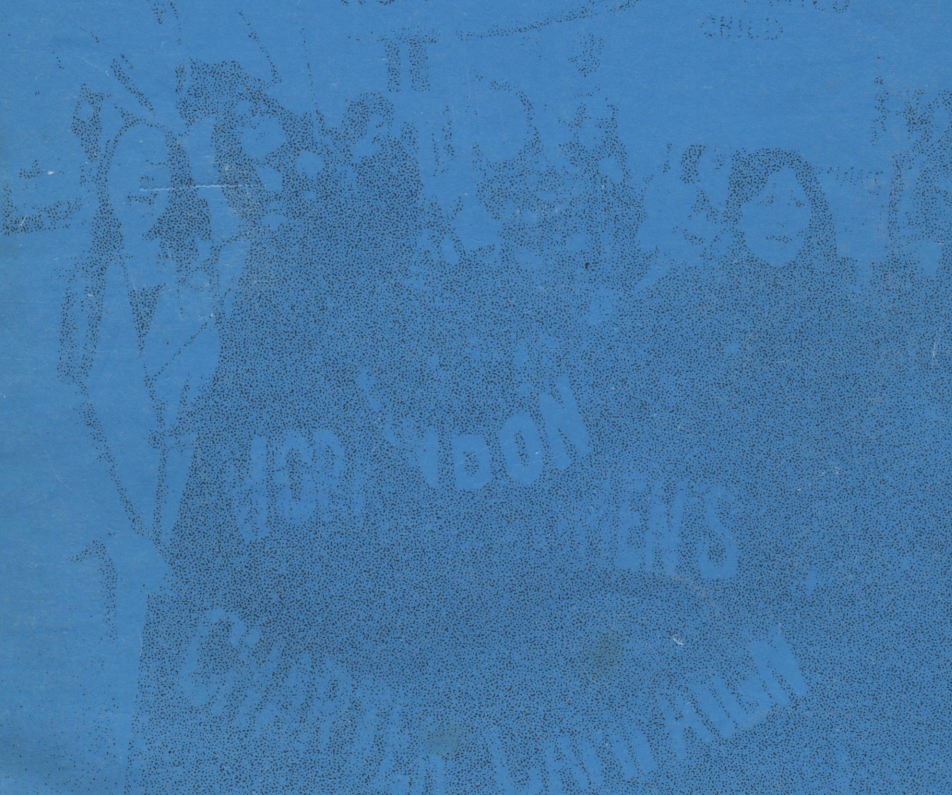


FIGHTING FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

LET ANYONE
CHOOSE FOR
US
OUR BODIES
OUR CHOICE

EVERY MOTHER
A WILLING
MOTHER
EVERY CHILD
A WANTED
CHILD

OK WHO'S
CHOOSING
FOR US?



20p

1976, The Year of Equality?

Introduction

1975 was International Women's Year. At the end of 1975 the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act came into force. Throughout 1975 and 1976 the media covered women's rights extensively. Some of the coverage revealed the extent of existing inequalities faced daily by women. Some of it was patronising and sexist, making short shrift of women's oppression. And some of it was of the order of 'now you're equal, so go down the coal mines'. But the realisation is growing that the legislation alone is not enough to make women equal, especially at a time of growing economic and social crisis. Nevertheless, it's undeniable that the introduction of this legislation has raised women's expectations. It's also clear that if women rely **only** on the provisions of the Acts, no real steps forward in the fight for women's rights will be taken.

And, if women are denied the right to fight for **their** interests, the entire workers movement will be weakened, at a time when working class unity is more urgent than ever.

What was the reality faced by women in 1976? Clearly, the effect of public expenditure cuts, attacks on women's abortion rights, the continuing lack of nursery provision and the wage limits imposed by the Labour Government have all worsened women's position. Women are actually **worse off** than a few years ago. What is the reality underlying the official myth of equality?

This **Socialist Woman** pamphlet will look at that reality, and will spotlight the ways and means by which women can carry forward a meaningful struggle for equality in all areas of life — in work, in training and education opportunity, for abortion and contraception facilities, for nursery provision, etc.

Unemployment

Equal pay and job opportunity, even if they were obtainable via the legislation, do not benefit women who do not have a job. Rising unemployment figures among women pose a major challenge to the struggle for women's rights. Women are losing their jobs faster than men — more than a third of the new unemployed in 1976 were women, although women constituted less than a third of the workforce. The following table shows the rise in unemployment among non-manual women workers:

Preface

This pamphlet aims to provide an analysis of the struggle for women's rights over the last year and show how the demands of the Working Women's Charter lay the basis for an extension of this struggle. We have not attempted to include a detailed study of the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts, information on which has been extensively produced by the NCCL's **Equality Report** and the Equal Pay and Opportunities Campaign, as well as in official trade union publications.

What we have attempted to provide is a framework within which the struggle for women's rights can be developed. Many of the lessons that women have already drawn from that struggle were aired at the 'One Year On From the SDA — A Rally for Women's Rights' held at Alexandra Palace on 26 February 1977. The legislation was deemed totally inadequate, particularly in light of the Labour Government's attacks on the working class through the policies of wage restraint, cuts and unemployment spearheaded by the Social Contract, through the attacks on the right to abortion, etc.

Women are beginning to learn that they will only extend their rights by relying upon their own strengths and self-organisation rather than on the legislation. But national solidarity action is needed for women in struggle to ensure not only that they win but that they can make a full contribution in the task of building a united opposition to the attacks of the Labour Government through the Social Contract. The fight around the demands of the Working Women's Charter and the ideas and actions of the women's movement, support for the struggle of women now, is an essential task for the entire working class in the fight for alternative policies to the capitalist crisis, for socialism and women's liberation.

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ISBN 0-85 612 201-7

Published by Relgocrest Ltd., 328/9 Upper Street, London N1.

Typesetting: F.I. Litho Ltd., 328/9 Upper Street, London N1.

Printed by Interlink Longraph Ltd., 45 Mitchell Street, London EC1.

