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Womans Voice



number 1

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Women's liberation has been the subject of hundreds of books, articles, jokes and TV programmes. Much of this has made the subject seem a silly and trivial one. But, despite this, there is no doubt that thousands of women have achieved a new awareness of their position in society and how they would like it to be changed. But in the "great debate" about women's lib, one thing is hardly ever mentioned - the situation of the working class woman.

WOMEN'S VOICE is being produced to fill this gap. First and foremost it is a magazine for working class women who want to read something that tries to deal with their real life. It will cover the struggles of women - for the right to work, for equal pay, against rent increases and rising prices. It will deal with the double burden of working women who are expected to do two jobs - one at work and one at home. It will be looking at the needs and interests of women as housewives and mothers.

WOMEN'S VOICE will be socialist in its approach. Because the society we live in today is geared towards profit and not towards human needs, we cannot radically change women's situation in this society. Only a socialist society can begin to do this. And socialism cannot be built without women; without our struggles to change our lives as workers, as mothers, as wives.

So WOMEN'S VOICE aims to be something new - and at the moment, unique. We hope you will like it and support it. If you do, we can turn WOMEN'S VOICE into a properly printed magazine and vastly increase its circulation. In our next issue, we hope to publish readers' letters - so write in and let us know what you think of the articles.

THE PRICES SCANDAL

The Tories argue loudly (and the Labour Party leaders in whispers) that it is the unions' fault that prices are rising. It's all the fault of the greedy workers, they say.

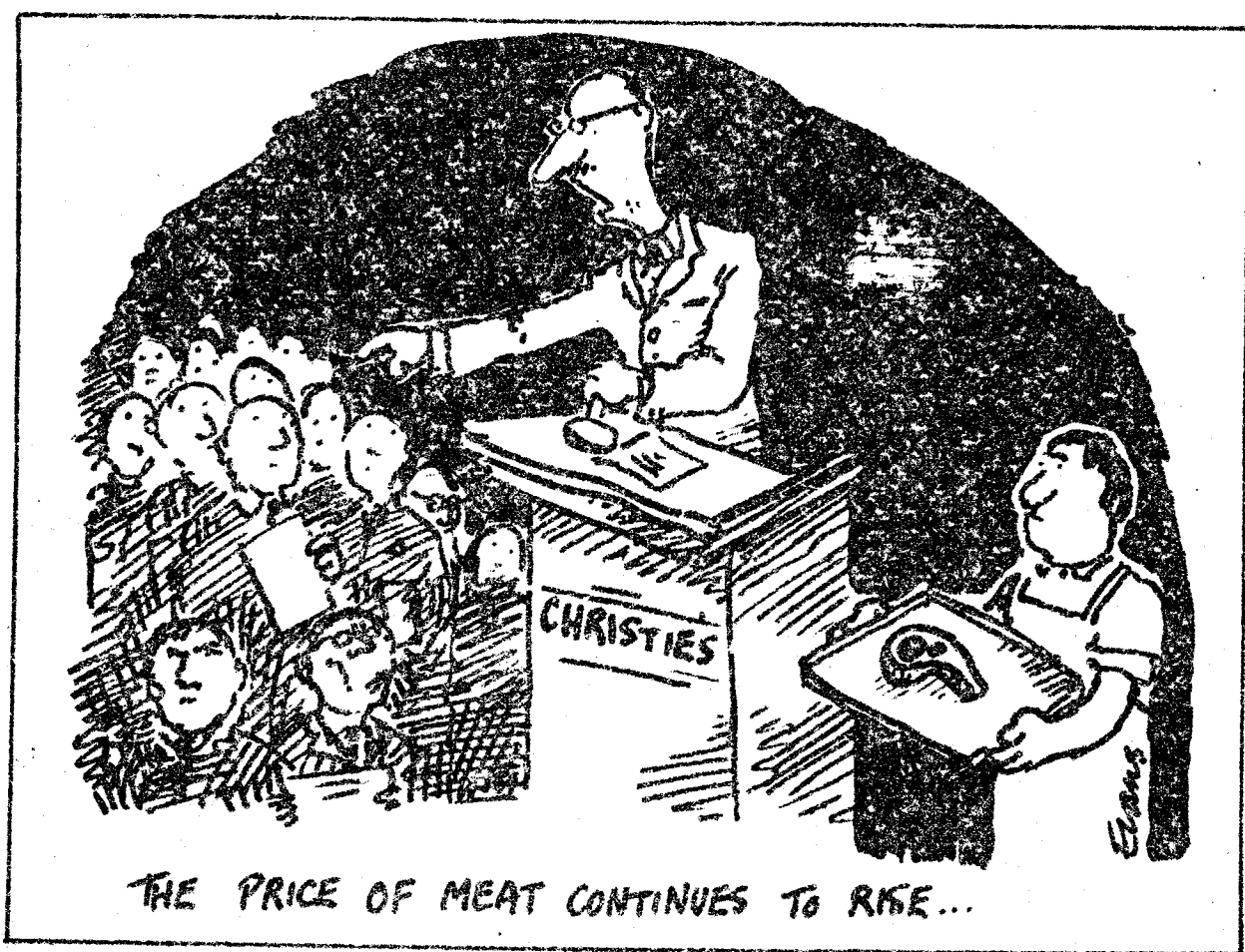
(of course, the Tories don't think this applies to people like top civil servants and the bosses of the nationalised industries. They've just been given colossal pay rises)

