing to make life better for women. If it's made better for women, it's made better for children, it's made better for men. The whole of society benefits.

'I'm disillusioned with the power politics'

Maureen Colquhoun

But whether this is going to happen, or the Labour Party is going to quietly die, I'm not at all certain. Things are very volatile. We're very establishment now, very right wing. It's rather a sick joke that it's ever been a left wing party.

Even the Tribune group are not really socialist. Ambition so often takes over, so you get your tribunate who will appear on TV and trot out ideas that you know he would collapse in horror if he had to put it into practice. Not all of them, of course. But some.

WV: Would you then ask people to join the Labour Party?

I'm disillusioned by the power politics that I've observed first hand. Coming in rather than looking in I like even less what I see. But if you've been in the Party for all your working life, believing idealistically in a movement and then seeing what the power means and how in an economic crisis of enormous proportions the Party falls back into the capitalist system, then one doesn't feel able to recommend anyone to belong to the Party.

But on the other hand, where is there to go? Isn't there a responsibility on people like me to stay, and I have thought of leaving, because it is *my* Labour Party too.

I began by collecting subs, running jumble sales, even making the tea! I became ward secretary, party secretary,

'It's rather a sick joke that it's ever been a left wing party'

local councillor, county councillor, now MP. And I haven't fundamentally changed. I don't make any secret of my views.

Perhaps the young women should come into the Party and take it away from the middle of the roaders.

WV: But there are those of us who don't have the patience to change the Labour Party.

So what are you going to do—stay in your idealistic position where you get no power at all for the rest of your life.

WV: Or perhaps build something you said earlier on, an alternative to the Labour Party, if it is in that sort of decline. Maybe it isn't possible to change it.

I can see myself constantly arguing, as I have been arguing with you, a kind of justification for remaining in the Party. And I shall stay in, and I shall continue to fight.

Price watcher

Nikki Mellor



picture: Phil McGowen

Nikki Mellor, Marc and Ben (21 months) live in Brixton, London. Marc is a production worker at Phillips (Electrical) and gets £36 take-home pay. Two years ago, in the same job, he was earning £31. Prices have almost doubled since then.

Nikki is a teacher. She has to look after Ben, but she managed to get a part-time job teaching children at home. Without that they would not be able to manage. She gets £20 a week.

After two years in Phillips, holiday and sick pay are quite important benefits. But it's only since unemployment rose that people have stayed in the factory long enough to get them. And there's a constant threat of redundancy in this declining industry, or ill-health because of noise levels in the factory.

Nikki has no holiday or sick pay. She would not qualify for maternity leave. So her income could disappear. The education cuts are threatening her job. If the kids she teaches are able to go back to school, she might not get any more. So she has a vested interest in not preparing them to go back. She is trying to organise other members of the National Union of Teachers to fight this threat.

Income

Marc £36
Nikki £20
Total £56

Main items of spending

Rent £14.00
Marc's travel and food £6.50
Food £14.00
Telephone £10.00
Total £44.50

That leaves £11.50 for clothes, furniture, holidays, entertainment, all other travel and household expenses.

"We use my income for things we can't buy every week—like coffee. The money didn't arrive before Christmas, so we've got no coffee.

**'the money didn't
arrive before
xmas... so no
coffee'**

"It's difficult to say what the food bills are like, because we were both ill over Christmas. We couldn't shop and Marc couldn't collect his pay or his Christmas bonus for three weeks. We had £26 social security. But we've been living out of the freezer and the savings we had before Ben was born.

"Marc's job in a factory means that he sometimes can get bargains like a half-price freezer—because he meets so many people. It means we can eat more meat—pork at 55p instead of 78p—and stock up on vegetables when they're cheap. We can meet sudden expenses

and destock the freezer. And I don't spend the time and bother trying to shop around with Ben in tow. The freezer insurance doesn't apply if the electricity is cut off because of a strike.

"We don't go out and we don't drink (even after Women's Voice meetings) because that money wouldn't be there for food.

"Luckily we eat a lot of foreign food & using cheap meats and switching to spaghetti or rice when the price of potatoes goes up. You always feel you have to have two vegetables with potatoes. With rice or spaghetti you only have one. Not a week goes by without us having spaghetti bolognese. We're not far from Brixton market, and save a lot by not using local shops. We're trying to organise bulk-buying. But you need the storage space.

"We have a really nice meal once a week and we like entertaining—but Marc's four brothers eat enormously.

"During the week I try to plan ahead with cooking to save electricity—but it's difficult with Ben. He'll disrupt a day and I have to give up and go out. I do try to get him with other kids. He's too young for a playgroup. I need time away from him.

"Most of Ben's clothes were handed on, and they'll come back through another two kids, if I ever want them again. But soon all the kids will be too close in size for handing-on to work.

"We buy our clothes at jumble sales, or I make them. Sometimes all my wages go on Marc's clothes. I haven't bought shoes for 1½ years. These are 6 years old. My black ones are 14'

'we can't get anything on HP'

"Marc's good at woodwork. Our suite only cost £100 and the bits were bought over a time. The wardrobes were £130. Shop ones would have been £300.

"We can't get anything on HP. Marc doesn't earn enough and my income is too irregular.

"When we were ill we could keep the heating on all day because it's in the rent. The flats were designed for the old and handicapped and include the £2.24 heating allowance—paid all the year round. It shows the council can arrange adequate heating.

"In the last flat we couldn't have survived another winter—with fuel bills of £80, both of us ill, marooned 18 floors up when the lifts broke, with Ben climbing out of the windows and me nearly throwing myself out.

"We got moved out with the help of a good GP and by making a terrific fuss—doing the hysterical woman bit over the phone. But it wasn't an act!

"The sick thing about the housing is that I'm alright. I'm white and a teacher. So I can argue over the phone and write letters and make a fuss.

"There was a radio programme this morning about booking holidays. They're so middle class about the things people do on holiday! By August we won't be able to afford anything except camping. Someone told me that some package tours were very cheap. But we asked and they're all ridiculously expensive.

"But we're going to Skegness (the SWP holiday at Easter weekend). That's definite.

"When I was a kid the CP used to run camping holidays with kids from all over the world. I remember them vividly. We should make sure that when people join the SWP their families don't feel abandoned

and excluded.

"In this area Women's Voice had a picnic and a party with a kids' room. It was the first party I'd been to since I had Ben. You can't ask other comrades to give up their only free evening. And babysitters cost too much.

"But we're not poor—we still live quite well on our income."

Prices of all the things we need—food, fuel, fares, rents are still rising as fast as ever. But wages are dropping. 13 million people, many of them working, are living below official poverty levels in Britain.

We have asked Nikki to keep a check on how rising prices and falling wages affect her during 1977. Not only will we tell you what's happening, but we'll also explain why—why coffee has doubled in price and is becoming more expensive; why you're paying more rates and rents for less service and worse housing, why you can't afford the fares on non-existent buses. And we'll also give you the news about what people are doing and what you can do to fight for a better life.



picture: Phil McGowen

Abortion news

Birmingham, Leicester, Preston, Chester and Blackpool, Harrogate Brighton, Leeds, Windsor and Maidenhead, Bournemouth and Poole, are the places not to live if you want an NHS abortion. Reluctance of doctors and consultants to approve abortions, and inadequate facilities are the reasons given by the Campaign for Common Sense on Abortion. The facts come from official figures.

Babies for Burning, the disgusting rag which James White and Leo Abse used as evidence to back up their campaign against abortion is being sued for libel in the High Court. Perhaps now they will have to admit that their 'evidence' never did really exist.

The Commons is going to vote yet again on restrictions to the 1967 Abortion Act. William Benyon has introduced a new

private members bill with all the restrictive clauses thought up by the anti-abortion select committee last year.

It says:

Abortion should be banned after 20 weeks unless the woman would suffer grave permanent physical or mental injury, or the child would be born with a serious disability.

Two doctors authorising an abortion should not be connected with each other, and one must have more than five years practice.

