

# womens voice

Monthly women's paper of the International Socialists

A million women want work in Britain. One million!

Think of the energy and skills wasted!

The official figures show only (only?) 287,000 women registering as unemployed in March.

But we know what a farce that is. Most married women don't bother to sign on, since they can't draw the dole.

The results of a Woman's Own questionnaire in January show that only three out of ten women do sign on. 70 per cent are left out of the official figures. Very handy for the government.

Nearly 700,000 women—who are not listed in the official figures—are looking for jobs. Chasing ads in the local papers, applying to factories in the neighbourhood, relying on the grapevine for news of vacancies.

Add these hidden unemployed to the official statistics. And you get a figure of 2 million unemployed.

We've got to fight for more jobs now—for a 35 hour week and no reduction of wages. For a ban on overtime. For no redundancies.

Women can't afford to 'go back to the kitchen sink'—even if they wanted to. Three out of five working women have a job because the family needs the money for essentials, not luxuries. 14 per cent of working women are the main breadwinners.

Women must have the right to work. One million women are being denied that right today.

However much the government tries to hide the truth, we know it. And we'll fight it!

**Women's Voice talked to two married women who are unemployed:**

**Rena Begum worked for four years and seven months in the Civil Service. She was made redundant eight months ago.**

She has three whole files of letters replying to her applications for jobs. 'No vacancies at present and we have suspended recruitment.' 'We are not recruiting primary teachers as there is a surplus of staff at the present time.' 'We have a severe restraint on all recruit-

ment because of the current economic situation and will not be employing new staff until late 1976 or even 1977.'

'When I went to the job centre one time, they asked me what my qualifications were. When I told them I have a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree they said I was overqualified. Another time they said degrees from Indian Universities are not recognised. So I'm not qualified enough!

'I feel very frustrated. When you stay at home with nothing to do, it's so boring, so depressing.

'I'm trying to get factory work now. I went to a factory in Abbey Wood last week. But they won't have work for two months at least.'

Angie Hanson was an international telephonist. She was union rep at her section in the Post Office.

'We did a lot in the union. It just got

better and better. The union rep before was just management's lackey. She never called meetings or anything.

'I really loved the union work. I used to be there till 10 or 11pm doing union work. We had to learn everything from the start. We started having meetings in the exchange—at first management said they wouldn't allow it. They were short—only a half hour after work just to let people know what was going on.

'We tried to get a nursery in the post office. They wouldn't hear of it. We tried for a year. Finally the head office of the union said they had offered us a place in Richmond—that's over 15 miles away! We just laughed.

'There was quite a suitable building for a nursery near us. And there's a lot of women at work who are desperate.'

'I'm at home looking after my little girl now. If I had a nursery, I'd go back. I'd love to go back to work.

My husband is a post office engineer. We're having to rely on his wages whatever happens—even if the roof falls in.

There is a nursery in the neighbourhood—but it's only for two mornings a week. And there's a waiting list for that.

I'm sure there are lots of nursery nurses who would be grateful for a job. My sister-in-law for instance. She'd get paid for it and she could have her kids with her.

You do vegetate if you're at home alone with a baby.

I'm not registered on the employment exchange. If something came up, I couldn't leave the baby all of a sudden. I'm not even sure if I qualify to register.

I don't believe the government's figures. I don't think they even know how many people want work. I don't trust them—not Tories or Labour.'

Picture John Sturrock Report

# JOBLESS WOMEN: THE TRUTH IS OUT!



## POLICE ATTACK RIGHT TO WORK MARCHERS

'There is one thing about this march that is very different from the marches of the 1930's. Some things are similar, like the baton charges of the police yesterday. But one thing is completely different: the women were organised together with the men, not in separate contingents.

Every day of the march the women were organising, visiting factories on delegations, taking a leading role in the actual day to day running of the march. I think this is very important because it shows that we are not going to be divided.'

A marcher speaks . . . see page 2

Special report on women's health and safety at work  
SEE CENTRE PAGES



PEOPLE CAME from all over the country to meet the Right to Work marchers as they walked the last mile to the Albert Hall, London. More than 3000 people marched with them, and delegations joined them from the streets as they went.