What are the facts? In reality wage increases for the ordinary workers are only just keeping pace with the rise in the cost of living. Indeed the 'real wages' of many workers are already falling behind, as their union leaders settle for pay rises of only seven or eight per cent.

The workers have to run faster and faster in order to stand still in this mad capitalist world of escalating prices.

During the last dock strike, the Tory press made a great hullabaloo about how the dockworkers were forcing up food prices by stopping food imports into Britain. Some brainwashed idiot in London's East End even chalked on a wall 'Dockers exploit housewives'.

So just to get the record straight before this sort of nonsense gets going again, it's worth looking at what the government's own statistics say about food prices since 1969. From figures hidden away in the back of the annual report of the National Food Survey Committee, it is possible to work out the price of a weekly shopping basket in 1969 for a manual worker, his wife and two children - the 'average' working class family.



The government's own figures prove that, to purchase the same amount of food in the month of May 1972 as they did in 1969, that family had to fork out just over £2 a week more - an increase from £8 to £10 for the same amount of grub!

That extra £2, and all the other extra pounds for all other families, has not gone to produce anything extra at all. It has gone straight into the hands of food producer bosses, and the bosses of the food distributing and retailing chains in one of the biggest profit bonanzas ever.

The government fooled the housewife at the election, the food bosses swindled the shopper during decimalisation. And both government and industry will rob us when it puts the Value Added Tax on food (against its promise not to) for entry into the Common Market.

Unfortunately there has only been a search for individual solutions to this scandal of food prices. For the statistics also show that families are switching from foods rich in protein and vitamins to more starchy foods in a vain attempt to make the week's house-keeping money stretch further.

Mothers are being forced to cut down on mid-week meals. Beef has become a 'luxury' food. The consumption of milk, fish and fruit went down between 1969 and 1970 - while potato, bread, sugar, margarine and tea consumption went up.

And this was between 1969 and 1970, the last years for which we have those statistics. Food prices have rocketed recently, and

ordinary families are being forced to switch more and more to a starchy and unhealthy diet. One school expert has been quoted as saying that you can tell the poorest kids at school because they're often the podgiest - fed too much on bread and chips to fill them up, when the mothers can't afford to buy the dearer, and more nutritious foods.

Some housewives have already begun to demonstrate in the markets and high streets against the ludicrous price of meat. Many of these will probably agree that the workers are right to take on the government now. If we all wait around much longer, we'll be crawling around on our knees from hunger and malnutrition.

(This information from SOCIALIST WORKER)

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READING BETWEEN THE LINES OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS

"Peter and Jane are in the car with Daddy. They like it in the car.

Mummy is at home.

.....Here we are at home, says Daddy. Peter help Daddy with the car, Jane helps Mummy set the tea. Good girl, say Mummy to Jane. You are a good girl to help me like this."

When children reach school and start to read, they've already got fixed in their minds, ideas about the roles of the two sexes. Not only as they

see them acted out by their parents and other adults, but also about ideal sex roles, i.e. what is "masculinity" and "femininity".

Although a mother may drive a car, or mend a fuse, as often as a father, a little girl still doesn't play with toy cars or tool sets, for these things are understood to be outside the "feminine" stereotype. Instead, girls are attracted to "pretty" things, and to "maternal" roles in games. Children show signs of this different sex role behaviour at such an early age

that people assume that it is due to different "instincts" and biological drives. Of course there may quite possibly be such differences. But the extent to which they affect "masculine" or "feminine" behaviour is quite another matter. And it is quite easy to see that a lot of so-called "natural" behaviour is taught to the child. Books play an important part in this.

Toy shops too contain all the equipment for the child to learn what is expected from him or her, according to sex. From looking at girls' toys, you would think little girls had no childhood. Whereas boys play exciting fantasy games of cowboys, spacemen, footballers or soldiers, the little girls' toys centre on the dreary world of housekeeping - miniature vacuum cleaners and washing machines, housemaid sets, cookery sets, dolls to dress and wash. Nurses' uniforms are popular of course - but being a nurse is still playing the "maternal" role.

In their books, children find a detailed description of how each sex fits into society. At the same time, the middle-class way of life and the pictures of the house, car, holidays, don't bear much resemblance to the way in which most families actually live. There is always a garden, a dog (and usually a farm somewhere nearby). Mother is usually baking cakes in the kitchen, always available, and Janet is encouraged to identify as much as possible with her.