The woman's own doctor should be notified of the abortion.

Pregnancy advice centres and referral agencies should be prevented from sending women to their own clinics (Charities like PAS keep down the price of abortions by running their own clinics

Parents of girls under 16 should be present when abortion advice is given.

Police should be able to inspect records of abortion clinics.

The Second reading of the bill will be on Friday February 25. Womens Voice and NOISS are calling a picket and demonstration for that day. When we know the hour we will publicise details.

Dr Edelin, an American doctor who was found guilty of manslaughter in 1975 for carrying out an abortion has had his conviction quashed. The case received enormous publicity at the time in the States because it seemed to be such a victory for the anti-abortion lobby. The State Supreme Court said it was overturning the verdict because 'the defendant had no evil frame of mind, was actuated by no criminal purpose, and committed no wanton or reckless act in carrying out the abortion.'

'Is the life that springs up in the mother's womb not truly a human life? Who could suppose that a mother would destroy her offspring or let it be killed. What drug, what legal gilding can ever deaden the remorse of a woman who has destroyed the fruit of her womb.'

That was the Pope's New Year message to the women of Italy. The same women who have just had the fruit of their womb destroyed or maimed for life by the chemical explosion at Seveso. Not even those women are able to get abortions in Italy. Doctors, most of them Catholics, refused to carry them out.

'Had it not been for this poison cloud we would all have gone through with our pregnancies,' said one woman who came to England for her abortion.

'But now we are scared that our babies would have been deformed. We tried to have a legal abortion in Italy but were prevented even though the Government had given permission.'

So much for the piety of the Catholic Church and its of life.

**DEMONSTRATE
AGAINST THE
NEW BILL**

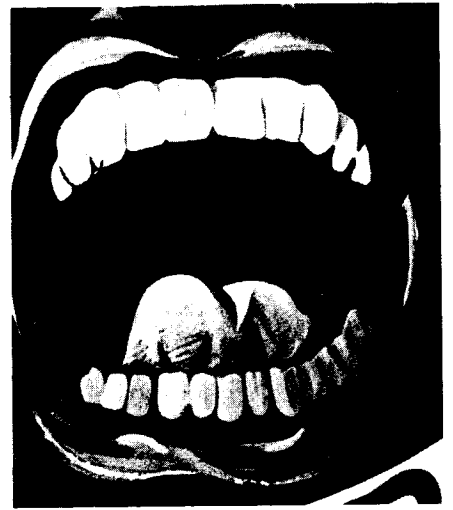
**NO RETURN TO
BACKSTREET
ABORTION!**

Friday 25 February,
see next month's issue
for details

Called by Womens Voice
and NOISS



Womens VOICE Debate Abortion



James White: *What would be your attitude to a young girl who was raped: should she be allowed to have an abortion?*

Professor J Scarisbrick: *"The 1967 Act allows her abortion on other grounds. The first thing that a young girl who has been raped should do is have her womb washed out before conception takes place. The trouble with proposing abortion as a solution to the problem is that it distracts from the real solution to rape, which is just a lavage."*

A dialogue between James White MP, a member of the Parliamentary select committee on Abortion and Professor Scarisbrick who was a witness for the anti-abortion organisation Life. It demonstrates quite clearly the misconceptions and revolting mentalities behind the present attack on the 1967 Abortion Amendment Act. Scarisbrick implies that abortion is available on demand. A rape victim, like any other pregnant woman, has to convince two medical practitioners that adequate grounds exist for abortion. The 1967 Act did not give women control of their bodies.

It is this question of control which is crucial in explaining the shift in the abortion debate. In 1967 MPs voted for a progressive Bill which aimed to destroy the trade of backstreet abortionists. Now, 11 years later, on 25 February, a Private Members Bill which seeks to undermine that Act, will have a second reading. Eleven years ago we were still basking in the post war boom. Unemployment was insignificant, strikes were short and successful because employers could afford to lose. Parliament, generously playing the benevolent uncle, and not Big Brother passed a series of social reforms.

Now we are in an 'economic crisis', and it makes sharper the struggle between workers and bosses. Who's going to win? The bosses and their profits, or the workers trying to protect their living standards. Who is going to control? At the moment the bosses are winning and we face a barrage of repressive legislation.

Women in crisis are particularly vulnerable, and their gains are hardest hit. The gains we have made for abortion rights are under attack from two directions. First we have

the rerun of that old film "A Woman's Place is in the Home". We are getting kicked out of jobs at a faster rate than men. Nursery facilities and pre-school play groups are closing. We don't need the jobs because we only work for 'pin money' and we don't need nurseries because children grow up mentally better off with mum. (And you can't get a nursery place without a job, and you can't get a job without a nursery place. If you see what I mean) Tougher abortion laws result in more women being removed from the labour force to look after kids.

Secondly, DHSS cuts are hitting NHS abortion facilities. Out patient clinics, hospital beds, specialist staff and equipment are all being cut. Where cuts should take place is a political decision and politically unsafe areas are the first to go. Cuts make for increased waiting lists and pregnancies won't wait forever. More and more women are turning to the private sector for abortion. NHS abortions are now under 50 per cent of the total. Direct legislation on Select Committee

recommendations will worsen the situation in the NHS. And the charitable clinics will find it impossible to function as at present.

The current legislation is not aimed at ironing out the real abuses. The enormous regional variation in abortion figures will worsen. Harley Street will still make a fat profit from those that can afford the fees. The rest of us will turn back to illegal abortions in less hygienic conditions.

In 1975 the opposition against the James White Bill was so great that he and his supporters were forced to make a tactical withdrawal. We must now aim to build a campaign that will do the same for Benyon's Bill. In 1977 we need a strong single issue campaign. The Health Service cuts are whittling away abortion facilities but anti-abortionists cannot be opposed by a cuts campaign.

We must aim to build a campaign as successful as SPUC's. We do that in two ways. By learning from their success and by opposing them wherever they appear.

SPUC have built their campaign around a continual public presence.

We may scoff at their tactics to get vast numbers of demonstrators at rallies but it gives them the coverage they need to make their ideas seem credible. Over 100,000 people attended their rallies on November 7th last year.

By actively heckling and picketing their meetings we show publicly that there is opposition to their ideas and we present other arguments to the many youngsters they involve.

Although there are many active local committees the National Abortion Campaign (NAC) is incapable at present of providing the leadership to build a campaign with a continuous national focus for our supporters. NAC have a finger in every pro-abortion pie with a resulting plague of meetings. Meetings about meetings about meetings do not build an *outgoing* campaign.

1977 will be a make or break year for Abortion Rights. Womens Voice must campaign to win.

Gerry Matthews



picture: Laurence Spatham (H1)



Alice Garwood works at the outpatient department counter and has done for the past 15 years.

'I have seen kids come here, and then seen them again when they are grown and still coming in.

It's so friendly here. It's not like coming into a hospital. Patients come up to the counter for a cup of tea and they may be worried and say, "Oh, I don't like the idea of going in there for that operation." I try to tell them not to worry, it's nothing. And then they come back after and say it was alright, not what they thought.

'This is not just a hospital—it's more like a big happy family. Right the way down from the doctors to the cleaners.

'The women have got faith in the treatment they get here. We need a hospital like this even more now than when it was started.

'Quite frankly I can't think of myself not being here, of it closing down.

'They would have closed it down last year—we're still open yet!'



Arthur Churchley, public employees' union shop steward at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital, is in charge of organising the picket which protects the hospital day and night.