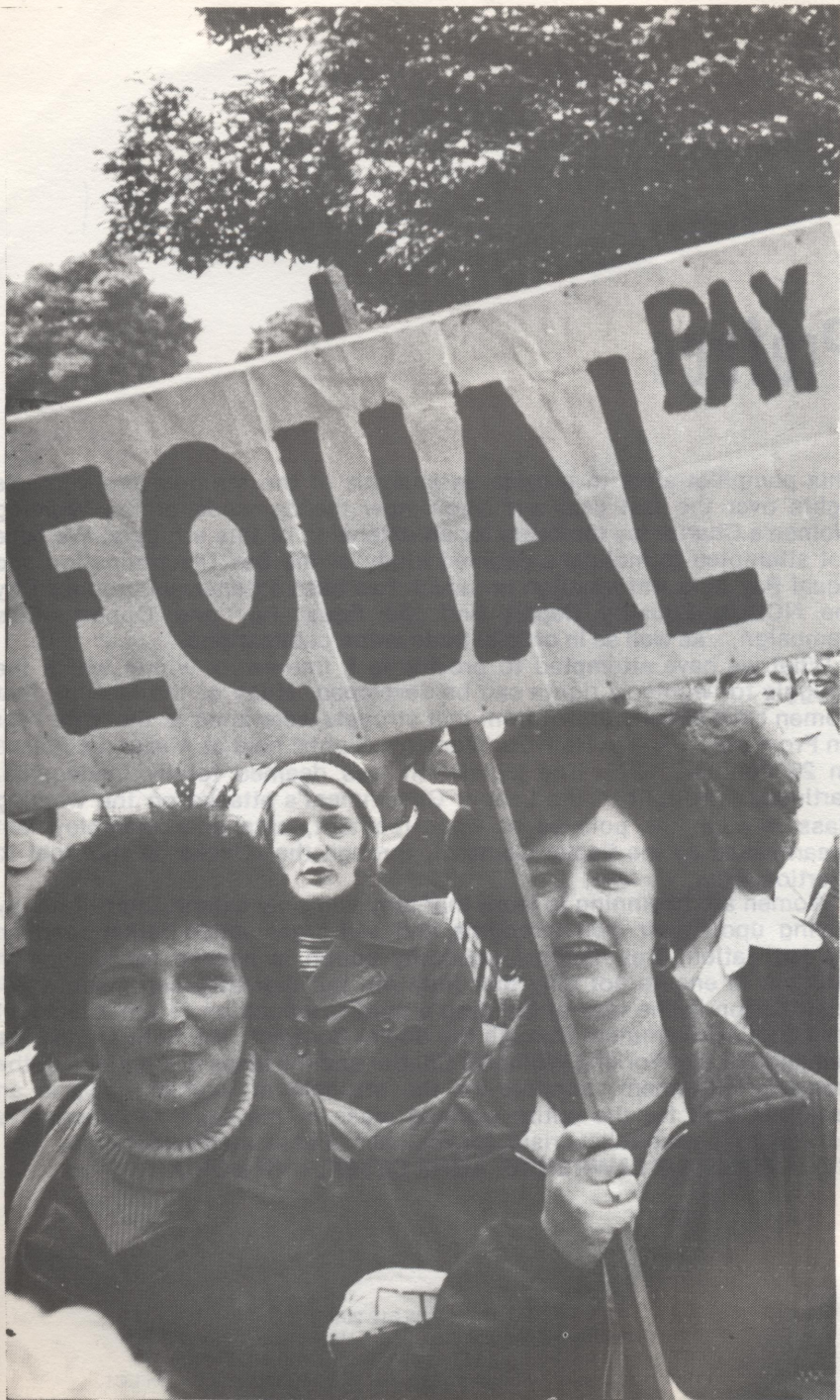


Photo: CHRIS DAVIES (Report)

**Female unemployment
— non-manual**

Occupation	June 1973	June 1975	December 1975
Clerks	14,256	28,224	46,254
S/H typists	1,484	3,342	5,653
Typists	1,335	2,831	5,219
Office m/c operators	1,077	2,566	2,439
Sales	6,510	14,435	25,103

(Cited in CIS Report, **Women Under Attack**, p.12)

In 1975 **The Economist** noted that of all Britain's unemployed, only 46 per cent of women were registered. The corresponding figure for men was as high as 92 per cent. Reinforcing this important discrepancy, the Department of Employment figures indicate that there is an 89 per cent rate of increase in the number of women unemployed, compared with a 60 per cent rate of men unemployed. Further, the rate for female minority groups is as high as 254 per cent.

The particularly high rate of women's unemployment arises from a variety of causes. Among these are cuts in the public sector, and in other areas where a high proportion of women work, for example, closures in the textile and clothing industry. Then there is redundancy on grounds which discriminate against women, for example, the operation of a policy of married women and part-timers out first and the operation of the 'last in, first out' principle. This obviously affects women more than men, as family commitments mean that women are more likely to have shorter employment records. Furthermore, there is an overall lack of concern over the loss of women's jobs.

But women are not just losing their jobs; a woman's right to work is also being attacked. The slogan 'married women out first' often appears in the daily papers. For example, **Willie Hamilton**, a Labour MP, said publicly that married women teachers should give up their jobs to create work for unemployed teachers!

Cuts in Social Expenditure and the Loss of Women's Jobs

The public sector cutbacks will have a drastic effect on women's jobs, particularly in education, the health service, local government and the civil service. The following table shows the impact of the civil service cuts on women's employment:

Civil service employment

	Cuts on existing levels	Lost Growth	Total loss
Total no.	16,000	44,000	60,000
Annual loss in recruiting	8,000	22,000	30,000
% effect on female unemployment July 1975	+ 4.7%	+ 12.9%	+ 17.6%

(Cited in CIS Report, p.13)

Over 70 per cent of NHS workers are women. Conditions for those left in employment are worsening as the workload increases. At a time when the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE) estimates that 70,000 new nurses are required to run the National Health Service, the register of unemployed nurses increased by 83 per cent in the period June-December 1975. Student nurses are being forced to fail examinations in order to avoid being laid off in the next year, since there are no jobs for qualified nurses. Women who have trained for teaching (another secure job until recently), are in a similar situation. If class sizes are to be brought down to a barely teachable 30, 58,000 teachers are needed. Yet an estimated 30,000 are out of work this year. 20,000 of these are women. [1]

Cuts in the public sector also hit workers in private industry. Cuts threatened by the Post Office also threaten the jobs of workers in the telecommunications industry.

Nurseries

For mothers of young children nursery provision is essential, in order that they are able to go out to work and to broaden their choices outside the home. Working mothers need day nurseries which look after children in working hours. Recent studies have also stressed the needs of young children for the stimulation and educational benefits which nurseries can provide.

However, more often than not, provisions such as nursery schools and playgroups are inadequate. In fact, these types of facilities, particularly playgroups, are only used by the state to get some pre-school education provided on the cheap, as the parents often provide the premises and staff the playgroups. The trends in childcare provision are outlined below:

Children's services, 1961-73. England and Wales
[places in thousands]

	1951	1961	1966	1972	1973
Maintained day nurseries	40	22	21	23	24
Registered (private) nurseries	10	18	75	296	335
Registered childminders	1	14	32	90	92
Nursery education —					
full-time	—	226	237	296	325
part-time	—	—	32	86	101

(Source: **Social Trends**, HMSO 1974, cited in 'Women's Oppression Under Capitalism', **Revolutionary Communist** No.5, p.30)

In contrast to the fall in the number of state-run day nurseries, there is a rise in the number of private day nurseries and child minders. The lack of state support for day nurseries shows the effect of the crisis in the economic situation. All too often, this non-support of nurseries is justified and excused by an ideological attack on mothers who leave young children to go out to work.