John has a bit more difficulty: father is usually at the office or reading his newspaper while mother brings in tea. But father and John mend the car together or play cricket.

"Peter likes to help.
He sees Daddy go up the ladder. He wants to help Daddy.
Yes, says Daddy, You can help me.
Here comes Jane with some tea."

Little boys are much naughtier than girls - they are allowed to be. It's all part of the real boy's "natural" behaviour. Girls must be good. And women tend to be more conventional than men all through their lives, and defiance is a masculine quality. Look at Peter Rabbit, compared with his sisters:

"Flopsy, Mopsy and Cotton-Tail, who were good little bunnies, went down the lane to gather blackberries. But Peter who was very naughty, ran straight away to Mr McGregor's garden and squeezed under the gate! "

The boys have all the fun - but they pay the price. They must be brave, stiff-upper-lip, with no show of emotion. Girls are allowed to show their feelings. On the first day at school:

"Jane sat on her mother's knee, but Toby stood up and held his cap in his hand"

Jane allows Peter to dominate her.

"Peter and Jane like to play.
I want to jump on this trampoline, says Peter. Look at me Jane.
.....Jane wants to play.
I want to play, please, Jane says.
Peter I want to jump please"

Many stories just contrast and encourage differences between boys' and girls' roles and behaviour.

"Jane and Toby put some aprons on and did some painting. Toby did big bold strokes. Jane did little tiny ones"

"Somebody knocked the water over. It might have been Toby and it might have been Jane. Jane got a cloth from the kitchen and wiped up all the mess... Jane and Toby were given a sparkler each ... Toby whirled his round in the air, but Jane held hers very still."

You'll probably recognise some of these quotes. They're all from books used every day in schools, public libraries and at home. They provide models of "correct" behaviour for little girls and boys, and - specially in their school books - children hardly ever see other attitudes or

realize there might be other ways of behaving, other ways of living.

This sort of stereotyped idea of how the two sexes should behave prevents many children developing all their talents. It's also responsible for much emotional torment among children who can't live up to what's expected (the little boy who does cry

when he gets hurt: the little girl who wants to play at 'spacemen', not dolls' tea parties). And parents also worry unnecessarily, afraid there's "something wrong" with their child.

In future issues, we will talk about why boys and girls are taught to conform to these often false ideas of what makes a "real" man or a "real" woman.

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FIGHT THE TORY RENT ROBBERY

Women find it easy to ignore many of the working class's struggles. On the industrial front, the most dramatic battles are usually fought in industries with few women workers - the docks, the railways, the car industry, the mines.

link up with the trade union movement, because, remember - a rent rise equals a wage cut. We must put pressure on local councils, force them to defy the Act (but don't put too much faith in them!)

But when it comes to tenants' resistance to rent rises - then women will throw themselves into the fight with determination. This is something we know about. Rent is paid from the housekeeping that we have to manage. And the stakes are high - our very homes, the security of our families, are in danger.

Organisation NOW is essential for we must face the fact that tenants really only have one weapon and that is the Rent Strike - to withhold rent. This is a major step. The fear of eviction is understandable and very real. Legally speaking, tenants have no rights at all and can be evicted by the local authority with a court order. Mass organisation of tenants backed by solidarity in the trade union movement is the safeguard against this.

The Tories "Fair Rents" scheme is another stab in the back for ordinary people. It aims to double council rents in many parts of the country, and will also affect over a million families who live in private rented accommodation. And it is not an isolated attack. Taken with the Industrial Relations Act, the welfare cuts, the failure of the government to do anything about unemployment or soaring prices - we can see that the ruling class is intent on lowering our living standards, in an attempt to keep up their profits. But to do this they must smash working class organisation. This isn't proving too easy in industry, and we won't let them get away with it on the rents either.

Unity and solidarity are the guarantee of success. The chances of building that unity are greater now than they have been for many years - not just locally, but on a national level. And this demands full participation by every woman on the estates.

All tenants must know the facts about the rent rises. We must organise on every estate. We must

The fighting spirit of ordinary women is under-estimated. But it's there if we look for it - whether it's blocking the streets to get a crossing, or taking over an old rubbish tip for use as a playground. Women have always been deeply involved in tenants struggles, and this time our campaign must be a massive success, leading to a Rent Strike that'll show the Tories the door.

We must be as involved as men at all meetings, and in every part of the organisation. There should be women on every Tenants Committee. And there are lots of practical things we can do on the estates. For instance, child-minding is vitally important if all women tenants are going to come to meetings. Often there's an extra room at the side of a hall which could be used, so that women can bring their kids along. The fact that a playroom is available should always be printed BIG on all leaflets and posters advertising meetings.

Working women should put resolutions through their union branches that if any tenant is threatened with eviction, then the workers will strike until that tenant is reinstated.