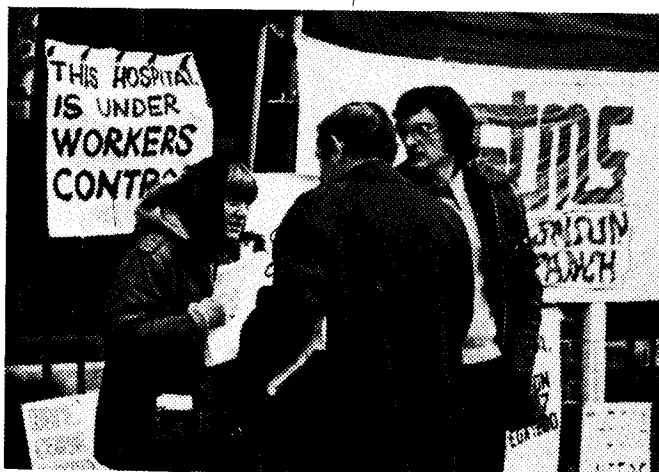
'We occupied our hospital because we reckon we have been deceived. Barbara Castle said that we would be resited as one complete unit, and now they are trying to fob us off with three wards—on two sites.

'To us that doesn't constitute a hospital.

'The occupation is going well. But now we need to go out and get more outside help.

'They reckon they will start taking beds and equipment out the last week of January.

'We will need big pickets—a few hundred people maybe—to help us stop them. We will want as many on the picket as possible. Anyone in London who wants to help on the picket line can ring me (01-387 2501, ext. 50).



Arguing the case on the picket line

picture: Angela Phillips (JFL)



EGA STAYS OK!

The Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital, a small hospital in London—run by women for women—is occupied.

The staff are occupying it to save it.

Though they occupied it on 17 November, the campaign to save the hospital started over a year ago.

One of the first threats came when the General Nursing Council stopped recognising it as a suitable place for nurses' training. Then Barbara Castle announced it was to be closed. Union meetings and a public meeting got much more support than anyone had imagined possible.

Feelings were whipped up even more when the maternity section of the EGA was closed on 11 June **without any warning**. There were scenes of weeping nurses and patients as many pregnant women were hurriedly transferred to other hospitals for confinement in strange surroundings. Some women, in hospital for observation due to complications of pregnancy, were even sent home!

A one-day strike for 21 July was called—demanding the hospital be upgraded and the service maintained on the Euston Road site, where it is now, to continue serving the neighbourhood.

It was a magnificent day of action. Strikes at St Pancras and the National Temperance Hospitals—two other small local hospitals—were more or less solid. Two big teaching hospitals—University College Hospital and the Royal Free Hospital—also supported it.

Since that time, the Save the EGA Campaign—a group of local tenants, residents, and representatives from local unions, pensioners' associations and womens groups—has carried out a series of leafletting campaigns and street meetings to keep the area informed of what is going on in the EGA.

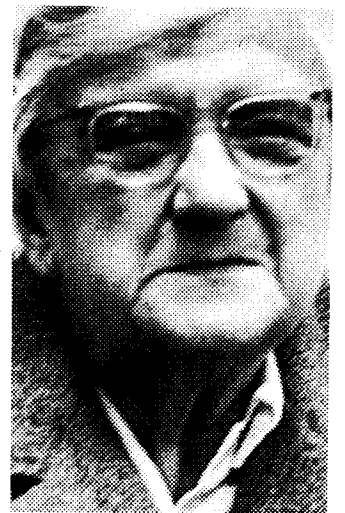
There have also been deputations to MPs, the Area Health Authority and the Community Health Council.

The occupation itself is organised by the Action Committee, which consists of representatives of all departments in the hospital, including the medical staff, whose support is obviously vital.

The staff, the patients, trade unionists and women all over London are saying, 'EGA stays OK!'



Mrs Pearson: 'I came here because my doctor thought the waiting list would be shorter as a lot of doctors aren't referring to the EGA any more. I had my operation in the EGA ward at the Whittington. I think it's a great shame they're closing such a lovely hospital. It's so friendly. I don't know whether it's because it's all women or because it's so small. I could have gone anywhere, but I'm glad I came here—it's worth all the effort and the journey from outside London.'



Mrs Edwards: 'I've been coming here to outpatients a long time. I'm all for this hospital, they saved my life fifteen years ago. I think they need an entirely women's hospital in Camden. Although there are women doctors in other hospitals, you don't always see them. I'm all for women doctors. I've written to Barbara Castle, Lena Jaeger and to Camden Council about it.'



Mrs Kerpen: 'In any other hospital you're just a case, here you are a person. They don't talk down to you, they discuss things with you and once a doctor stayed with me until midnight because I was feeling low. I've never experienced anything like it.'

Words and pictures Angela Phillips (JFL)

Save the EGA Save Our Hospitals

Delegate Conference at the EGA - 12th Feb.

Save Our Hospitals Conference - March 19th

Details: 265A Seven Sisters Road, London, N4





LONDON
HARRINGEY -
SAY NO
TO ANY CUTS

**ELIZABETH GARRETT
ANDERSON
HOSPITAL**

SWITZERLAND
LONDON
EGG

COHSE
CENTRAL ORGANISATION OF HOSPITALS

SAVE OUR HOSPITALS

WHAT'S HAPPENING? It's not just the EGA, Plaistow or even dozens of individual hospitals. We may succeed in delaying some closures or even preventing some hospitals from closing down. But the problem is a national one.

DESTROYING THE NHS. Bit by bit, they are dismantling our National Health Service. Private patients took enough money and resources out as it was. Now they're not just 'cutting back', they're dismantling the whole service as

we have known it. The latest news is that doctors are talking about introducing charges for the NHS.

FIGHT BACK! We have to organise the fight back NOW. It must be fast and it must be coordinated, between hospitals in one area and across the country. Below we report on one hospital's fight back and suggest things you can do NOW. If you have other ideas to suggest, please write and let us know. (Womens Voice, 6 Cottons Gardens, London, E2).



picture: Syd Shelton

maternity hospital fights

by Gay Whitehouse

Plaistow Maternity Hospital in East London will be closed—if the area health authority get their way. The well-dressed members of the health authority took less than five minutes to make their decision. They sat chomping watercress sandwiches and cherry cake throughout the proceedings. When the vote was taken, they didn't even miss a bite. Instead of opening their mouths to say 'yes', they just grunted approval.

But they may get a surprise. Hospital workers at Plaistow are helping to write a bulletin to go out to other local hospitals, ambulance stations, local residents, etc.

Hundreds of people have signed the petition supporting the hospital. Many families in the area have had three or four generations born there.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

In London...

What you can do about the EGA: (if you are in the London area)

- Get a delegate from your shop stewards' committee to the EGA delegate conference on Saturday, 12 February, 11am-1pm, at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital, Euston Road (by Euston Station). You can get letters of invitation and delegate's credentials from the hospital.
- Contact other trade unionists in your area about the conference. It is a women's hospital and many women shop stewards will be keen to support the conference for that reason alone.
- Build the campaign to keep the hospital open by organising street meetings. Petitions and badges are available from the hospital. Unstaple the poster in our centre spread and use it for display and to back up your arguments.

... everywhere

What you can do if a hospital in your area is threatened with closure:

- Contact the stewards in the hospitals and see what can be done to organise a campaign amongst the users of the hospital.
- Help produce a 'Save our Hospital' news sheet.
- Start a petition. Get people in the neighbourhood to sign it and take copies themselves.
- Hold street meetings in the local market—get more signatures for the petition there.
- Write to your local newspaper. Try to get on your local radio station as a feature. If that fails, phone in during one of the phone-in programmes.
- Try to get the union branches in the hospital to delegate two or three people to go to the **Save Our Hospitals Conference on Sunday 20 March**.
- Just as important. Let us know what you are doing and what's happening in your area so that we can spread the news faster next month. We don't want this magazine to be confined to the London area.

Ring Maggie Renn on 01-739 1878 or write to Womens Voice, 6 Cottons Gardens, London, E2. Copy deadline for February issue is 20 January.



picture: Syd Shelton

save our hospitals conference

90 shop stewards in hospitals from Edinburgh to Southampton are supporting a national Save Our Hospitals conference. It will be held in London on Sunday 20 March.

It will bring together all those fighting hospital closures—wherever they are. The campaign is not just for hospital workers who may lose their jobs when hospitals close, but for all working people whose health and very lives are endangered.