Supporters of the theory of maternal deprivation (significantly they don't talk about paternal or social deprivation) argue — in the most extreme form — that children inevitably become neurotic/delinquent/maladjusted if their mothers are not with them 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for the first five years of the child's life. What this does to women is not a concern of these people, nor are the resulting severe problems of over-dependence in children. John Bowlby claimed (in his

1. **The Teacher** (newspaper of the National Union of Teachers), September 1976.

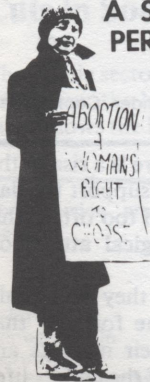
infamous 'Bowlby hypothesis') to provide evidence that the first five years of an individual's life are crucial for mental health. He argued that in the absence of a continuous relationship with the mother, the child's future would be marred by delinquency and an instability which could not be reversed. Bowlby therefore argued against the provision of nurseries for working mothers as 'they have an adverse effect on the child's emotional growth'. [2]

In fact, Bowlby's studies were based on children living in institutions, not children living in the home with working mothers. Needless to say, theorists such as Bowlby do not consider the **mother's** happiness or mental welfare. If women did not like staying at home for five years, they were just expected to put up with it, sacrificing themselves for their children.

State nursery provision is mainly available for unsupported mothers or others who can prove 'exceptional' social needs. When the Plowden Committee suggested an improvement in nursery school provision they argued that: 'We do not believe that full-time nursery places should be provided... we consider that mothers who cannot satisfy the authorities that they have exceptionally good reasons for working should have low priority for full-time nurseries.' When asking for a nursery place, as when applying for an abortion, women have to undergo the humiliation of proving themselves unfit for the social goal of motherhood. 'Normal', healthy, married, financially secure women with 2.4 children and decent housing are not considered to need nurseries. These ideas, based on widespread acceptance that it is the mother's responsibility to care for her children, makes it easy for the Government to cut back on nursery provision. Such facilities are often seen as luxuries rather than essentials, and so are the first to go in a period of 'national economic crisis'.

The effect of cuts can be seen in the White Paper of 1971, 'Education: A Framework for Expansion'. This paper proposed to allocate funds for building nursery classes attached to schools. It estimated that there were 300,000 equivalent full-time places in nursery schools. A Government circular of 1973 aimed to increase this figure to 700,000 by 1982. This proposed increase has become yet another of the Labour Government's promises which has been thrown out of the window.

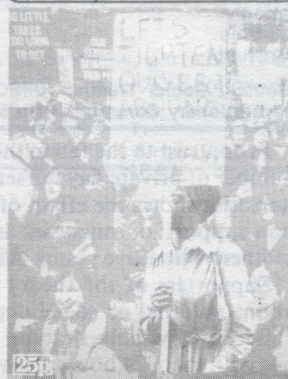
ABORTION RIGHTS - A SOCIALIST PERSPECTIVE



25p

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orders - write for de-
tails).

Socialist Woman



2. See, for example, J. Bowlby **Child Care and the Growth of Love**, Penguin 1965.

Social Services

Without nursery provision women cannot choose to have children and remain financially and socially independent. Even a woman's right to choose when and if to have children is under attack (see the Socialist Woman pamphlet **Abortion Rights — A Socialist Perspective**, price 25p). Cuts in the NHS are postponing the establishment of daycare abortion centres in the hospitals where the consultants are sympathetic to abortion provision. Contraception facilities are also being reduced.

	1971	1972	1973	1974
FPA clinics	1040	1016	944	793
FPA patients (thousands)	735	806	784	1151

(Source: **Social Trends**, cited in **Revolutionary Communist** No.5, p.31)

One result in the reduction of the number of clinics is that clinics have to treat more patients and the quality of care declines. Thus proper screening and routine check-ups, which reduce the dangers of contraceptive methods to women's health, are being reduced. While extension of contraception provision is desirable, the fact that general practitioners who do not have to undergo contraceptive training as part of their qualifications are now being allowed to prescribe contraceptives increases the overall level of contraceptive cover without taking adequate measures to safeguard women's health.

Contraception and Abortion

If lack of contraceptive provision and nurseries are hitting women in the earlier part of their working lives, older women particularly are being made to bear the cost of cuts in the social services. Many women who want to return to work after child-rearing are prevented from this by having to look after elderly and dependent relatives. Other older women are forced to sacrifice careers to care for elderly parents. Cuts in social services are being implemented by transferring responsibilities from the state to women in the home. For example, the home help service charges were increased from 70p to £1.04 an hour in January 1976; and in Northumberland 62 people stopped using the service altogether and another 82 people asked for their home helps to come for fewer hours a week. A report of MIND, the mental health charity, indicated that in 1976 provision of homes and hostels for the mentally ill was well below the Government recommended figures, thus forcing many to stay in mental hospitals and so delaying recovery and reintegration into society.

Provision of Homes and Hostels for the Mentally Ill in the North

Area	No. Places	Govt. recommended figure
Northumberland	4	56-84
Durham	30	130-195
Cumbria	29	94-141
North Tyneside	4	42-63
Newcastle	55	60-90
Sunderland	47	60-90
Gateshead	0	44-66

Tranquillisers

Capitalism's answer when women start to crack up under the strain of coping with ever-increasing family responsibilities is to prescribe tranquillisers. Every day women in Britain take 7 million anti-depressants. Research in the *New England Journal* (April 1974) showed that in the UK 70 per cent of the users of anti-anxiety drugs are women, and that nearly all women over 15 years of age use these drugs. The ages of 25-34 and 45-54 are the periods of highest use. Significantly 12 per cent of women that take anti-depressant drugs need them every day. [3] The profits the drug companies make from the NHS are, of course, extremely high.

National Health Service

Hospital waiting lists are often particularly long for gynaecological operations. This reflects sexist attitudes in medicine which see women's complaints as unimportant and psychosomatic. As many middle-aged women are not productive workers, their health is also seen as less important for this reason. Consequently medical advances in treatment of the menopause, such as Hormone Replacement Therapy, are particularly vulnerable to the cuts. Similarly, cancer screening, which could greatly reduce deaths from breast and cervical cancer, is still only available to a small proportion of all women who could benefit from it.

Housing

Family commitments mean that the general effects of cuts in public expenditure bears heavily on women. If, for example, council housing is not repaired, then the woman at home all day with the children suffers particularly. If social amenities such as playgrounds, parks, shops, community centres, are not built or allowed to decay then **again** the woman is the one who has to maintain family life without these supports.