The march was organised by the Rank and File Right to Work Campaign, protesting about the 1½ million people out of work in Britain. In the three weeks from 27 February to 20 March, eighty unemployed workers, men and women, black and white, walked 340 miles, actively fighting for the right to work.

They held meetings, protests, pickets, wherever they went. They sent delegations off to hospitals, schools, factories, pits—all the places where

# A TRIUMPHANT BEGINNING



Greeting the marchers along the route

Photographs Beeban Kidron

workers are threatened with the dole—in every town they went through. And the reception they got urged them on to

the triumphant rally in London.

Wherever they went they found workers who wanted to fight for jobs. In

Manchester, on the first day of the march, the marchers talked to builders at work about 70 electricians who had

been sacked from that very site. The following Monday, the 500 workers on the site voted for an all out strike until the 70 sparks were reinstated. And they have been!

The Yorkshire miners gave the marchers free cigarettes, telling them 'We're behind you all the way'. And in Clay Cross, Eileen Wholey, one of the Labour councillors victimised for standing up to the Tory Rent Act, told the marchers 'It's our duty to help you people', and with some of the other councillors, provided two meals for all of them during their stay in Clay Cross.

These people will remember the orange-jacketed people, marching through their towns and will carry on fighting for the right to work. We, too, must carry on that fight.

## Fifty nursery nurses must not be sacked

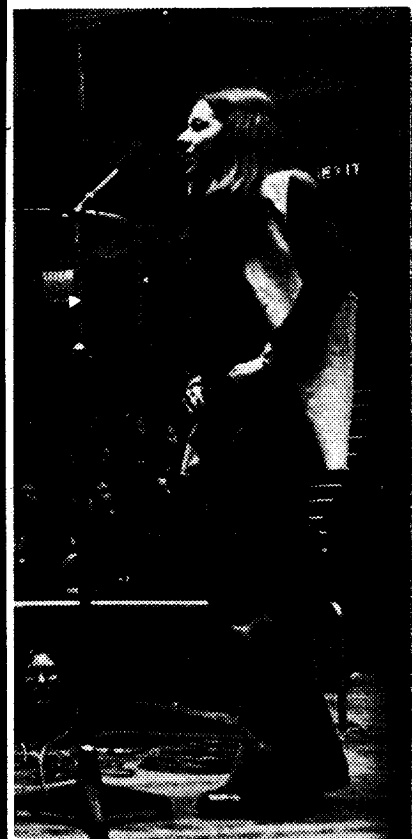
THE MARCH 5th demonstration in Dundee against the cuts was a great success. 30,000 trade unionists were on strike, and 8000 gathered in the town centre to voice their opposition to government policies which attack the weakest in our society. A platform of full-time union officials made a lot of noise, saying they opposed the cuts, but in reality they have not given any lead on how to fight them.

Jackie Johnstone, full-time building union official, was a delegate to the regional council committee which discussed the implementation and severity of the cuts. He told them that he would not accept any cuts. From the platform he told 8000 trade unionists the same story. But the cuts remain and the officials do nothing.

In June 50 nursery nurses will get the sack. Three new nursery schools in Ardler, Menzies Hill and Douglas, will not open. Dundee Right to Work Campaign are making this a priority on their list. Convenors and stewards are being approached and asked to raise the issue on the shop floor. Trade unionists in the workplace are the only people with enough power to help the nurses. NALGO the local government union, have taken the initiative and called for an overtime ban, and an escalating public campaign.

Johnny Miller, secretary of Dundee Right to Work Campaign said: 'If we can build enough muscle fast enough, around the campaign in Dundee, we may well be able to call for direct action from factory workers. We cannot allow these people to be sacked. It would be criminal to sit back and watch these services being destroyed'.

# WOMEN FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO WORK



Caroline Conway addressing 5000 workers at the start of the Albert Hall Rally.



Rosaria da Costa, a Portuguese textile worker, told the 5000 people in the Albert Hall why import controls are no solution to unemployment.