You can get more information, a letter of invitation to take your union branch and the union branches of your local hospital from Bill Geddes, 265a Seven Sisters Road, London, N4.

Compiled by Jenny Jackson

Where's the creche?

What do you do with your children during union meetings?

I'm a working mother in Equity, the actors' union. A year ago the union decided to provide a creche for all meetings. It's very important that they do. We don't have a branch or delegate structure, only general meetings. So a couple sharing responsibility for their children and both members of Equity are forced to attend meetings for part of the day only—while one babysits the other is at the meeting and they swop at lunchtime! For single parents the situation is even worse.

At the last Special General Meeting in November there was no creche. The extremely right wing council say there is no demand. And to prove it they point to the meeting held the previous year when only 12 children used a creche, at a cost of £100.

Not surprising, when so few members knew there was going to be one! It had hardly been advertised.

Council also oppose the creche on the grounds of cost. This is absurd. The fact that a creche is not provided is part of the Council's overall attack on our democratic rights. Many members with children are excluded from active participation in their union because they cannot arrange suitable childcare or afford commercial rates, due to low wages and high unemployment in our industry.

There is considerable demand for the creche. In future parents in Equity must organise and fight for creche facilities.

Carrie Lee-Baker

If you want more information about the campaign contact Carrie at Equity Rank and File, 120 Horn Lane, London W3 6NY. Phone 01-993 0356.

Two years ago NALGO, the local government workers' union, published a report on equal rights. Even though we are supposed to have had equal pay for years, over 82 per cent of those on the lowest grade are women, whilst 97 per cent of those on the top grade are men!

The report recommended no less than thirty changes which would enable women to have an equal chance at work, and take a fuller part in the union. But it was up to every branch to fight it out with management. Fat chance, with most branches dominated by men who just don't understand how hard it is to do two jobs.

In a few places some of the militant women are now trying to do something about it. The Lambeth NALGO branch is setting up a committee to campaign on five of the union's proposals; the ones we need most. They are: a day nursery for workers' children; creche facilities at union meetings; better maternity leave; more information about training; looking into discrimination against women at work and in the union.

It's just a start!

Vanessa Stilwell, Lambeth NALGO



Public Service is 'The Voice of NALGO' or so it says on the front page of the NALGO union newspaper of that name. So it seems odd that Public Service should also carry this ad for the voice of the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church is the staunchest supporter of the anti-abortion campaign in this country. The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children brings men and women, children and nuns straight from the churches by the coachload for its big anti-abortion rallies.

Yet it is official NALGO policy to defend the 1967 Abortion Act against the attacks that are now gathering steam again. NALGO should be a little more selective about who it takes money from.

Part-time teachers

The next time you go to a class at your local college, take a good look at the teacher sitting behind the desk. If she's a married woman with kids, it's ten to one she's a part-timer and one of the most exploited people in teaching. Nearly every college employs a large number of part-timers—mostly women who can't work full-time but badly need the money. Their conditions are a disgrace. On the face of it they do well, getting about £3.75 an hour, but the good news ends there. That money's only for the time they're actually teaching; it doesn't cover the hours spent preparing and marking work, setting exams, helping students, travelling from one building to another and sitting around for hours between classes. One woman in our staffroom reckons it works out at about 60p an hour if she's lucky.



Remember when they got meat?

Part-timers have no rights at all. Their classes can be closed overnight, if students have exams or meetings they lose their money, they have no right of appeal, get no sick or holiday pay and are generally messed about. If they apply for unemployment pay during the holidays (at least sixteen weeks a year) they're told they're seasonal workers and don't qualify. They're laid off in May, told to hang around in September on the off-chance there's some work for them, start in October and get their first pay packet at the end of November. These women don't work for pin money, a lot of them are single parents with no other income, but the union only seems interested in recruiting them (£18 a year if they want full voting rights) and



Remember free milk?

does nothing for them.

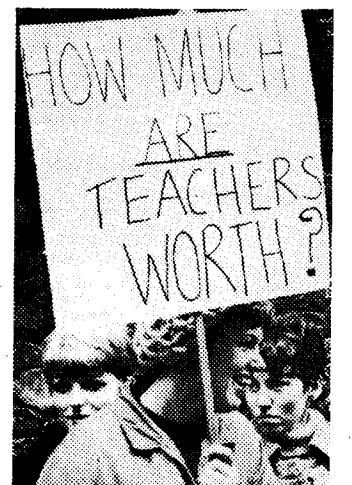
Things have now taken a turn for the worse. Our NATFHE union branch has imposed a ban on full-timers doing overtime because of teacher unemployment, so things looked a bit better for part-timers—more hours in spite of the cuts. But some bright sparks on the management side woke up to the fact that employees actually get certain rights under the Employment Protection Act. Overnight, part-timers doing 12 hours a week had their hours cut to seven—a wage cut of at least £16 a week—so that they won't be covered by the Act. So far the union has done nothing.

However, some of us have recently set up a rank and file group inside the union and we're prepared to fight. So far we've heard of no other college where an Act that's supposed to protect workers is actually being used against them in this way.

If anyone knows of a similar move in a college, school, office or factory, we'd be pleased to hear from them.

Write to Womens Voice and we'll pass on the information.

Nancy Hall, Leeds



MATERNITY LEAVE

What the law says...

You have:-

1. **THE RIGHT NOT TO LOSE YOUR JOB BECAUSE YOU ARE PREGNANT**, if you become pregnant in your present job. If your pregnancy makes you unable to do your job, for instance you have to stand a lot, or if it becomes illegal or hazardous, the employer can't dismiss you without offering you any suitable vacancy which is available. The terms of your new contract must be no less favourable than the old one. If there is no suitable job, and you're dismissed this doesn't alter your other rights, to maternity leave and re-instatement.

2. **THE RIGHT TO REINSTATEMENT AFTER THE BABY IS BORN**, if, 11 weeks before the birth, you have worked for that employer for **AT LEAST TWO YEARS**. You are entitled to the same job and conditions as if you had never been away. For instance, if your pay increases with the length of employment, the time you are away will contribute to the increase. But pension and seniority rights will only carry on from where they were when you stopped work. So your final pension will be smaller, and you may lag behind in promotion.

You may lose this right if you don't tell your employer at least three weeks before you intend to stop work. You can go on working right up to the birth (but you may lose maternity allowances(but you can't have more than 11 weeks off (unless it's sick leave). After the birth you may return within 29 weeks, giving the boss one week's notice of your return.

When you return to work it will be possible for the employer to dismiss your temporary replacement if he/she was told this in writing on appointment.

3. **THE RIGHT TO MATERNITY PAY** will come into force on 6th April 1977 and both the two years' employment condition and three weeks' notice of stopping work apply.

How much do you get?

Maternity leave is for six weeks only. It is 9/10ths of normal weekly pay, plus earnings-related maternity allowances, minus the standard maternity allowance. Normal pay is calculated on average hours—at hourly rates so it allows for regular overtime. But women paid piece or bonus rates will lose. If you get full maternity allowances you should get almost full pay for the six weeks.

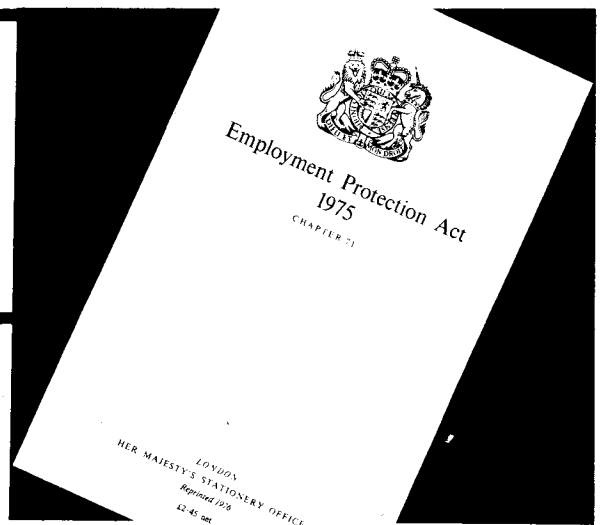
If you take the full 11 weeks off before the birth, you will have another 12 weeks of maternity allowances—5 before the birth and 7 after. But if you work any of that time you lose the allowance. Whatever you do, you'll have 22 weeks

without money unless you go back to work early.