Social Security

The workforce in the Department of Health and Social Security is being reduced, whilst the number of unemployed is increasing. This will mean that social security payments will become even more difficult to obtain and that claimants will have to wait longer for their claims to be dealt with. All this will make life even more difficult for women budgeting to run households on social security payments. Moreover, the social security system, being exempt from the Sex Discrimination Act, still discriminates against women. The cohabitation clause still exists, cutting off women who are suspected of living with a man who is not their husband. Married women, when unemployed, are not entitled to supplementary benefit on the grounds that their husbands should support them.

3. *Women Under Attack*, a special report by Counter Information Services, 1976.



Photo: JOHN STURROCK (Report)

Yardley equal pay strikers emerge from their overnight occupation of Transport House for union backing from the T&GWU.

Wage Limits

Equal Pay

Women's pay, despite the Equal Pay Act, is still approximately 60% of men's. In fact, the gap between male and female earnings actually widened last year by 6p an hour. Equal pay meant two different things to the Government and the mass of women. The official Government estimates considered that the EPA would raise women's wages by 3-4 per cent. Women hoped to see the 40 per cent gap between men's and women's pay closed. Equal pay meant getting the average male wage. But such an interpretation of equal pay was what the EPA had given employers five years to avoid.

Equal Training and Job Opportunities

The reason for the low pay women receive is to be found by looking at the sectors of the economy where women work. Many women are employed in small workplaces and are not unionised. The concentration of women's employment in certain low-paid sectors of the economy is a major cause of discrepancies in male and female rates of pay.

**Predominantly female occupations
(thousands)**

90% or over female occupations

	All persons	Women
Hand and machine sewers, embroiderers	238	230
Nurses	432	394
Maids, valets, etc.	443	428
Canteen assistants	304	293
Typists, secretaries, etc.	770	759
75% & under 90%		
Shop assistants	969	786
Charwomen, sweepers & cleaners	522	456
Kitchen hands	122	100
Office machine operators	177	153
Hairdressers, etc	159	124
Telephone operators	107	89
60% and under 75%		
Clerks and cashiers	2,475	1,546
Waiters and waitresses	113	82
Primary and secondary teachers	496	318
Packers and labellers etc.	183	121
Bartenders	103	73

Source: **Social Trends**, cited in **Revolutionary Communist** No. 5, p.29

Women's participation in the better-paid and skilled jobs is unlikely to increase in a situation where cuts in education and training are reducing opportunities all round. Moreover, the cuts are also hitting the areas of traditional female employment — teaching and nursing. The opportunity for women to train in other types of work is very low. 'At the Government-run Skillcentres where courses are run in skilled crafts, of the 12,074 people in training last December (1974) only 32 were women'

Wage Limits

Since the summer of 1974 and the development of the Labour Government's Social Contract, the living standards of the working class have been reduced by wage limits. The constraints of the Social Contract have also weakened the working class in fighting back against unemployment and public expenditure cuts. For many low paid workers wage limits have meant that their standard of living has fallen further below the poverty line.

One of the major arguments for the Social Contract is that it helps the weak and low paid workers. However, the fact is that an estimated 20,000 workers found themselves worse off after a £6 rise under Phase 1 because of extra tax payments and loss of benefits. Nor did the majority of low paid workers even receive the full £6 possible under Phase 1. In Phase 2, those earning less than £50 got a maximum of only £2.50 a week. In April 1976, 10 per cent of male and 75 per cent of women manual workers earned less than £44 a week.

In fact £11.6 million of wages arrears due to many of the most exploited workers in the retail and textile sectors remain in the hands of the bosses. This was the conclusion of the April 1976 Report of the Low Pay Unit, which took a hard look at workers whose wages are supposedly protected by Wages Councils. And if these offending bosses are caught, the maximum fine available is a mere one hundred pounds. The fact that inspection by these Councils has been totally ineffective — 90

per cent of such employers are never inspected at all — has led many trade unionists (including the recent Women's TUC) to conclude that these Wages Councils, which are supposed to protect workers with little collective bargaining power, have actually helped to keep them isolated and unorganised. Homeworkers are a case in point.

For women, restraint on pay, in the context of an inflation rate of 20 per cent, has greater implications. Pay restraint means an increase of domestic tasks. Women are expected to shop around, experiment with cooking and make the family's clothes in an attempt to stretch a deflated weekly wage to meet the family's needs.

The Government's wages and taxation policy, coupled with cuts in social spending which have run the Welfare State services into the ground, make up a bundle whose message is loud and clear for the low paid — less take-home pay, more taxes, and fewer facilities is the reality of the Social Contract. And this for workers in whose interests the pay policy was peddled!

Thus the imposition of a wage limit has particular consequences for the majority of women workers who fall into the low-paid category, despite exemption of equal pay increases from Phases 1 and 2.

And these equal pay increases haven't proved all they were cracked up to be, either. Equal pay for women was supposed to be part of the 'social' side of the Social Contract sold to the working class in return for wage restraint. However, two-thirds of women workers have low-paid jobs not comparable to men's jobs. Of the remaining one third who are covered by the Act, 10 per cent still get nowhere near equal pay. The Act does not cover grading or job evaluation schemes that primarily determine women's low paid situation. The majority of women are employed in industries and sectors that require skills often associated with women's skills in the home — for instance, cleaning, cooking, and catering, which carry low status and therefore low pay.

Bad union organisation perpetuates the situation faced by the majority of women workers. The strike at Grunwick has shown what a struggle low-paid workers face — even to win the right to join a union. Often women are too scared to join a union, as the employers will sack them on the basis that they can always find other workers who will accept pittance wages for whatever reason. This is particularly true when unemployment is so high.



INPRECOR is a fortnightly information and analytical journal published by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. It is an international journal with editions in English, French, Spanish and German.

British subscribers can order the journal from: Inprecor, c/o Religocrest Ltd., 32B/9 Upper Street, London N1. Subscription rates: £7 per year (25 issues), £3.75 for six months. Please make out all cheques/POs to 'Inprecor', and specify which language edition is required.

Why Labour's Solutions Fail Women

The Economic Policy of the Labour Government

The failure of the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts to improve the position of women in society must be seen against the background of Labour's economic policy. The Labour Government came to power in 1974 in a situation of economic crisis, of a generalised recession of the capitalist system. While some capitalist countries (notably the USA) have temporarily pulled out of the recession, others such as Britain have by no means recovered from it. Recovery from the recession requires a transfer of resources from the public to the private sector, and consequently, an attack on the living standards of the working class. This process involves dismantling the welfare state, abandoning any attempt to maintain full employment, and imposing wage limits. Thus, to restore capitalist profits the Government has had to directly attack the welfare and financial standards of working people. A social-democratic government like the present Labour Government is prepared to do this, because in the final analysis it always chooses to defend capitalism rather than the interests of the working class.