'In the industry I work in, the textile and clothing industry, thousands of workers have lost their jobs because of the sabotage and economic boycott of the national and international bosses.

The workers realised very soon after the 25th of April that they would have to use every possible way of fighting unemployment.



The bosses of the British textile companies are calling for stricter import controls against Portuguese textiles. Many factories in England used to work with cloth imported from Portugal. The cut in the supply of imports affects the workers in my country, and textile workers here in factories which no longer have raw materials to work with. Import controls have forced many Portuguese firms into bankruptcy.

So the multi-nationals companies can take over and increase their control of the industry. This puts them into a stronger position to manipulate textile workers in Britain, Portugal and all over Europe.

Caroline Conway addressed 5000 workers at the beginning of the Albert Hall Rally. Here is her speech reproduced in full, (continued from the page one). The Right to Work Campaign has given 100 per cent support to the right of women to a job. The women on the Platform showed they weren't going to hedge on the issue: 'We must go on to make this ripple a tidal wave'.

### WOMEN FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO WORK

'We had a lot of support from trade unionists who were sponsoring women marchers, and I would like to say "thank you" to all of them, because it shows a willingness to actually take up the question of women's employment. Our jobs are important to us whether we are single or married, with families or without families.'

### 142 PER CENT RISE

'Unemployment among women has risen by 142 per cent in the 12 months to October. That's a fantastic increase in

unemployment, and the trouble is that women are going down the road first. It really woke me up one day when I was in Birmingham. I've always had jobs in industries where it's traditionally been very difficult to unionise—or you don't get unionised but booted out. But I was outside the Post Office in Birmingham where the women are already in a union—the union is already there for them—they don't actually have to fight to organise themselves into a union in the first place. We were outside there, giving leaflets out at lunchtime about fighting the cuts, about the Right to Work Campaign, and what was noticeable was that there were no women workers coming in and out. The men had previously voted to protect their 40 hours a week overtime by making all our sisters in the Post Office who work part-time, go down the road.

There are now only 17 night workers in the Birmingham Post Office who are women. From the reaction we got from one of the male post-office workers on the door, I can see the sort of thing that the women had to fight—the derision, the total incapability to understand the

importance of women's jobs. Because it is a question of unity—and that is what this march has been about. The employers would like to try and divide us up—they would like to divide us, black and white, men and women, employed and unemployed—any little rift they can get hold of, they will exploit.'

### RIPPLE

'They'll use the press, like they did yesterday. The heroic police, 41 injured, bearing their injuries' attacked by hooligan marchers—the other side of the story coming through in Socialist Worker. This is the sort of thing they are going to exploit to divide us. I think the march is really about unity and with your support, 80 of us have marched from Manchester to London. I think we have caused a little ripple wherever we've come to and I'm sure that little ripple will grow.'

### DEMANDS

'I'm glad to see everyone here, but it's not just a question of coming here. I say

to you: we've caused a little ripple and I want you to take back the message of how we are going to fight unemployment. It's a political commitment around the demands of the campaign. To fight against redundancies, for a 35 hour week, against excessive overtime, banning overtime where necessary, against the cuts, these are the sort of messages I hope you are going to take home from here.'

### ROTTEN EGGS

'We've had 80 people from all over the country on this march. Some knew each other beforehand, some didn't; and the reason we got on together was that we were united in our purpose. It really puts on the cards, for my anyhow, the fact that socialism is a real alternative to the crisis of capitalism. As someone said 'A bird that lays such rotten eggs as unemployment should have been made extinct long ago. We've proved we can get unity between people—on this march and the people who have actually supported us. We can go on to build a system through our own efforts, through our self activity, which will end unemployment for ever.'

**WOMENS VOICES**

I want to know more about the International Socialists and local Womens Voice groups. Please send me details

Name .....

Address .....

Please send to Womens Voice, 8 Cottons Gardens, London E2 8DN

TRADE UNION leaders and left wing professional politicians are falling over themselves to insist that import controls will reduce unemployment.

Womens Voice believes that this is nonsense, dangerous nonsense.

Let's just say that controls were introduced against Japanese made models and motorcycles, what would happen?