All women should realize how important it is that they fight back against the Tories on the domestic front. Women suffer from the effects of bad housing; through nervous disorders, stress from lack of play-space for children, inconvenience of no hot water or bathroom when the council won't do repairs quickly, nervous breakdowns.

The rent increase will make the woman's job as housekeeper and money-juggler even more difficult. It will mean cutting down on food even more than we do already; worrying about where the extra money will come from.

Organisation is the key word. Organisation at work through the trade union branch; organisation at meetings with nursery rooms for the children or a baby-sitting rota; organisation through the tenants committees with women equally involved with the men in running the campaigns; organisation at street level with people in each block and each street keeping in constant touch and preparing for the day when eviction become imminent (polish up that old tin trumpet - you'll need it).

One thing is certain - for any tenants campaign to be completely successful the women must be totally involved. Let's learn from the victories of the past and prepare NOW to show the Tories what they can do with their Housing Bill!

KATHY SIMS and
VALERIE CLARK

READ:

"Tory Rent Robbery and How To Fight It", an I.S. pamphlet (price 2p) available from WOMEN'S VOICE, or your local International Socialists branch

VICTORY! THE GLASGOW RENT STRIKE OF 1915

This most famous and successful rent strike is still a stirring example of how solidarity of tenants and workers CAN beat any "law".

Here it is described in the moving words of William Gallacher in his book "Revolt on the Clyde". We can certainly take heart from the courage of the Glasgow women.

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"During the whole period of the Glasgow Shipbuilders' strike, the campaign against increased rents had been growing in volume. Following the strike, greater forces

than ever were thrown into it. In Govan, Mrs Barbour, a typical working-class housewife, became the leader of a movement such as had never been seen before, or since for that matter.

Street meetings, back-court meetings, drums, bells, trumpets - every method was used to bring the women out and organise them for the struggle. Notices were printed by the thousand and put up in the windows; wherever you went you could see them. In street after street scarcely a window without one "WE ARE NOT PAYING INCREASED RENT."

These notices represented a spirit amongst the women that could not be overcome. The "factors" (the agents for the property owners) could not collect the rents. They applied to the courts for eviction warrants. Sherriff's officers were sent to serve them and evict the tenants. But Mrs Barbour had a team of women who could smell a sherriff's officer a mile away. At their summons, other women left their cooking, washing or whatever they were doing. The officer and his men would be met by an army of furious women who drove them back in a hurried scramble for safety.

Attempt after attempt was made to secure evictions, all ended in futility. The increased rent could not be collected, the tenants could not be evicted.

Then some legal genius had a brainwave. The property owners and their factors sat back and laughed as they thought of it. So simple and effective. Why hadn't they thought of it before. They would sue the householder at the "small debt" court. By this means, workers were summoned to attend the court. They had to show reason why their wages should not be impounded to liquidate the debt for rent. In such a case the factor could not only get the employer to take the rent from the worker's wages - he could also ask for a judgment placing the cost of the proceedings as an extra burden on the tenants. After a few such cases, with the workers affected coming home with only half their wages, the others would become demoralised and the rent resistance would be finished.

This was how the factors reasoned. It was a great idea and it was sure to work. So summonses were sought and issued to a group of tenants employed in the yard. But they had reckoned without Mrs Barbour and the Clyde shop stewards.

"Will we let them get away with this?" was the new war-cry resounding in every street. "Never!" thundered the reply from the women. All day long, in the streets, in the halls, in the houses, meetings were held. Kitchen meetings, street meetings, mass meetings, meetings of every kind. No halt, no rest for anyone, all in preparation for the sitting of the court when the test case came on. As in the streets, so in the factories. "Will we allow them to attack our wages?" "Never!" Every factory was keyed up and ready.

On the day of the trial, Glasgow witnessed a demonstration the like of which had never been seen before. From early morning the women were marching to the city centre where the sherriff's court is. Mrs Barbour's army was on the march. But even as they marched, mighty reinforcements were coming from the workshops and the yards.

At the Albion we formed up at breakfast time and were joined by Yarrow's and Meechan's. In the main road we awaited the arrival of the contingents from Dalmuir and Clydebank. Then we went on, leaving the factories empty and deserted. We were shouting and singing.

Into the streets around the Sherriff's Court the workers marched from all sides. All the streets were packed. Traffic was completely stopped. Right in front of the Court, John McLean (the famous socialist militant) was on a platform addressing the crowd. In other streets near the Court others of us were at it. Roar after roar of rage went up as incidents were related showing the robbery of mothers and wives whose sons and husbands were at the war front. Roar followed roar as we pictured what would happen if we allowed the attack on our wages.

...Inside the Court the sherriff and his clerks were white with apprehension. A deputation of workers, men and women, was demanding to be heard. The roars from outside were making the windows rattle. At any moment the deputation might be followed by a surging, irresistible crowd of angry men and women. In such circumstances how was it

possible for a poor sherriff to retain any dignity - how was it possible to make play with legal technicalities and trivialities? There was no hope of the police doing anything. They were helpless, and what use is a court, what power has a judge, apart from the brute force they are able to employ?