In the present situation, a social-democratic government can serve the interests of the capitalist class better than an openly capitalist Conservative government. The trade union movement would not tolerate the present levels of unemployment or such falls in living standards under a Tory government. The Labour Government's special relationship with the trade union bureaucracy makes the Labour Government useful to the bourgeoisie, as the trade union bureaucracy is prepared to support the Social Contract and to suppress opposition to it within the trade union movement. This was clearly demonstrated when the leadership of the building workers' union UCATT abstained on the policies of the Social Contract at the special TUC conference in June 1976 — after the UCATT conference had voted against them.

However, this situation may change with increasing clashes between the Labour Government and the working class over the negotiation and acceptance of a Phase 3 of the Social Contract. In this situation, a Tory government may be preferable for the capitalist class.

The Family

We have demonstrated the effect of the Government's policies on women's position. To be able to fight back against policies which attack nursery provision, our right to abortion, etc, we have to understand why the working class movement is often prepared to let women pay for the crisis.

Firstly, if we look at unemployment, many trade unionists do not think that it is as important to protect women's jobs as it is to protect men's. The whole history of women's involvement in the trade unions reveals a continual struggle of women to gain acceptance from male workers of their right to work outside the home, and to have a political voice within the union movement. (The male attitude to women's rights to political expression and rights within the trade union movement was summed up by a prominent member of the Independent Labour Party at the beginning of this century. 'Even working class men, in arms against their own oppression', he said, 'liked to feel that there was something a little lower than themselves'. This comment could easily apply to the position of women in the workforce and the trade unions at present!)



In the twentieth century women have twice been encouraged to go out to work in wartime and to return home to provide jobs for men after the war. Women's role in the family makes it easy for capitalism to use them as an industrial reserve army. And this process is assisted by the cooperation of the trade unions. For instance, the Dilution Agreements of the Associated Society of Engineers which were concluded in the munitions industry in the First World War provided that dilutees (i.e. women) should be dismissed when men became available to do their work again.

Backward attitudes to women working arise from the acceptance of a woman's role in the family. Central to this is the acceptance of a woman's financial dependence on a man and the right of men to earn a family wage. The case for a woman's right to work is often argued only in terms of single, separated and widowed women, that is, those 'deviants' who do not possess a man to support them. This line of argument is very weak, because it avoids the issue of a woman's right to financial independence from men. But we should argue that all women should have the right to work, irrespective of husband's income.

Similarly, in the case of cuts, we cannot fight for nurseries effectively if we think that it is the woman's rather than society's responsibility to look after children. The same applies to the care of the elderly. Many women are faced with the choice of seeing elderly, handicapped and mentally ill relatives deteriorate in under-staffed institutions or giving up years of their own lives to care for them. The problem women face in fighting the cuts is that women have been brought up all their lives to manage to cope, to assist others by sacrificing themselves. Women opposing cuts are placed in a similar position to workers going on strike — do it and your family will suffer. It is impossible for women individually to resist the cuts.

In the case of equal pay, a study of its implementation in 25 firms revealed that in four cases the shop stewards had colluded with the management to minimise the cost of equal pay. The account of the male workers' response to equal pay is indicative of the problems of divisions within the working class:

'In most organisations in the monitor group, men tended not to react to equal pay until implementation was complete, becoming sensitive only when some women started to earn more than some men. However, in one instance, being put in the same grade as women was enough to stimulate the men into demanding a transfer. We have seen other examples of reactions from men. In one case, a group of men, including one shop steward, set out to discourage the women by telling them they would have to work nights and do heavy lifting, with the result that the women asked management not to give them equal pay. In another case, men took industrial action to force management to alter their grade and bonus scheme so that women would not start to earn more than some men.

'In two cases, men refused to help women with labouring elements in their jobs, such as carrying trays of work to and from machines which traditionally they had always done. In another, men put pressure on management to change job titles and consequently to increase pay in order to restore differentials. Finally, in two organisations men have pressed for upgrading. In almost all cases, management have been willing to make the necessary adjustments to satisfy the men in order to maintain industrial peace.' [4]

Labour's 'Solutions' for Women

How does social democracy define the **problem** of the oppression of women? The social-democratic view differs from a revolutionary view in two respects. Firstly, social democracy sees the aims as women's rights, not women's liberation. Thus, the issue is posed in terms of piecemeal reforms and not a qualitative change in women's lives. In addition, those who argue for women's rights often just claim equal conditions and opportunities with those men enjoy now! For those of us who see the aim as women's liberation, we think the struggle to improve women's position requires fundamental social change. Liberation means the full development of women's potential as human beings and cannot be achieved within the framework of capitalism.

Secondly, social democracy sees the obstacle to women's liberation as being merely male prejudice — not social structure. The problem of women's oppression is reduced to a matter of education and ideology. Within this perspective it is 'reasonable' to see the solution to women's oppression as a gradual, patient education of men and women to alter attitudes and perceptions of sex roles as the way to women's rights. It is extremely important for revolutionaries to comprehend and take up the logic of this approach. Its gradualism corresponds to the general social-democratic approach to reform, and while it permits extremely radical positions on sex role and conditioning, it avoids the more fundamental issues of social structure.

Therefore, the solution which social democracy offers to women struggling against their oppression is a wide separation of their struggles — into political, industrial and trade union struggles. This denies the link between the struggle against the exploitation of women as workers and their oppression within the family structure. Furthermore, social democracy encourages a reliance on the capitalist state as a means of achieving a change in women's position in society. For revolutionary Marxists, the oppression of women arises from class society and consequently the achievement of women's liberation is based on the need to overthrow capitalist society. This means that while the class struggle can win reforms from the capitalist state which partially improve the position of women — such as the EPA and SDA — these are not necessarily permanent gains and cannot provide a solution to oppression. Changes in the legislation therefore cannot achieve women's liberation.

The struggle for the liberation of women, as part of the struggle for socialism, requires a struggle against all institutions which oppress women. It has to take up issues concerned with the workplace and the home and to demonstrate how oppression in the family and exploitation at work reinforce each other. Clarity on women's ties to the family is essential. Many social democrats see the family as an unchanging social structure which lies outside class relations. Some social democrats see the family as the basic unit for the construction of a socialist society. These ideas arise from the failure to see the family as being tied to the capitalist state, although its connection to a supposedly 'neutral' state can clearly be seen through welfare policies such as child allowance, etc. They see the family as dividing public and private worlds, thus providing a realm of personal happiness to compensate for the harsh experience of work. These romantic ideas concerning the family are sustained in the face of all the evidence of mental illness, wife and child battering, etc caused by family life. The power of these idealistic views of the family are such that no conflict is perceived between the family and socialism, or even the family and women's liberation. For example, both the TUC Women's Charter and the General

and Municipal Workers Union programme of demands for women call for an expansion of part-time working and flexible hours to allow working mothers to fulfil domestic commitments. No challenge is made to the idea that childcare and housework are the woman's responsibility and not society's.