First of all, it would be more costly for working class people to buy models and motorcycles. The British made models are more expensive, less economical to run, and not so well engineered.

But you say we'll swallow that in order to create jobs. The problem is

there's no guarantee that any jobs would be forthcoming.

British businessmen are interested in the maximum profit in the shortest possible time. Therefore there's no guarantee at all that they would invest in a new British based motorcycle industry.

In any case if Japan was penalised in the field of mopeds and consumer electronics, they could easily retaliate against their imports from Britain. These include chemical, wool, textiles, telecommunications and a host of other things which would create unemployment back in Britain, just as import controls here would create unemployment in Japan.

## editorial

In any case, no British worker has the right to demand his or her job at the expense of another worker. In the Chrysler struggle the surest road to disaster was Coventry demanding jobs at the expense of Linwood and Linwood demanding them at the expense of Coventry. The com-

pany and the government just loved these divisions and sacked workers in both places.

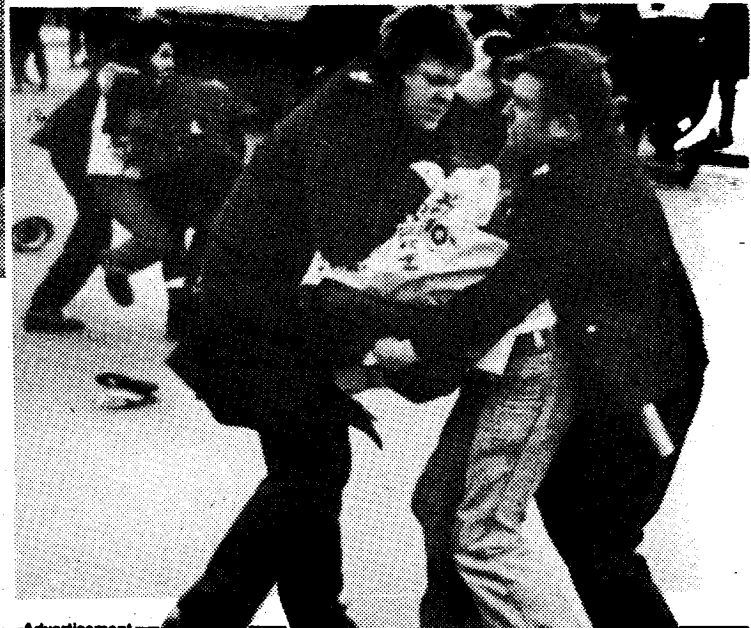
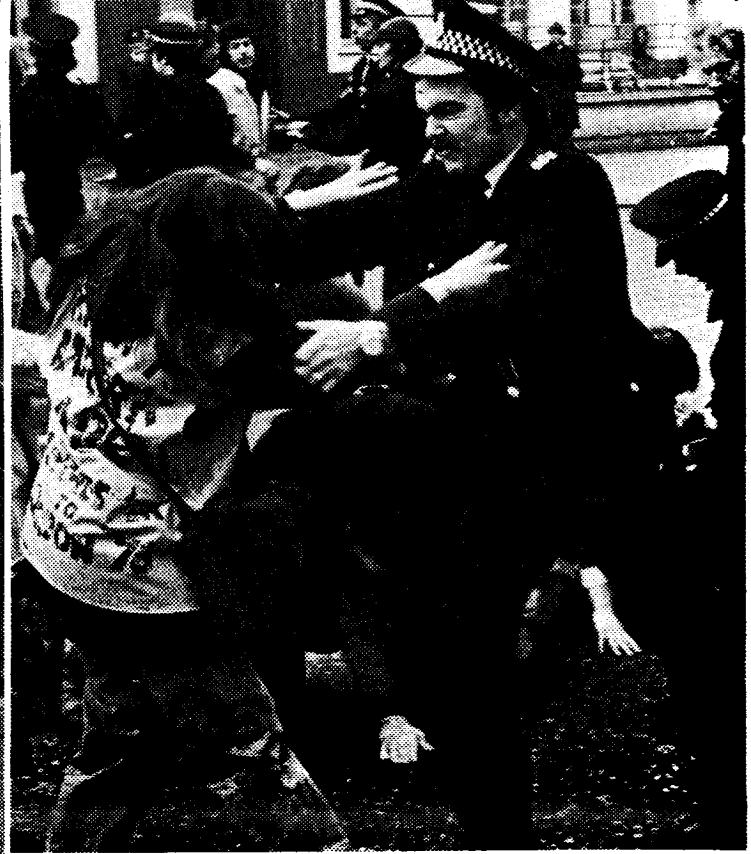
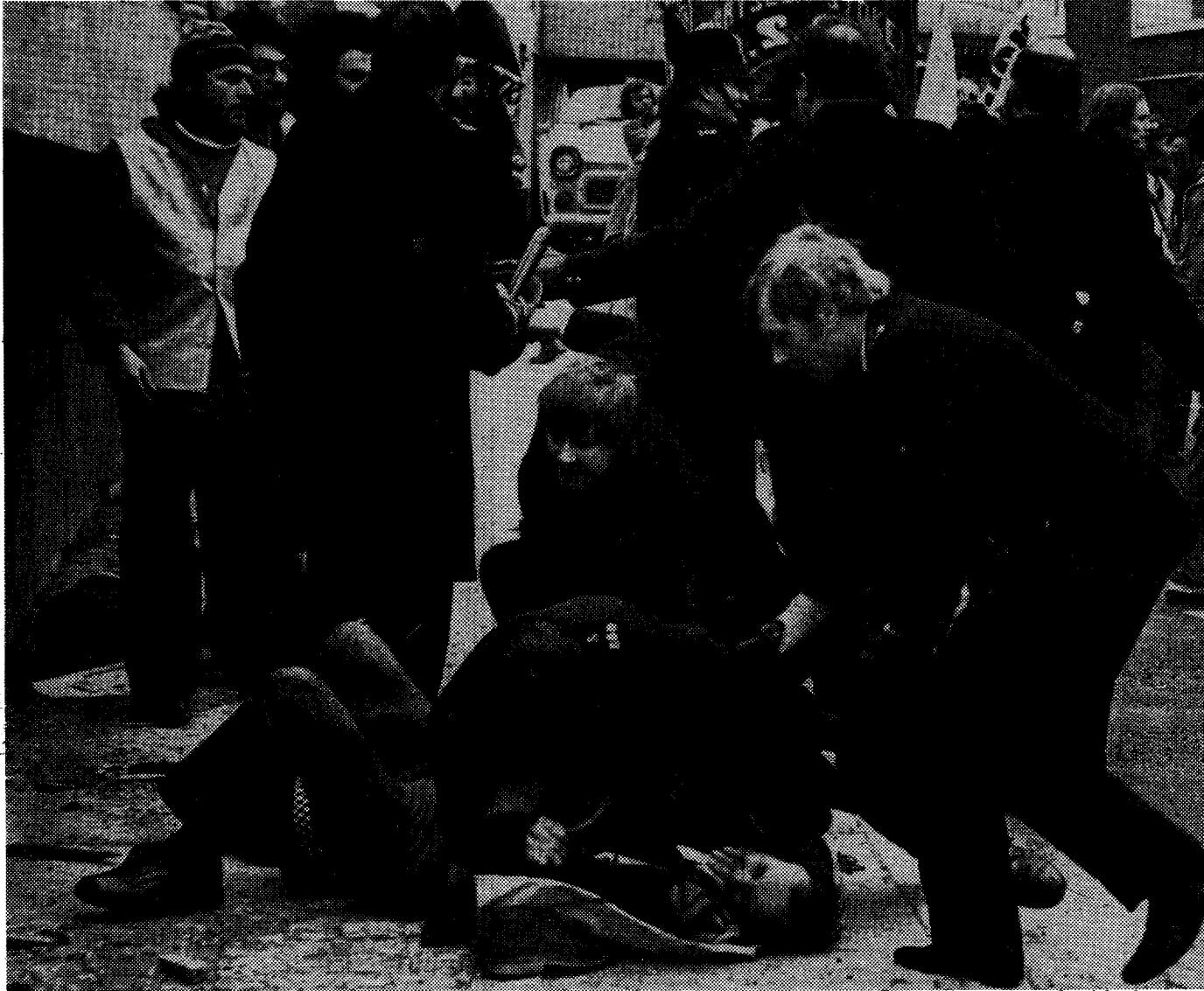
It's the same at an international level. The multinational corporations will exploit every division in our ranks. We must not assist them by saying that 'We Britons' want jobs at the expense of 'mere Spaniards' or 'mere Americans'—people who in any case are our brothers and sister workers.