It was obvious to the sherriff that the situation was too desperate to play with. He telephoned to London and got put through to the Minister of Munitions, Mr Lloyd George. "The workers have left the factories" he said, after explaining the character of

of the case. "They are threatening to pull down Glasgow. What am I to do?" "Stop the case" he was told. "A Rent Restriction Act will be introduced immediately".

When this news was relayed there was a scene of enthusiasm that baffles description. Shouting, singing and cheering, the great demonstration started to move again. All night long the celebration of victory went on.

The "great idea" of the factors had been blown sky-high through the determination of the women and the solidarity and organisation of the workers on the Clyde, and in this way the Rent Restriction Act was won for the workers of the country.

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S C H O O L S S T R I K E

"WE WANT:

ABOLITION OF SCHOOL UNIFORM, THE PREFECT SYSTEM, CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND ALL OTHER PETTY RULES.

THE RIGHT TO ORGANISE IN SCHOOLS. NO VICTIMISATION.

DEMOCRATIC CONTROL OF SCHOOLS BY COUNCILS OF SCHOOL STUDENTS, PARENTS, TEACHERS AND NON-TEACHING STAFF.

ABOLITION OF STREAMING AND SELECTION, AND A GENUINELY COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS SYSTEM. "

(from a "REBEL" leaflet)

Why was there a school strike? It started in one school, and the next day other schools were out in sympathy. No-one took any notice when the school students put their demands "through the usual channels" so they felt forced to strike to draw attention to their demands. But when they took this action, they were treated either like naughty 3-year-olds or like "juvenile delinquents". There was the usual talk about being led astray by a handful of troublemakers. We've all heard that one before!

we really try to keep them tied to us as long as possible, not trusting them to make their own judgments? The fact is that hardly any parents supported their children over the strike.

Why? Society tells us all, of course, that children should respect authority and obey their parents. At the same time, a lot of parents were genuinely worried that their children's futures would suffer, that they'd fail exams. Although, when you look at the sort of children who took part, most of them were probably only headed for second-rate jobs anyway because of the inadequacy of our education system.

What was the mothers' reaction? We say we want our children to grow up to be independent and free, to make their own decisions. But do we? Or do

But we have to be brutally honest about ourselves. We also want to dominate our children for reasons that have nothing to do with their

wellbeing. We have to preserve some myths about ourselves as parents. Dad gets treated like dirt at work, so when he gets home he must have respect. So it's "While you're living under my roof, you'll do as I say". Mum has put the kids first, and herself last, for years. So she says plaintively, "Surely I deserve some consideration. Don't you realize how much all this is worrying me?" In our concern for our children, we make them feel guilty and resentful. Parents are almost always the last to see when their children have "minds of their own".

During the schools strike, another often-voiced comment was, "But these kids are too young to know what it's all about". Are they? Look again at their demands. They are not revolutionary or ridiculous. In fact, they're surprisingly reasonable! And

NORTH LONDON SCHOOLGIRL:

"My parents were really angry about it. I felt a bit let down, because my mum had always said the headmaster was a bloody bully. So I thought they'd support the demands, but when it came to the demo, they were really against me. Tried to forbid me to go. I'm sure there would have been a lot more kids there, except a lot of them were threatened by Heads and parents.

My mum and dad were really worried about the police. And they heard about schools where the Head got the school psychiatrist to examine some of the kids who went on the strike. Well, I could understand them being worried about that. But I told my dad that I thought that was just the same as what happens when people ask for more wages in a factory. The police, being

"RANK AND FILE" TEACHER:

"Even some of the reactionaries have agreed that the school students demands are 'reasonable'. The crunch comes when methods of achieving these demands are raised - a familiar situation. Already the liberals have expressed a preference for the more respectable National Union of School Students (NUSS) over the more militant Schools Action Union (SAU). Two very important motions have been submitted to the NUT Young Teachers' conference this year. Their importance lies in their recognition, not only of the demands, but of the right of school kids to try to achieve these demands in whatever way they decide. They're also significant in that they demonstrate to people inside and outside teaching, that there does exist an attitude amongst teachers that is, at worst, hostile, and at best, patronising."

eleven-year-olds do know what they're talking about when they say they don't want to be hit by headmasters, or made to wear an ugly, expensive school uniform.

And even quite young children at secondary school realize that the working class kid isn't getting the same chances as the middle class kid. So when they talk about "equality" and "democratic control", they're going in the right direction.

On a TV programme, a trade unionist said that whenever a lot of people are being pushed around by a few, they must organise against it. This is what trade unionists do. He agreed that this is what school kids must do.

As parents we can't sit on the fence. We're either for them, or against them.

expelled, all that - it's victimisation. And we ought to fight it. My dad had to agree. But he still said he didn't want me to get mixed up in it.