However, it is interesting to note that the new draft of the TUC Charter for women workers proposes to drop that clause so that it would simply recognise that women have to work part-time because of family commitments.

The draft states: 'Unions say part-time workers should receive pay and conditions at least pro-rata to full-time workers with whom they work' (**Aims for Women at Work**, TUC 1977). This particular change must be put down to the pressure on the Women's TUC from campaigns like the Working Women's Charter and the increasingly militant stand of women inside and outside the trade union movement.

To analyse the failure of the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination legislation, it is necessary to ask why the Labour Government introduced it (and the maternity leave provisions in the Employment Protection Act). While social-democratic governments (and even openly capitalist governments) will happily grant reforms in periods of capitalist expansion, in the present period of economic crisis they will only grant reforms either if it is going to cost them very little or if they are forced to grant them as a result of the class struggle. The present legislation on women's rights occurred for both of these reasons.

The increasing demands for women's rights, starting with the 1968 equal pay strike of the Ford machinists at Dagenham, the increased participation of women in work, education, the trade unions, community politics and the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement ensured that the Labour Party and trade unions would have to make some gestures towards women's rights. The economic situation, however, means that capitalism cannot afford the material conditions for even the limited degree of women's rights possible within a framework which seeks to maintain the family rather than replace it with other social structures. Thus the legislation contains nothing about state provision to remove some family responsibilities from women.

The legislation is directed at removing unequal practices, not creating social facilities. It does not pose equality for women in the context of a general improvement of the situation of the working class or a challenge to the material roots of women's oppression.



'A Charter For Women'

A 'Charter for Women' was the grand title for Labour's election promises to women in their 1974 Election Manifesto. This manifesto proclaimed that 'changes in our society over recent years have emphasised the importance of providing practical equal opportunities for women, rather than making polite noises about equality'.

But in reality the Labour Government's deal for women means less than even 'polite noises'. It is in fact a cover for a series of attacks on women's right to equality and independence. Over the past few years, the Labour Government's commitment to preserving capitalism, and their consequent willingness to push the cost of that onto the backs of working people, has meant that they are unable to provide a solution to women's oppression — that is, a solution which challenges a woman's traditional and material role as a wife and mother. Labour's so-called 'Charter for Women' is proving to be yet another paper concession — and women whose expectations were raised by the promises of the equal rights legislation are realising that they must look elsewhere for a lead.

In the same year that Labour made its empty promises, a very different 'Charter for Women' was drawn up by the London Trades Council (now part of the South East Region of the TUC). Unlike Labour's charter, which was put together by lawyers and advisors isolated from the practical day-to-day experience of working women, the Working Women's Charter was born out of the struggles and experience of women. The Working Women's Charter represented years of struggle for equal pay and equal treatment in areas such as education, politics, social services, taxation, pensions and the law. Furthermore, within the Charter, the separate issues of women's rights were cemented together by important lessons arising from the growing Women's Liberation Movement.

THE WORKING WOMEN'S CHARTER

We pledge ourselves to agitate and organise to achieve the following aims:

1. The rate for the job, regardless of sex, at rates negotiated by the unions, with a national minimum wage below which no wages should fall.
2. Equal opportunity of entry into occupations and in promotion, regardless of sex and marital status.
3. Equal education and training for all occupations and compulsory day release for all 16-19 year olds in employment.
4. Working conditions to be, without deterioration of previous conditions, the same for women as for men.
5. The removal of all legal and bureaucratic impediments to equality, e.g. with regard to tenancies, mortgages, pension schemes, taxation, passports, control over children, social security payments, hire-purchase agreements, etc.
6. Improved provision of local authority day nurseries, free of charge, with extended hours to suit working mothers. Provision of nursery classes in day nurseries. More nursery schools.
7. 18 weeks maternity leave with full net pay before and after the birth of a live child; 7 weeks after birth if the child is still-born. No dismissal during pregnancy or maternity leave. No loss of security, pension or promotion prospects.
8. Family planning clinics supplying free contraception to be extended to cover every locality. Free abortion to be readily available.
9. Family allowances to be increased to £2.50 per child, including the first child.
10. To campaign amongst women to take an active part in the trade unions and in political life so they may exercise an influence commensurate with their numbers and to campaign amongst men trade unionists that they may work to achieve this aim.

For the first time, demands on all these issues were drawn together in one Charter, whose unifying thread was an understanding that women cannot obtain equality and independence in the spheres of work and education unless they can develop and extend choices in the 'private' areas of the home. Such choices can only come from a right to decide when and whether to have children, together with adequate and free provision of abortion, contraception and sterilisation. They can only be secured when the fact of pregnancy does not act as a barrier to achievement outside the home. These choices can only be sustained by the social provision for, and care of, children; and by breaking the financial dependence on the male 'breadwinner' which would be allowed by equality in the areas of social security, pensions and increased financial responsibility by the state for the upkeep of children.

By expressing the threads linking women's position in the home and their oppression and exploitation in other areas of life, the Working Women's Charter laid an essential basis for severing these threads and laying foundations for a full integration of women into society.

The very fact that the Working Women's Charter was drafted by a body of the trade union movement, and that it was subsequently discussed in the labour movement, represented another significant advance. Even though the Women's Liberation Movement had, from its earliest days, discussed women's family position and its effects on their social, economic and political life, this debate was new to the labour movement where little challenge had been raised to the notion that 'a woman's place is in the home'. For the first time, debate from the Women's Liberation Movement filtered through to the labour movement, without whose strength women's needs and struggles cannot be extended and won.

The Working Women's Charter has in fact emerged as an important banner in the struggle for women's liberation. It has provided an historic opportunity to draw together the experiences of struggle in the labour movement and those from the Women's Movement. It lays the basis for united action around women's oppression which can draw behind it the strength and power of the labour movement.

This strength of the Working Women's Charter must be retained and built upon in an ongoing campaign to extend support for the Charter and for the principles of women's liberation which it embodies. Efforts must be stepped up to ensure that the Working Women's Charter is adopted by the TUC and the Labour Party in order that the weaknesses of their present policies are overcome.

A Socialist Alternative

Clearly the struggle for women's liberation cannot rest exclusively on the fight for the demands of the Working Women's Charter. Activity on two other fronts is essential if women are to become independent, equal and free from the yoke of their oppression. As indicated elsewhere in this pamphlet, the problems facing women cannot be separated from the system of oppression and exploitation of a society which is geared to the profits of the few at the expense of working people. Any fightback against the current attacks on women's rights must not be separated from the attacks on the working class as a whole.