There's one other crucial objection to the import control policy. It leads you nowhere. It means you're asking 'someone else' to do 'something' about your plight. In fact you should be doing something yourself. You should be fighting for

the Right to Work.

You should be fighting for higher wages because it is reduced living standards that are the root cause of the present unemployment in Britain. Thorn's workers in Skelmersdale were chopped because people can no longer afford colour TV sets and the market has collapsed. Plessey workers in Liverpool are being sacked because people are having their phone takes out! Cure this and we will cure unemployment.

Fight for the right to work on the shop floor demanding no overtime and a shorter working week and we will get rid of the shameful waste of unemployment.



# POLICE AMBUSH MARCHERS

AFTER THREE weeks on the road, the march entered London only to meet a brutal reception from the police. Four times they deliberately attacked, wielding truncheons, mercilessly, driving them into the skulls of the unemployed marchers. 35 marchers were arrested, along with nine local trade unionists who were part of a welcoming delegation.

The national press said that the marchers began the fighting (funny, they were not present at the time), but Tommy Douras told a press conference: 'We've marched 300 miles without a single arrest. We had a huge rally in the Albert Hall next day, which we'd all been looking forward to. Do you think we're lunatics? D'you think we'd have picked on a busload of coppers when we were only a mile away from end of the day's march? Come off it. You know what happened. They picked on us.'

It was the police who were the attackers. It was they who brandished offensive weapons, who went in at times without helmets (they get in the way) as the marchers tried to move on. And the whole time, a police helicopter flew overhead to direct operations.

Now the 44 who were arrested are on bail, and are facing a variety of charges—including obstruction, assault and threatening behaviour—all for the privilege of being clobbered by the police.

Heavy casualties were claimed by the police. They made very loud noises about it. But none of them were kept overnight in hospital. Two marchers were beaten unconscious, one for more than two hours (and the police arrested another man for trying to look after the unconscious marcher before he was dragged into the station). Two other marchers required stitches in their heads, one had a broken nose. Four marchers were still in hospital on Saturday morning.

The trial begins at Hendon Magistrates Court on Friday 21 May. The Right to Work Campaign is calling a mass demonstration outside on this day. And a defence fund has been set up to cover the expected high legal costs of defending the marchers and other trade unionists arrested at Hendon.

Already, widespread support has come in for our brothers and sisters who face criminal charges for demanding the right to march for the right to work. A

called by the executive of Barnet Trades Council, to look into the events of March 19th. A Tribune Group MP, Bob Cryer told the marchers that 'Many of us in the Tribune Group will back the defence fund'.

Womens Voice calls on all our supporters to back the 44 in whatever way you can. If you are in a union, raise a motion in your branch condemning the police attack on the marchers, and calling for all workers to strengthen their support for the Right to Work Campaign, to support the picket of Hendon Magistrates Court, and to support the defence fund financially.

Finally, we must not let these events divert us from the fight against unemployment and for the right to work. The authorities would love that to happen. But this is a campaign that must and will go on. Hundreds of trade union bodies and thousands of individuals have already supported it. And in the weeks to come, they will be building on the positive initiatives of the march, and they will be spreading the demands of the campaign.

By fighting for the demands of the campaign, we can show why the 44 were arrested, and by doing so, we can build the support that is necessary to protect

## The arrested marchers need your help . . .

If you were a witness of the attacks on the Right to Work March, then you must get in touch with the Right to Work Campaign, 46 Prince George Road, London N16. Telephone 01-249 1207. If you have a photographer or information of any variety please do not hesitate.