What can be done? Well, I don't really know. Except that adults must take us seriously. Just because they're older doesn't mean they know everything. They ought to listen to us properly. We know a lot of teachers agree with us, although they're in a tricky position with their jobs.

But parents too, they've got to try to understand what we want. They've got to find out what really goes on in the schools.

And if they think we're right, well, they should support us."

A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE HOME?

Anyone who tries to take an honest look at the lives of women in our society has first to find her way through the popular myths about women's situation.

Nowhere perhaps is this more obvious than in the whole question of women and work. "A woman's place is in the home" still conditions the outlook of the majority of working women.

This doesn't mean that women only go out to work for pin money - reality pinches too hard for that. But one thing it does mean is that women are less likely than men to be in a union, and if they are in one, even less likely to be active in it.

People forget that women have been working in the factories since they began, and were working down the mines long before then. It comes as a surprise to hear that women have been fighting for equal pay since at least 1833 and that the first TUC resolution on this was passed as long as 87 years ago.

The fact of the matter is that capitalism - with all its talk of the ideals of motherhood and the sanctity of the family - has rarely allowed the mass of working class women to stay at home and simply be wives and mothers. With the Industrial Revolution women were forced to seek a livelihood outside the home and submit themselves to the long hours (15 hours a day was not uncommon), terrible conditions and pitifully low wages prevailing in the mines and the factories in this period. Children too were at work from as young as 7 years. Far from women taking up their "natural" place in the home, the situation was so desperate that many people feared that the working class family was in danger of disappearing altogether.

By the end of the nineteenth century, women were to be found in most trades - textiles, printing, metal working, engineering, clerical work and many others. What is more, they were clearly

there to stay. During this century the proportion of the workforce made up of women has in general remained around one-third (varying from 28% to 38%).

What all this brings out is that many working class women in this country have always had to go out to work to provide a decent standard of living for themselves and their families. Yet one of the myths constantly perpetuated in our society is that women have only been going out to work over the last 20 years or so. Films and books depicting the way people lived in the past usually only show us the middle class family, where the woman could indeed afford to stay at home surrounded by servants.

The working class woman has been written out of history. Not many people have bothered to write about her sufferings, her struggles and her hopes. And this makes it that much easier for the wool to be pulled over women's eyes today.

What has happened in the last 20 years is that the number of MARRIED women working has shown a significant increase. In 1951 for every 100 male workers there were 44 women workers. In 1971 the comparable figure for women was 61. This increase has been almost entirely due to more married women going out to work. Today 62% of women workers are married.

In industry, women are 28% of the workers. Without us, factories making such essential goods as food, drink, clothing, footwear and textiles could barely survive since on average half the workers in these are women. In the engineering industry, hundreds of thousands of women make up the bulk of unskilled labourers. As far as clerical staff in industry is concerned, women are two-thirds of the total. If we look outside industry, vital jobs such as cleaning, catering, nursing, and teaching are predominantly staffed by women.

These figures very clearly drive home the point that women today can in no sense be considered a marginal section of the workforce. Without us, the economy in its present form could not possibly survive. (Continued..)

What the figures also show is that, whether we like it or not, a woman's place is every bit as much at work as it is at home. In reality "a woman's place is in the home" is simply a justification for paying us lousy wages, for giving us unskilled jobs and bad conditions, for refusing to promote or train us, and for throwing us out of work when it suits the employers. Consequently, if we

are to fight back against these things, then the attempt to organise women at work must go hand-in-hand with an attempt to smash the myths which surround women and the home - hand-in-hand with an effort to get women to face the TRUTH about their situation.

KATHLEEN ENNIS

.....
T & GWU RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN

At an Executive Conference on 10th March the Transport & General Workers' Union adopted a policy statement which urged a recruitment campaign aimed at women and listing its special interests in all their problems - from lack of opportunity, to maternity leave.

We must examine this "great leap forward" carefully because there are a lot of women in this Union (228,677 at the time of the policy statement), and because its history on women workers leaves a great deal to be desired. (Although it is much better than many other unions which have a lot of women members, like the General & Municipal Workers Union, which is more right-wing and undemocratic)

The May issue of the "T & G Record", the union newspaper, contained a bright and colourful broadsheet to be used to recruit women. On the front is a great, ugly mangle surrounded by a red border, underneath "SYMBOL OF WOMEN'S OPPRESSION". On the back page is a form to fill in for more information about the Union, and a picture of the pamphlet, "Women's Rights in Industry" for women in the T & G. (obtainable from: Organisation Dept. T & GWU, Transport House, Smith Square, London SW1P 3JB).

But what difference will this campaign make?

It will not change the fact that fulltime officials are not interested in small numbers, men or women, and most women do not work in the docks or huge factories. Just keep paying the dues and keep quiet, is their motto.