The struggle to defend women's rights and extend the fight for women's liberation must be seen as part of a wider struggle which places responsibility for the economic crisis at the feet of those responsible — the capitalist class and its Labour Government guardians. Women should begin to link their demands and struggles to those of the labour movement as a whole, and begin to find socialist solutions to the crisis. Equally, this means that the labour movement has to make the demands for women's liberation an integral part of its struggle. We must fight to ensure that there is no surrender in the labour movement to the notion that a woman's natural place is in the home, and that jobs, abortion facilities and nursery provision are luxuries that can be dispensed with when the going gets tough.

To surrender in this way can only be to accept that a section of the working class is responsible for the crisis, and should pay for it. This can only divert the struggle for socialist solutions to the crisis in which we should hold that no section of the working class has to pay the price. By resisting attempts to push women back into the home, and by strengthening the fight for women's rights to independence and equality, we can begin to unify the working class as a whole in defence of living standards. The struggle for women's liberation and for socialist solutions to the crisis go hand-in-hand. The most urgent task for socialists at present is the fight back against the wage restraint policies of the Labour Government — the prime obstacle to women's equal pay and the measure responsible for declining social, financial and welfare conditions. The Social Contract ties women and men to wage restraint, unemployment and cuts in social expenditure. Whilst we allow the hardship caused by the Social Contract to continue, and while we allow scapegoats to be sought among the weakly organised, immigrants and women, the full energies of the workers movement are diverted away from the real cause of the crisis — the capitalist class and the Government which pursues its interests. And while this happens, Labour's Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts are not worth the paper they are written on.

For Full Rights for Women

A valuable programme of demands which integrate the needs of women with those of the working class as a whole was outlined at the 1976 Women and Cuts Conference in London. Under a section on the fightback, the conference adopted the following programme:

THE FIGHT BACK

1. We reject that women and the whole working class are responsible, or should pay, for the present crisis. We therefore pledge ourselves to fight unemployment and the cutbacks on the following basis:

★ **No to the cuts**, against the closure of hospitals and nursery schools, and the freezing of plans for increased health care, child care, housing, education and transport.

★ **No to unemployment** — the right to work for both men and women. Against all redundancies and any reductions in staffing levels, including those of part-time workers. For full support to all workers engaged in such struggles and the building of links between the 'employed', 'unemployed' and 'housewives'. For full trade union rights for the unemployed. The fight against unemployment to include the demand for occupations of workplaces where redundancy is threatened, around the demand for nationalisation under workers control.

★ **For an immediate injection of funds into the social services** and for a programme of socially useful public works. The extension of the social services to be supervised by the workers organisations, housewives, tenants and students, and to be based on a workers plan which meets the needs of the whole working class, including women.

This plan to include 24-hour state nurseries; extension of abortion, contraception, pregnancy testing and sterilisation so that they are free and safe on demand on the NHS; an expansion of all forms of education to ensure equal education and training opportunities for women; an immediate freeze on rents and fares and provision of adequate housing and transport for all.

★ **The protection of the working class against inflation**. For an automatic increase in social spending to compensate for inflation. The protection of working class living standards against inflation through opposition to all forms of wage restraint. For a rising scale of wages and state benefits (including family allowances, pensions and grants). To protect the low-paid (largely women) by a national minimum wage of £50 for the employed and unemployed.

★ **For national and local enquiries** by workers organisations and consumers of social services into the financing and organisation of public services as a first step to prepare the fight for social services based on the needs of the whole working class, on a national scale. This will necessitate the right of access to all plans on social services, by the opening of all official books, to ensure the right of working class organisations to veto any projections made.

★ **Against the exploitation of women's needs by private industry**. For an end to private practice in the National Health Service and outside it. This would include replacing private abortion clinics with NHS facilities and the replacement of private childcare facilities with free state provision for all under-fives. For the nationalisation without compensation of the drug, health and education supplies industries, building and the banks.

We must ensure that within this fightback we cover all aspects of oppression and exploitation that women face in society. This means extending demands flowing from the Women's Liberation Movement which relate to the defence of the right of lesbians to be free from victimisation because of their sexual orientation. It necessitates taking up demands which confront the specific problems which confront black women, saddled with the triple burden of class, sex and race oppression. It means extending demands in the areas of maternity and paternity leave, for a woman's right to control her body through abortion and contraception freely available on the NHS. It entails extending demands in childcare so that responsibility for childcare and education is shifted to the state. It entails measures which allow for the fullest integration of women into political and trade union life through autonomous organisation and caucuses where women can prepare their campaigns to win the workers movement behind their struggles. We must also

encourage the strengthening of specific campaigning bodies such as the National Abortion Campaign, the Working Women's Charter Campaign and the autonomous Women's Liberation Movement. Through these organisations we can ensure that the debate about women's liberation is not forgotten or put aside and that initiatives are taken which can commit the labour movement as a whole to the struggles and demands as outlined in this pamphlet.

Fight Back Now

This debate and struggle around a programme which outlines socialist alternatives to solve the crisis in the interests of the working class, is essential if women are to find a way out of the problems outlined in the earlier sections of this pamphlet. A first essential step in this direction is to fight now against the attacks launched by the Labour Government against women and the working class. This means the fullest opposition to the cuts, unemployment and the Social Contract. Every support should be given to women in the forefront of these struggles.

Hundreds of women have been in struggle around equal pay following the example of the Trico women. They had to fight a long and hard 21-week battle against the employers, backward male workers and the AUEW bureaucracy (who would not call for national blacking action in the car industry for fear of upsetting the Social Contract). Under the banner of 'Equal Pay, No Delay' the Trico women relied upon their own strength and organisation rather than the courts or tribunals to secure their victory. This very important lesson has been learnt by women over the past year.

The Trico women came up against the Social Contract through the collaboration of the AUEW leadership and the tribunal ruling which stated that their claim, because it didn't come under the limited terms of the Equal Pay Act, was in breach of the pay code. Increasingly women are coming up against the Social Contract as their claims fall outside the framework of the Equal Pay Act.

Job evaluation and grading schemes are the main way in which the employers evade the Equal Pay legislation. Manual strength rather than dexterity is usually given the higher status, cutting out numbers of highly skilled women. The employers were given five years to 'prepare' for the introduction of the Equal Pay Act. They certainly 'prepared' by regrading, rationalising and restructuring. Women were herded into new grades that created 'women only' jobs. Regrading meant down-grading.

Most skilled or semi-skilled women workers receive lower pay than the lowest graded and unskilled male worker. At Magnavox in East London, all the women were on grades from 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest), while men did not fall below grade five. These women went out on strike, ignoring the tribunal. As in this case, such manoeuvres by the employers are beginning to be met with resistance. The General and Municipal Workers Union submitted a demand to the recent Women's TUC that 'no account be taken of job evaluation to which independent trade unions have objections'. The Society of Civil and Public Servants and the technical staffs (TASS) side of the AUEW have echoed this demand, which should be extended to include **the right to veto by all sections of the trade union movement of grading schemes that discriminate against women.**

The fightback means support for the women working in the public sector who have taken strike action against the cuts — like the thousands of women who took strike action to march on the 17 November anti-cuts demonstration in London last year. We must support the action of the women of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital who have occupied their hospital to prevent its closure and to defend the

right of women to adequate health care. We must defend the right of women to jobs in the public sector.