Earnings-related allowance is based on last year's earnings—so for a baby born in 1977 it's based on 1975-76 pay, and may be lower than you expect.

Maternity pay comes out of a government fund made up of your insurance contributions. But if you change your job you lose all claims to the money you have contributed until you have been in your new job for two years.

If your employer refuses to pay your maternity leave you must appeal within three months of the six-month period. Your baby may only be 7 weeks old—and you'll be worn out.



...what about fathers?

by Wendy Mustell

Leave for fathers is not written into the Act but some workers with good maternity leave agreements are already fighting for it. The British Library Branch of the IPCS civil servants are fighting for paternity leave. At present fathers can get up to five days off work, if the management agree. Now the unions want to see fathers entitled to days off: three days if the mother is in hospital for seven days, four days off for six days in hospital, and up to five days off if the mother is in for hospital for five days or has the baby at home. They also want an additional day if the father wants to be present at the birth.



You still need a union

Although the Employment Protection Act protects your job in theory it doesn't always in practice. A woman employed by the Sankey Jonchu factory in Standish, near Wigan, came back to work after having her baby to have the management tell her she wasn't wanted.

The GMWU called out the factory, and three other factories in the group in Blackpool, BURNLEY and Blackburn. The strike was official. And in one and a half days she had her job back. More thanks to the union than the law!

Further information

Basic but detailed information about what to do if you are having a baby, and are only covered by the Employment Protection Act, is contained in an excellent pamphlet 'Maternity Rights for Working Women' by Jean Coussins. Price 30p plus postage, National Council for Civil Liberties, 186 Kings Cross Road, London WC1X 9DE.



Employment Protection Act
1975
CHAPTER 71

MATERNITY LEAVE

Holes in the law

The great advantage of the Employment Protection Act is that it gives us, for the first time, some minimum maternity rights—paid for by our increased National Insurance contributions.

The right to keep a job is important. But what use is it without nurseries and proper child-care facilities?

The 2 year employment condition is restrictive for young women, who may want to change jobs, may move around with their husbands, or may have interrupted work to look after children.

The two year employment condition is restrictive for young women, who may want to change jobs, may move around with their husbands, or may have interrupted work to look after children.

Part-time workers are hardly covered. Many women will not qualify for the basic maternity allowances. And the timing of

appeals will be a real burden to women who have just had a baby.

Many European countries have much better minimum provisions—eg Italy with 20 weeks on full pay, Hungary with 5 months on full pay and three years leave with cash allowances.

Many unions have negotiated better conditions. NALGO has minimum paid leave of 32 weeks, unpaid leave for a further year, reduced hours working during pregnancy, and some paternity leave. Some agreements have a mixture of better and worse conditions than the minimum. At the moment it seems that you have to choose a 'package'—not the best out of each.

Many more unions could campaign for the sort of conditions which would give women a real choice of having and caring for children while working.

Fight to improve it

Here's how one woman presented the argument for improved maternity provisions in her union. And some of the problems she came up against.

"Conference notes that the Employment Protection Act whilst improving the existing British Rail maternity provisions still falls far short of the minimum requirements necessary to guarantee adequate provisions for mother and child. Conference therefore instructs the EC to enter into negotiations with the British Rail Board for:

1. Eligibility for maternity provisions after 12 months full time service.
2. Maternity leave to count as part of continuous service, so that there is no loss of any conditions and entitlements.
3. 40 weeks paid leave, 18 at full pay, less any received flat rate National Insurance Maternity Benefit, and 22 weeks at half pay.

Moving the resolution at my branch meeting I argued: "Recent changes in the law have recognised the importance of work for women, that this is not just a sideline for them but something as central to their lives as it is for men. Women have to work. Many family incomes depend on the woman's wage. The Employment Protection Act has brought in changes to benefit pregnant women at work, but the terms of the Act are just a beginning, and a lot still has to be done to alleviate the difficulties of childbirth.

"The Act offers 11 weeks off before the birth, with a maximum of 29 weeks afterwards—40 weeks altogether. 90 per cent of basic minimum pay, less standard rate National Insurance Maternity Allowance, is available for only six of those weeks, with Maternity allowance (£12.90) paid for a further 12 weeks. As the principle of payments for 18 weeks has already been established and as it is unrealistic to ask women to survive on what is at present offered at a time when financial outlay increases, I am suggesting that 18 weeks are fully paid, less any *received* state benefit.

"The law says 40 weeks is a reasonable time off for childbirth, but money is still needed to live on, so the remaining 22 weeks should be paid at half pay.

"In the original bill for the Employment Protection Act,

eligibility was to be one year's service, not two. So let's bring it back to that. Many women, through no fault of their own, move their jobs more often. But they still make up 40 per cent of the work force, and work for an average 35 years, compared to men's 50 years.

"That maternity leave should count as continuous service with maintained pension and National Insurance Contributions is self-explanatory. People need pensions, holidays, promotion, sick pay, whether they are men or women, parents or not. It is unfair to penalise women for what is a social contribution in having children; they should not be classed as unequal to men because men are not forced to have time off for having children.

"It is even more necessary under present conditions of unemployment and cutbacks that women are given financial help as there's not much money around. It is also important from any trade-unionist's point of view that we take care of women's conditions so that we will all be willing to protect what we have rather than women finding that work and union is no real concern of theirs.

"This motion is intended to be a basis for the Executive to negotiate from. The principle of the Act must be interpreted fully to give women a real chance to cope with children and work. We must fight to make women's position as good as men's."

These were the sort of arguments which I used at my branch, a London branch of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association. But the replies came: "Womens liberation has gone too far;" "crime on the streets is due to working mothers", "if a family has a baby why should anyone else pay", to "I had a baby before maternity protection, and look at me."

The resolution was lost. But the ideas within it will give encouragement to the women in the branch, especially in a conservative union like ours.

Don't be deterred if you fail. We're up against a lot of backward ideas in both men and women. You always carry on arguing your points long after the meeting is over. Next time perhaps I'll win. Or perhaps someone else, in another branch, will win.

Lyn Philibon.

Our *Womens Voice Group* has been having an impact in the area for a few months now. We've battled away on different issues, really jumping in at the deep end by organising pickets of local Ladbrokes betting offices. We managed to get support and money for the women on strike for union recognition.

We also built up our own confidence. It was obvious from the start that there were a whole pool of women in the area who were convinced that the ideas put across in *Womens Voice* and *Socialist Worker* were good in theory, but they didn't know how to be involved.

We held a lot of meetings on things that affect women: abortion, the cuts, unemployment and the role of women in general. It's great to see women who for ages wouldn't do so much as come to a meeting actually arguing the toss. We often talked ourselves into doing things we weren't sure we would be able to do.

A lot of hard work went into the Trico strike. A really successful public meeting on equal pay was organised. And our first attempt at a street meeting, to leaflet and collect money for the Trico women, ended up in a punch up with the National Front!

Recently we've been campaigning against the closure of the EGA. Both *Womens Voice* EGA street meetings have been fantastically successful. At the first one we managed to collect £20, sell £5 worth of their badges (that's one and a half every minute) as well as leaflet shoppers and get petitions signed. Despite torrential rain, women out shopping were queueing up to put their names down. Mind you, it's difficult to ignore our street meetings as we all take turns in shouting the odds through a megaphone. We now do a regular shift on the EGA picket line in the evenings.

The cuts haven't hit us dramatically yet. The local authority has been nibbling away at our services for ages. But as yet they haven't actually closed the hospital. But it's only a matter of time. When they start we'll be ready to campaign, because we know how to do it now.