## ...and your money

It will cost a lot of money to keep up the Right to Work Campaign and defend our arrested brothers and sisters.

So, brothers and sisters, dig deep, raise the matter in your stewards' committee and branch. Affiliate to the campaign and/or send us some money earmarked for the Defence Campaign.

Send all monies to: Right to Work Campaign, Defence Fund Treasurer, 46 Prince George Road, London N16.



Photograph by John Sturrock (Barnet)

Every day millions of workers enter a battlefield. There are about 1½ million accidents at work every year in this country, and only a third are ever reported.

It's the big bangs that hit the headlines, but who knows about the lost fingers, bronchitis, headaches and backaches that are caused by bad working conditions every day? From mechanical accidents to noise, from chemical dangers, known and unknown, to stress and ruined personal lives.

**RE-ENGINEER THE PLANT, NOT THE PEOPLE!**

THE commonest of all health problems arising from work today is backache. Around one in three workers suffer from it at one time or another. It is caused by continuously repeating the same movements, and by lifting heavy weights and twisting the body.

The International Labour Organisation suggests that no-one should lift a weight of more than 55kg. (That's 8 stone 9 pounds, or about the weight of a full grown woman).

If workers on the job are asked what they think, women think a level of 14kg is more appropriate, while men suggest a level of 23kg.

The people doing the work must decide how it is to be done.

**NOISE**

Many women work in places not normally thought of as dangerous. But the hazards of work are more insidious than you think . . .

A survey of Alfred Marks employees in offices found that half of all machine operators (photocopying machines, key-punches, duplicators) suffered from severe headaches while at work and in their free time. This is almost certainly caused by excessive noise levels. Exposure to noise of around 90 decibels can permanently damage your hearing. Noise in many machine rooms approaches this sort of level . . . Yet most office workers accept lower wages than they might get in industry because their conditions are at least clean and supposedly safe.

**CHEAP 'SOLUTIONS'**

In industry the 'solution' offered to excess noise is usually earmuffs. They are a lot cheaper than altering the machinery to suit its operators. Can you imagine wearing earmuffs in a noisy office? The tedium and isolation would be so acute that you might as well BE a machine.

Protective clothing is by law supplied to many workers in noisy and dusty factories. But it is always uncomfortable and irritating to wear, and usually prevents workers

Special Report by Sybil Cock

work is bad for our health. The bosses will go to any lengths to keep profits up. They put THEIR profits before OUR lives and health.

Women are now 41 per cent of the workforce, and the

proportion is increasing. They work mainly in the food and service sectors, so they are not exposed to the most obvious dangers at work. However, although they may suffer less than men from the more dramatic accidents, bad health from bad working conditions invades them to an incalculable degree.

This feature shows some of the ways in which hazards affect women's lives as workers, wives and

# Work is dangerous to your health... Safety is dangerous to their wealth

from talking to their mates, often the only tolerable aspect of work. Noise and dust should be removed at source. This is by no means impossible, just expensive for the factory owners.

**NURSES**

Nurses and hospital workers put themselves at risk of infection every day. There are many instances of high TB levels among workers in pathology laboratories, and any number of individual cases of infection. Nurses exposed to anaesthetic gases in operating theatres show a significantly higher rate of spontaneous abortion ('miscarriage') than other nurses.

**INDUSTRIAL NURSES**

A recent article in Spare Rib describes in fascinating detail the work of industrial nurses in British Leyland and Garrard Engineering. These nurses are trapped between management and workers. Management pays them to patch up injured or ill workers and get

them back to work as fast as possible. But the nurses can see that the workers' health problems are far wider than the first aid box can treat. They talked of the enormous increase in stress since the introduction of measured day work at British Leyland. Stress is seen by most of the medical profession as the result of our inability to adjust to the world.

Industrial nurses see the real cause of stress: **the fact that bosses will not adapt their machines to fit the workers.**

**CHEMICALS**

'Safe' limits for concentrations of dusts and vapours in the air are set with the 'average fit male' body in mind. Women are generally smaller than men, and the effect of the same concentration of a chemical in a smaller body is therefore more dangerous. Anyway, these so-called safe limits are no more than guesses. A vast amount of research needs to be done before one can really say that a safe level has been established for

any one of the thousands of dangerous chemicals floating around.