We must generalise these struggles and unite against the real problem, which is not so much a poor hospital administration, employer or local authority as the Labour Government's policies. Opposition to the Social Contract is developing, as shown by the conference called by Leyland shop stewards for a return to free collective bargaining, and the increasing number of workers who are taking strike action against the erosion of their standard of living.

The strikes at Leyland, Heathrow and Port Talbot have been the most widely publicised. But others, involving mainly women, have received less attention. These are often isolated from the better organised sections of the labour movement. So it is very important to mobilise national support and solidarity behind such struggles. When the Bakers Union threatened national strike action in support of an equal pay claim the employers caved in very rapidly.

With the next round of the pay policy coming up, proposals for kitty bargaining or a 'flexible' Phase 3 are an indication of the possible danger that the labour movement could dismiss women's needs and instead wrangle over the distribution of an ever-diminishing cake. In this situation, it is necessary to map out demands that will ensure that any fightback against the Social Contract will go forward in unity. Women's struggles around low pay and equal pay like those at Yardley and Grunwick are part of the fightback, and those workers' demands must be integrated into the struggle of the whole working class in order to make sure that they do not go to the wall.

Women are beginning to organise within the fightback to ensure that their needs and demands are seriously integrated. The demands circulated at the Leyland conference by the Working Women's Charter are a good basis to build on.

- * Support for all workers in struggle now.
- * An immediate end to all forms of wage restraint.
- * Equal pay now. Against low pay, for a national minimum wage.
- * Automatic pay increases linked to rising prices to protect wages against inflation.
- * For a woman's right to work.
- * Opposition to all grading schemes that discriminate against women.
- * Immediate submission of wage claims that defend the interests of women by including the above demands.
- * To prepare for these claims, to organise immediate trade union investigations into equal and low pay and the grading of women.
- * For national solidarity strike action with the EGA and Grunwick.

Women's needs will not be integrated if the trade union movement is not aware of them. As much information as possible has to be gathered through trade union investigations into women's pay and conditions. A survey of 30 major unions in March showed that only half monitored claims for equal pay. Further investigation by unions will clearly show the way in which job evaluation and grading schemes tie women to low paid jobs.

We must also be sensitive to the attacks on women which bolster up her family responsibilities and limit the choices open to her. These ideological attacks, strengthened by Festival of Light crusaders and the anti-abortion bands, go hand-in-hand with the direct attacks of cuts, unemployment and wage restraint.

The Benyon Bill is the latest weapon from the arsenal of the anti-abortionists. It seems likely to fall because of lack of time in Parliament, but we must be prepared for yet another Bill or attempt at restriction. This will occur again and again unless the anti-abortionists are isolated by the mass mobilisations of the women's, student

and labour movements. The labour movement must be committed to this fight and its leadership forced to act upon the resolutions passed both by the TUC (which is embodied in the new TUC Charter for Women), and by the 1975 Labour Party conference.

The Labour Government, with its supposed commitment to women's rights, must be made to take that commitment seriously by opposing any new anti-abortion legislation and imposing a three-line whip in Parliament on any vote. Free abortion on demand is a fundamental right for women if they are to achieve liberation, and the fight for a woman's right to choose in opposition to restrictive abortion legislation must be in the forefront of the struggle in the women's and labour movements.

Leadership

Finally, if we are to be successful in these projects we must consider the position of those who look for leadership to the present leaders of the trade union and labour movement. We must learn the lessons of the Trico strike, where the women had to suffer 21 weeks of hardship and increasing demoralisation because the leadership of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers refused to organise national solidarity and blacking for fear of rocking the Social Contract boat. We should take note of the severe difficulties facing the work-in at the EGA Hospital, caused by the refusal of the public sector union leaders to take up their struggle as a focus of opposition to cutbacks and to call solidarity strikes and actions locally and nationally. We should look at the position of the leaders of the National Union of Teachers who have expelled London school teachers for taking action against the unemployment of so many women teachers. There is also the record of the so-called 'left' MPs in Parliament who proclaim their support of women's rights and yet refuse to stand up and be counted when it comes to opposition to the Social Contract and cuts in public expenditure.

Clearly, we cannot rely on this type of 'leadership'. We have to begin to develop an opposition to Labour's attacks which relies on militant and united action of the working class which is based on its own democratic organisation. However, at the same time, we should not let these 'leaders' off the hook. Let's force them to follow their fine speeches with action, by demanding that they put their weight behind all struggles to defend women's and working class rights — or else be pushed aside by militants prepared to keep up the struggle.

In addition to united campaigns and struggles against attacks on women, it is important to strengthen campaigning bodies and organisations like the National Abortion Campaign, the Working Women's Charter Campaign, and the Women's Liberation Movement. Through these organisations we can ensure that the debate about women's liberation is not forgotten or put aside, and that initiatives are taken to commit the labour movement as a whole to the struggles and demands outlined in this pamphlet.

Developing campaigning groups within the trade unions is also part of this struggle. Women within the trade union movement are beginning to take up the fight against the Social Contract. At the recent Women's TUC, delegates fought for motions on the Social Contract, cuts and unemployment to be taken on the agenda, resisting the attempts of the bureaucracy to claim that these questions were not relevant to a conference which should only discuss 'women's issues'. Similarly, the Women's Conference of the AUEW passed a resolution calling upon the union to oppose the Social Contract and to wage a campaign within the union for this position.

In many unions women's sub-committees and sections exist. These must be

developed into organisations that will seriously fight for and organise campaigns for women's rights within their respective unions. Campaigning groups around the demands of the Working Women's Charter or partial aspects of it will greatly strengthen the integration of women's needs into the struggle of the entire labour movement. Women's caucuses, whether in the workplace, trade union branch or district (and on many occasions these will be ad-hoc groupings), can develop the fight for positive discrimination in favour of women and the combativity of women within the workers movement. Fighting for the recognition of such bodies will be long and difficult, but they are a pre-requisite in the struggle of women for their liberation, in terms of developing women's self-activity and organisation.

The organisation of women in defence of their own interests is an essential part of the fight for a class struggle opposition based on socialist solutions to the crisis. If the trade union and Labour leaders will not defend women's rights, then a struggle must be launched to remove them and build a new leadership which can take forward that fight. End the class collaboration of the Social Contract! Build a socialist opposition which will defend and extend women's rights!

SOCIALIST CHALLENGE
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