The group has about 30 members now. And the bigger we get the more we will be able to do. But remember if you're thinking of starting a *Womens Voice* group that there will always be new people coming to meetings who aren't super confident, and who probably have never been active before.

It shouldn't have to be said but simple things like organising babysitting rotas, understanding the problems peculiar to women, is extremely important. Getting the North London Womens Voice group off the ground has been an uphill slog, but the effort has been well worth it! Perhaps you should do the same!

North London Womens Voice on the streets



Top: keen to sign the petition

Centre: 10p for a badge

Bottom: yet another name of support

Pictures by Syd Shelton



NORTH LONDON WOMENS VOICE GROUP

Southern Group

Below you will find details of the Women's Voice Group meetings over the next three months. We hope you and your friends will come along. If you have any babysitting problems, Mandy on 607 8067 will be able to help.

17th January 8pm JOY LEMAN: WOMENS EXPLOITATION IN ADVERTISING

14th February 8pm NIKKI MELLOR: ABORTION — WHICH WAY NOW?

14th March 8pm-MARGARET RENN: WHY REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM NOT JUST WOMENS LIB

These meetings will be held at the Florence Pub, Florence Road N1, just off Upper Street

North Group

Below you will find details of the Womens Voice Group meetings for the next 3 months. We hope you and your friends will come along. If you have any babysitting problems, Mandy on 607 8067 will be able to help.

24th January 8pm MEL BARTLEY: The EGA and Hospital Cuts

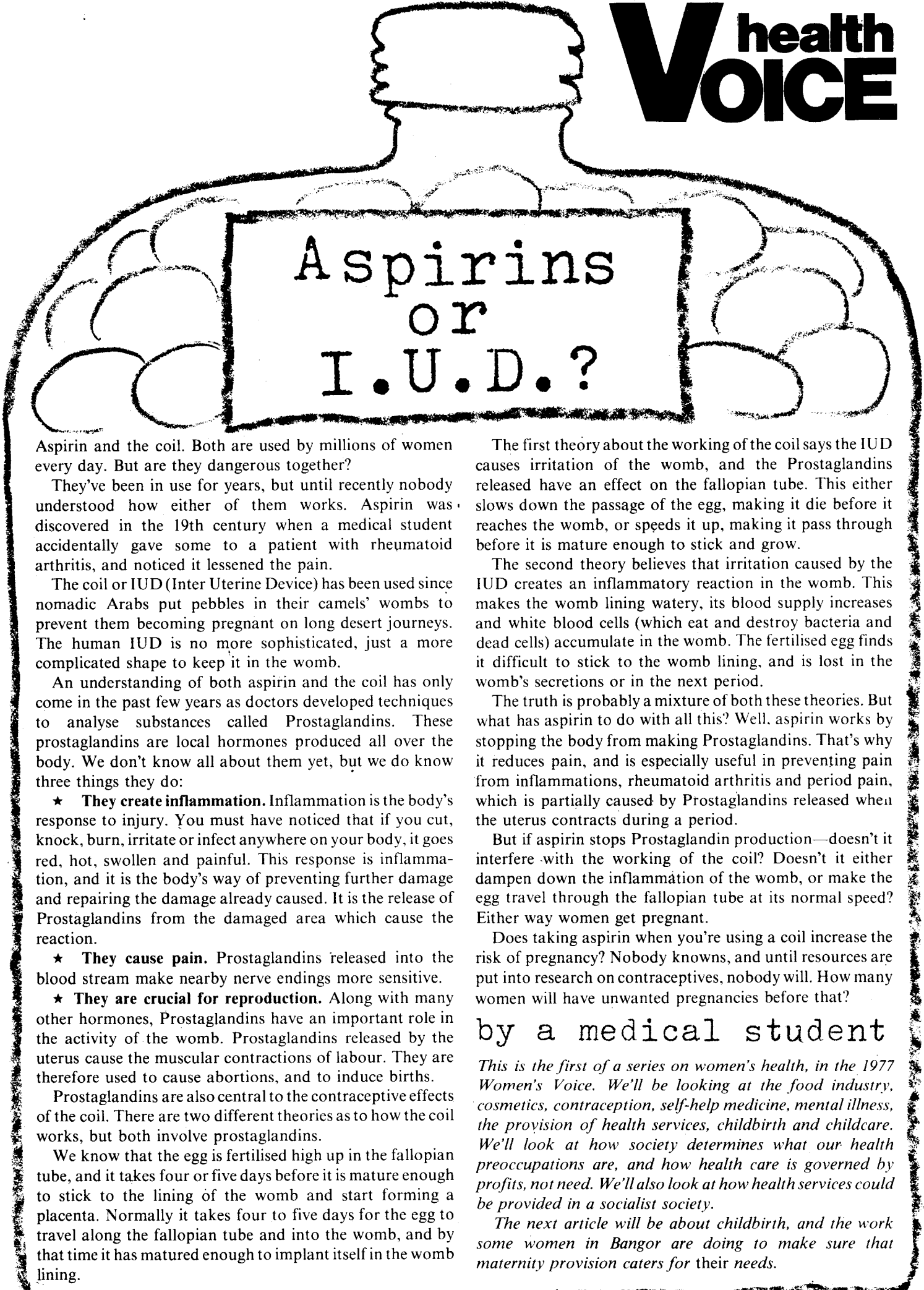
21st February 8pm ABORTION ITALIAN STYLE. Speaker to be announced

21st March 8pm MARGARET RENN; The WOMENS RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

These meetings will be held at The Beehive, Stoneleigh Road, Tottenham N17

We are also holding weekly street meetings around the proposed closure of the EGA Hospital for women, in an effort to get money and support for the workers at this hospital, who are at present 'holding a work in'. Anyone who is willing to help with leafletting, petitioning, selling badges and speaking at these street meetings, or can go and help on the picket line on Thursdays from 6 - 10 in the evening, should contact Mandy 607 8067

One Year on from the Sex Discrimination Act: **A Rally for Womens Rights.** February 26, Alexandra Palace, London N22. Speakers, theatre, exhibitions, stalls, literature. Organised by the Working Womens Charter Campaign. For more information write to Mandy Snell, 33 Wemyss Road, London SE3



Aspirins or I.U.D.?

Aspirin and the coil. Both are used by millions of women every day. But are they dangerous together?

They've been in use for years, but until recently nobody understood how either of them works. Aspirin was discovered in the 19th century when a medical student accidentally gave some to a patient with rheumatoid arthritis, and noticed it lessened the pain.

The coil or IUD (Inter Uterine Device) has been used since nomadic Arabs put pebbles in their camels' wombs to prevent them becoming pregnant on long desert journeys. The human IUD is no more sophisticated, just a more complicated shape to keep it in the womb.

An understanding of both aspirin and the coil has only come in the past few years as doctors developed techniques to analyse substances called Prostaglandins. These prostaglandins are local hormones produced all over the body. We don't know all about them yet, but we do know three things they do:

- ★ **They create inflammation.** Inflammation is the body's response to injury. You must have noticed that if you cut, knock, burn, irritate or infect anywhere on your body, it goes red, hot, swollen and painful. This response is inflammation, and it is the body's way of preventing further damage and repairing the damage already caused. It is the release of Prostaglandins from the damaged area which cause the reaction.

- ★ **They cause pain.** Prostaglandins released into the blood stream make nearby nerve endings more sensitive.

- ★ **They are crucial for reproduction.** Along with many other hormones, Prostaglandins have an important role in the activity of the womb. Prostaglandins released by the uterus cause the muscular contractions of labour. They are therefore used to cause abortions, and to induce births.

Prostaglandins are also central to the contraceptive effects of the coil. There are two different theories as to how the coil works, but both involve prostaglandins.

We know that the egg is fertilised high up in the fallopian tube, and it takes four or five days before it is mature enough to stick to the lining of the womb and start forming a placenta. Normally it takes four to five days for the egg to travel along the fallopian tube and into the womb, and by that time it has matured enough to implant itself in the womb lining.