It will not change the attitude of those officials who think that women workers (especially militant ones) are a drag.

"Why don't you join the GMWU?" the night-cleaners were told when they first started to organise. And this was when there was a recruitment drive! Because of things like difficult hours, these women need special cleaners' branches even now, and do not get them.

Nor does it change the fact that once in the Union, things only get done by the workers themselves. Don't expect any help whatsoever until you're on strike (and it doesn't always come then).

It does not help to overcome the isolation that many office-workers and others face, like this girl who wrote to me:

"They informed me that unless there was 51% membership from my place of work, I could not attend a branch meeting. I then had another go to try to get some more of the workers in the office to try to join the union. But on the whole, they're a pretty reactionary crowd and felt that any attempts by me to form a union branch would be leading them to the USSR !"

(This was from a Glasgow typist who joined the Association of Clerical and Supervisory Staffs, section of the T & GWU)

And, above all, how can it help women adequately when another union rule says "women who are not in receipt of men's rate of pay" (that means most women) get £2.50p a week strike pay instead of the man's £5 a week?

Other benefits are less too, e.g. Accident benefit of £1 (compared with £2).

Let's look at the policy statement. A lot of it is important and commendable: we would support "adequate maternity leave, the right to re-engagement after having a child... opposition to an acceptance of night working and shift working being made a condition of equal pay", and so on.

However, "the establishment of adequately staffed and equipped nurseries in the place of work itself" may sound excellent - but it is a very dangerous demand. One woman told me:

'I know of an American firm, a shoe factory, which has a nursery. And it also owns all the houses on the estate, and all the shops. And there's a pen factory, Shaeffer's, quite near where I live, that also has a nursery in the factory. I feel this is very wrong because the money the women pay for the nursery, they never see. And of course there's no union in either of these jobs, they are both American firms which are very anti-union.'

She went on to say what some of the other disadvantages are. The women in the Initial Towels works in Goswell Road, London, are virtually "black-mailed" into accepting low pay. Because each woman knows that if she loses or gives up her job, she loses the nursery place and it's very unlikely she'd get her child in anywhere else, so she probably wouldn't be able to get another job.

Unionised or not, we cannot let our employers have this powerful weapon over us. We must demand free nurseries from the State in every locality. Tenants associations could very well be adding this to their list of demands, with the help of trade unions and other groups of interested people.

Also, although the Union talks about the dangers in the plans being made for equal pay, nowhere do they mention Job Evaluation. And yet this is the biggest danger of all! Take this gem from the Engineering Employers' Federation:

"Job evaluation is a useful management tool for identifying the content and relative complexity of jobs and may assist managements in rebutting unreasonable equal pay claims".

Shops stewards and other trade unionists who work with women must be able to say that Job Evaluation is always a BIG CON and say why. It's an awe-inspiring but totally meaningless piece of mumbo-jumbo. If job evaluation is being talked about where you work, get hold of a copy of "The Employers' Offensive" and read the section on this. It is very important. Huge numbers of women will be submitted to these tests soon in the name of "equality". They will not have heard of them before and often will be oblivious to the dangers in job evaluation. If their union does not take a clear line of opposition on this, women will suffer, and many men too will undergo a work-study against their own interests, and be told they are helping "equality".

If you are a member of the T & GWU:

- make use of the broadsheet by pinning it up at your work and giving copies to the people there. Get copies from your Area Office (or Transport House in London, if necessary)
- embarrass unwilling or male chauvenist officials with their official Union policy where necessary
- press in your Union for resolutions condemning job evaluation, stressing that it will be used against all workers through the Equal Pay Act.
- press for action groups to be formed to really tackle the trade union education of new members, and make the union aware of the real problems of women, through conferences of women members.

In other unions, we need similar unionisation campaigns and a policy

which will include a women's section in each Union to debate and act on the real demands of the women, and to work with men in the unions to ensure that women can no longer be used as "cheap labour". Militants need to try to make any existing positive policies work. And they must fight against the prevailing attitudes about women that many trade unionists still hold.

But above all, if you are reading this and think you could join a Union - go ahead. There are problems with unions which neglect the interests of large numbers of their members. But if

things are ever to improve for women workers, joining a Union is an important first step.

KATHY TAIT

"The Employers Offensive" by T.Cliff (Pluto Press) is available, price 30p plus postage, from:

IS BOOKS, 6 Cottons Gardens,
London, E.2.
and your local I.S. branch

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WHY WOMEN'S UNIONISATION?

A reply to Selma James.

Selma James' pamphlet "Women, the Unions and Work" raises many questions about women both at work and in the home. Here we only hope to start a discussion of women and the Unions, based on just one or two of the points raised.