The first theory about the working of the coil says the IUD causes irritation of the womb, and the Prostaglandins released have an effect on the fallopian tube. This either slows down the passage of the egg, making it die before it reaches the womb, or speeds it up, making it pass through before it is mature enough to stick and grow.

The second theory believes that irritation caused by the IUD creates an inflammatory reaction in the womb. This makes the womb lining watery, its blood supply increases and white blood cells (which eat and destroy bacteria and dead cells) accumulate in the womb. The fertilised egg finds it difficult to stick to the womb lining, and is lost in the womb's secretions or in the next period.

The truth is probably a mixture of both these theories. But what has aspirin to do with all this? Well, aspirin works by stopping the body from making Prostaglandins. That's why it reduces pain, and is especially useful in preventing pain from inflammations, rheumatoid arthritis and period pain, which is partially caused by Prostaglandins released when the uterus contracts during a period.

But if aspirin stops Prostaglandin production—doesn't it interfere with the working of the coil? Doesn't it either dampen down the inflammation of the womb, or make the egg travel through the fallopian tube at its normal speed? Either way women get pregnant.

Does taking aspirin when you're using a coil increase the risk of pregnancy? Nobody knows, and until resources are put into research on contraceptives, nobody will. How many women will have unwanted pregnancies before that?

by a medical student

This is the first of a series on women's health, in the 1977 Women's Voice. We'll be looking at the food industry, cosmetics, contraception, self-help medicine, mental illness, the provision of health services, childbirth and childcare. We'll look at how society determines what our health preoccupations are, and how health care is governed by profits, not need. We'll also look at how health services could be provided in a socialist society.

The next article will be about childbirth, and the work some women in Bangor are doing to make sure that maternity provision caters for their needs.

Angela Camargo

'when the torture starts you begin to rationalise'

In the towns in Brazil you can imagine you are in Britain, until you step into the street. Then you know something is wrong. People are begging, there are shanty towns close by, where life is intolerable. So you either forget about it, or you blame it on god, or you ask yourself, why?

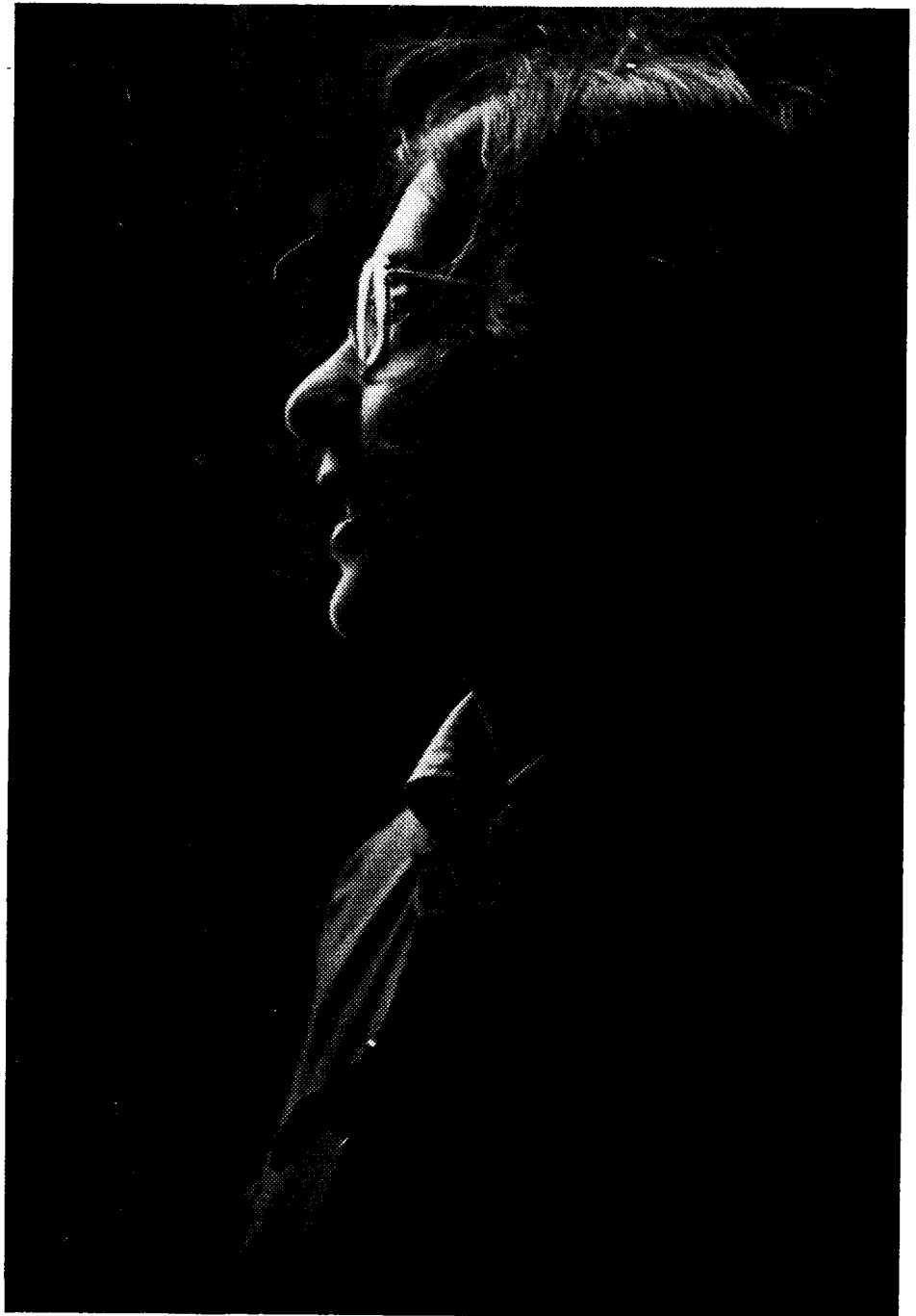
The workers in Brazil are *superexploited*. A man who works eight hours a day doesn't earn enough to feed himself, let alone his family. There are enough workers for the employers not to worry whether they can keep themselves alive. So everyone goes out to work. The women would never think of staying at home. And everyone works overtime.

The worst poverty is among the peasants. The women marry at 13 or 14, and start having children. They may have 15 children, and many of them will die. There are no medicines, there is no abortion or contraception, unless you are a middle class woman in the city—and that is still illegal. There is not even divorce. It is a *very* Catholic country. The religious ideas go side by side with ignorance, and the hope that in another life things will be better. By the time poor women reach thirty or forty years, they are just used up, finished.

When the military took over, inflation was very high and my family like all the middle class families supported the coup. There was a lot of anti-communist propaganda and they felt very threatened. Cuba is not so far away.

Then the oppression began. As a student I became involved in the campaigns inside the secondary schools, but the more the students demonstrated and fought, the worse the military clamped down. Eventually we were forced underground.

One day I went out, with a comrade. He had been arrested before because he had organised the sailors in the navy. He was very popular with them. When we arrived at this flat the police were there. We ran down the stairs, but a policeman was coming up, and he shot my friend through the head. I was shot too, in the back. I stuffed a handkerchief over it,



picture: Syd Shelton

and managed to get out of the building. Then I was caught. They didn't know who I was, and they didn't know I was wounded so the torture started right away. I had been in charge of accommodation for everyone underground so I knew all the addresses. How many people would be arrested if I spoke flashed through my mind.

When they took my clothes off they saw I was wounded and they didn't know what to do, whether to let me die, or take me to hospital. They discussed it for a bit, and then took me to hospital. I woke from the operation two days later, and they knew who I was. At least my friends knew by then that I had been arrested and could be out of the way

themselves.

They started to torture me again ten days later. I wasn't badly tortured because the wound kept opening. So it would just last a few hours, and then back to the infirmary. They used electric shocks where the wound was, on all the sexual areas, and they use a thing like earphones on your head—hitting both sides at once. They do the same with everyone. My girl friend was so badly tortured that her arms and legs were paralysed. She spent six months in hospital.

After a while you begin to rationalise. They know I'm in this organisation so why not tell them. It's wrong to say anything, but I was so weak from the wound and the torture. I didn't give them any information they didn't know, but I didn't keep quiet. Some people did—they were killed or tortured even more. I was sent to prison for two and a half years for being a member of the Brazilian Revolutionary Communist



Party.

When I came out I was scared to death. All the time they pick people up again, torture them a bit more, just to keep them quiet. You can't live a normal life again. And to go underground again. . .

So I went to France. I had friends there. That's where I met Philip Agee.

He suspected me as much as I suspected him. He thought everyone was a CIA agent, and I thought if he *was* a CIA agent, he probably still *is* a CIA agent. I never can pardon him for being in Brazil once, even if it was only for a few days!

His deportation from Britain came as a complete surprise to us. We never expected it from a Labour Government. But our case isn't anything special. There are so many cases of immigrant workers being sent back, the Irish people, the Cypriots in prison now whose lives are in danger if they get sent back. We have to fight it, not because he's someone, or because he is more important than the thousands of other people who are fighting for socialism, but because he is a public figure and maybe it will set a precedent if he is reprieved.

Whatever happens it isn't going to wreck our lives. It just makes me more determined. Now I have even more reason to be angry.



Unbiased?

Louise Boychuk was sacked from her job in the City office of HJ Symons Holdings because she was wearing a 'Lesbians Ignite' badge. The stockbroker claimed that this would be 'embarrassing' to his rich, overseas clients.

The tragedy of this case is that Louise was completely on her own, without the backing of any trade union organisation to fight her case with industrial action. She had to rely on the industrial tribunal which could not get her job back but only order compensation, had they ruled in her favour.

As it happened, the chairman proved early on in the hearing just where his sympathies were.

He asked: 'Might there have been 16-year-old girls just out of school, working with Miss Boychuk?'

At one point Louise's lawyer had to remind him that being a Lesbian is not, and never has been, against the law.

Her attempts to show that she wore the badge to show that Lesbians were real people and so that people would not assume she was heterosexual were lost on him.

Throughout the case, her boss made it clear that he didn't want Louise working

for him because she had revealed that she was a lesbian.

No one working with her had complained and she had no dealings with the foreign customers he was trying to 'protect'. He admitted he considered lesbians 'perverted' and 'would not like to sit near one'.

But the 'unbiased' tribunal was obviously blinded by similar prejudice.

The chairman delivered this ruling: 'She was the author of her own misfortune. In our view, whether you agree with homosexuality in principle or not, an employer is entitled to set a standard within reasonable limits.'

Books we've enjoyed

Women's Voice decided to ask a group of unpublished novelists, unheard of broadcasters and other assorted professional failures, revolutionaries, housewives and mothers, for their 'Book of The Year'. Some couldn't even make up their minds about that, and had to put in two. But here are the results...

What about you...?

Annie Dunn . . . 'Wedlocked Women' by Lee Comer
Because it's very explicit

Gail Cartmail . . . 'The Problem of Women's Liberation' by Evelyne Reed
Extremely controversial ideas about primitive women. Stamps on the male domain and taboo subject—anthropology. Good read and provokes argument.

Elana Dallas . . . 'Labour and Monopoly Capitalism' by Harry Braverman
Sounds dreadful but in fact is not that heavy, and is highly illuminating account of work today

'Women's Consciousness, Man's World' by Sheila Rowbotham

Many women in Newcastle have found it useful but the analysis is left in the air without suggestions about how to use it.

'The Bell Jar' by Sylvia Plath
A brilliant novel about a woman going through a nervous breakdown.

Judith Hamilton . . . 'The Voyage Out' and 'The Years' by Virginia Woolf

Hilariously witty novels about the oppression of women in Victorian society—and the role of the Victorian patriarch in class society.

Jill Arrowsmith . . . 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' . . . Raold Dahl
Pure fantasy about kids in a chocolate factory . . . Fantastic

Nancy Kelly . . . 'The Dispossessed' . . . by Ursula le Guin
Science fantasy about twin planets. When a socialist visits the capitalist planet he gets confused about the way women are treated and that people 'own' things.

Margaret Renn . . . If you can find, borrow or beg a copy of Sylvia Pankhurst's book 'The Suffragette Movement' it is not only the best history of the suffragettes, but also the best political analysis of the arguments that beset the socialist movement at the time. Should they stand by the women, or should they side step the issue by arguing for adult suffrage, votes for all. They let the women down badly.

Jean Clarke . . . 'Wedlocked Women' by Lee Comer

Easy to read and covers the whole range of sexual politics—raises the question of whether it's a woman's *right* to have first choice of the kids on a breakup, or whether it's mens conditioning which ensures they don't get a look in.

Sybil Cock . . . 'Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life'

Shows the links between the exploitation of workers as workers and our oppression by the isolated and unfulfilling relationships we make outside work. He challenges the view that under socialism we will all live in happy nuclear families based on love, by showing clearly how the family has adapted to meet the needs of capitalism.

Irene Breugal . . . 'Eleanor Marx, Vol 1' by Yvonne Kapp
The Marx household is revealed as dominated by an absolute Victorian patriarchy—Marx was an old male chauvinist.

Yvonne Walker . . . 'Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath'
A book to get the blood running through your veins.

Mary Smith . . . 'Women's sexual fantasies' by Nancy Friday
It's nice to know that other women have fantasies and can enjoy and express them. It expresses sexuality in words.

C Rosenberg . . . 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' by Ken Kesey/'Lenin, Vol 2' by T Cliff

Side show sexuality

She was told
When small
"You're a female"
In more ways than one.
Having no penis
Meant nothing to her
Until she watched boys

Rolling in mud,
Sadly she sewed
Stupid crosses.
Growing up
Was no ordeal,

Till puberty conscious minds
Snatched her identity
Gave her a label,
Destined to be

A feminine stereotype, it said,
with sweet little dresses
And make-up
For emphasis
Of her roles to play.
The choice was hers,
Carefree loose,
A good night
For the lads,
"The lowest slut"

Men brand her, eagerly.
Or keep intact
Her fortress
Chastity, as
"The coldest meanest bitch"
What should she be?

The web she learnt
Was far from spun,
Her ripening
Sexuality
Was just another

Coconut
At the fair,
To be "knocked off"
And won,
Strictly
For the sideshows.

ANNE PALEY TYNESIDE

'Out! on the Costa del Trico'

Out! on the Costa del Trico.
This new play by the *Womens Theatre group* is about the 22 week long strike over equal pay at Trico. The play is excellent entertainment, with lots of good songs, full of fight, strength and humour.

It shows life as it was for many of the women on the picket line: The problems of fitting in cleaning and cooking in with picket duties, fighting onefight at the picket and another at home with the family.

You see the women facing car workers in their bid to get the windscreen wipers blacked and the effort it took many of the women to go outon delegations to collect money and support.

But there is a weakness in the play. Trico raised more questions than it answered. The thing we all remember is the victory, and that the play puts across very well, but why did they have to fight for 22 weeks? Out on the delegations the womens was an easy case of equal pay, 'it's law' they said. So why was there a dispute at all? How did they succeed where others have failed? Why was there so little support from the AUEW machine although the strike was official?

Perhas a play is not the place for learning lessons, but as socialist women we can draw on their collective experiences, that are best portrayed in some of the songs,

Their discovery of which side of the fence the great English bobbies stood. The newspapers distortion of the facts and the crude use of headlines like 'Petticoat Pickets.'

The Womens Theatre Group opens at The Bush this week, but hopefully they will take the play around trade union branches, factories offices and hospitals. Womens Voice groups should show it too to show how equal pay can be fought and won. The play lasts about an hour—just long enough to have a speaker and start discussion

Contact the Womens Theatre Group by writing to Julia Meadows, 27 Stepney Green, London E1 3 JX. Or phone 01 790 7649.



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