Her main point is that more women joining Unions would be used "to assist capitalism to be less backward", that means, the Unions might organise women for their own ends instead of working for the demands that women make. She refers to the Miners' struggle to illustrate that this is what is happening with male rank and file trade unionists. They were successful because they rejected their Union's terms. But she doesn't discuss why they had the strength to reject the Union. She concludes this section:

"Now at the time when workers are beginning to wrest, from Unions, control over their own struggle, we are invited to bring women into the Unions where they will acquire trade union consciousness."

But the Miners had already acquired collective consciousness at work and at home, because of the tight-knit physical structure of the industry.

It was the Trade Union Executive at a particular point in time in the

struggle that they were rejecting: they were not rejecting "trade union consciousness" (organised political power). There is a difference between this consciousness and "Trade Union" (with a Capital Letter) consciousness, which just means loyalty at all costs to Union bureaucracies.

Selma James never makes important distinctions like this.

She suggests the necessity for women's independent industrial action, but thinks this should happen before organisation or leadership amongst women at work has been established - the sort of organisation and leadership men trade unionists have experienced for years (like the Miners).

Women who have engaged in successful struggles, such as the Leeds textiles workers in 1969, show how, despite their lack of experience of organisation, despite paying their Union subs as a duty rather than a political activity, and despite the Union's refusal to recognise their action as important - they could fight for and win a fairly substantial increase. BUT they HAD been unionised, so they did start from an organised base.

Women on strike have shown how different their approach can be from that of men. In Leeds they were adventurous and determined. But women, because of their economic and social position under capitalism, which demands formidable physical and time-consuming energy from women at work and in the home, are vulnerable and isolated. The Unions don't go out of their way to help, but without them women don't have any bargaining power at all and their isolation is increased.

Selma James considers that to become a Union member is to expose yourself to a sell-out by the bureaucracy. But in fact, few shop floor Union members have complete faith in Union bureaucracies. She goes on to say how useless Unions are in fighting for Equal Pay, how they divide rank and file members on sex lines to prevent solidarity on the shop floor. She's right. But then capitalism created these divisions in the first place. The Unions' policy of "Divide and Rule" should be attacked. But from a position of solidarity - not, as Selma James thinks, as part of a T.U. "plot" but as part of capitalism.

Her own alternative falls into the same trap as capitalism when she thinks that women's action should be only concerned with women's problems and take the form of withdrawing from male rank-and-file action in the Unions.

She also sees women's absenteeism as "political consciousness":

"Instead of workers' control of production, women's action is more like workers' control of the struggle, to hell with their production".

But women's absenteeism is mostly the result of over-work (in the home and at work), low wages, bad conditions, and heavy demands from children and the family. It is fatigue and domestic responsibilities that make women stay away from work - and this has little to do with political consciousness.

She sees women's withdrawal from work, on sexist not class grounds, as affecting the whole Union, industrial and government set-up. This is unrealistic when increased mass action around immediate demands, on the part of miners, dockers, and railmen is hitting at the present economic and political system.

Selma James thinks women should demand the right not to work. But women have little strength collectively, either at work or in the home, and thus no bargaining power.

She is on her own in the clouds as far as most of us are concerned.

When time and money are short. When women (and men) have to support themselves and a family on £8 or £9 a week. When organisation is difficult anyway, it is immediate practical demands affecting the everyday lives of women that should be voiced.

We do not have any illusions about "Trade Union consciousness" as the alternative to non-Unionisation. We must not buckle under the lack of leadership given to women (and men) by the Unions. We do believe that 'trade union consciousness' (organised political consciousness and practice) is the only realistic way of women being politically effective at work.

Non-unionisation is not the only reason for women's comparative political inactivity. So joining Unions is not the solution. But it is one of the ways women can show their strength and push for their demands.

We hope this discussion is only the beginning since it is by no means a final answer to "Women, the Unions and Work".

ISLINGTON MARXIST WOMEN'S GROUP

(The pamphlet is available from Women's Liberation Workshop,
22 Great Windmill Street, W.1.)

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N O C O M M E N T

".....I sometimes fill in the time by doing housework. But it's not man's work, is it? I mean it's so boring, isn't it?"

(Unemployed man interviewed on Radio I)

"Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of and nature of femininity... Nor will you have escaped worrying over this problem, those of you who are men. To those of you who are women this will not apply - you are yourselves the problem! "

(S.Freud: New Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis)

" Question: My boyfriend has asked me to make love ... If I accept, when is the best time to make love?

Answer: The best time to make love is when you are married! "

(From "Woman's Own" Problem Page)

"You must learn not to talk about world affairs, politics and such intellectual things. As a woman you are expected to only chatter about clothes and film stars and things like that."

(From "The People" newspaper: Advice given by a woman to a man having recently undergone a sex-change operation, advising him how to behave like a woman).

"It is a general principle of law at present that a man could not be found guilty of raping his wife. Even if a couple had been separated for years, the husband could still demand his marital rights. But senior police office at Durham felt it was time that was changed, especially now, with the existence of Women's Lib and women's rights being called into account so often"

(From "The News of the World", 25 June 72)

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