This research must be paid for by manufacturers, so if they can get away with guesses they will. Only a vigilant and militant workforce can make them do it.

Women workers are well known for their ability to bear children and replenish the workforce. Because of the usefulness of this ability, they are prohibited from doing some of the most dangerous and heavy jobs. In particular, they are protected from work with some substances known to cause spontaneous abortion or damage to the foetus in the womb. There are many such substances; lead, mercury, carbondisulphide, benzene . . . These substances are dangerous to all workers, not just unborn foetuses.

The dual standards of the law are used to discriminate against women. The law is used as an excuse to dismiss women from their jobs when they become pregnant, and deny them the advantages of continuous employment. It also hinders the development of truly safe processes for dealing with these substances, or of finding ways of avoiding their use altogether. Even if pregnant women can't do the job, unsuspecting men can always be conned into it. The law must not be allowed to divide men from women workers, our struggle is the same.

The law does not recognise that human beings have lives outside work—unless they are women who must be encouraged to reproduce.

**SHIFTWORK**

There are many exceedingly complicated provisions in the law governing the hours women may work. Night work is banned but 'if it is desirable in the public interest to do so for the purpose of maintaining or increasing the efficiency of industry or transport' the employers may ask for an exemption certificate. Needless to say, millions of women are exempted

Many women have to do shiftwork in light engineering and food factories, as well as in nursing. Shiftwork causes gross disruption to everyone's lives, and certainly causes that catch-all women's disease, stress. How many women think they are neurotic because they can't enjoy life, when they only see their husbands for an hour or two a day, and their 'free' time happens to coincide with the kids' bedtime?

The types of disease and injury women suffer reveals the way they are used as second-class and cheap manpower. They are used as high speed machines for assembling packing and processing, and as the only people suitable for work like cleaning, laundering, preparing food, and caring for the sick.

**TAKE HOME A HAZARD TODAY!**

Dangerous work conditions affect women in other ways. Dust from the metal Beryllium has long been known to be highly dangerous—its use was virtually banned during the thirties. But then new uses were found for it in the USA in the fast growing and highly profitable aerospace and computer industries, and it gradually came back into use. The disease it causes is similar to TB, but much more dangerous.

At one beryllium plant in the US, it was found that of 48 victims of the disease recorded by 1959, half did not even work in the plant. Several were people who just lived in the area, but 19 were the wives of beryllium workers. They had contracted beryllium poisoning by washing their husbands dusty overalls. By 1961 75 cases had been reported, and 31 people had died. Similarly, cases have been reported of asbestos workers' wives getting mesothelioma, a particularly nasty lung cancer that hits you years after exposure to the dust, making compensation claims particularly difficult. Lead poisoning is also contracted by the wives and children of lead workers because of dusty overalls.

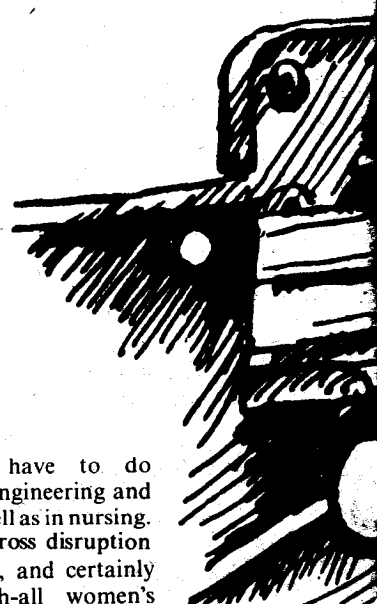
**FIGHT BACK**

In 1972 a strike took place in several parts of the USA. The men's strike was a safety record.

From a distance looks safe enough and women who are another story. Asbestos gases and skin-scraping forced through pipes and valves, hundreds of pounds of containers boiling gallons of deadly gelling towers of smoke. Poor maintenance, the failure to use chemicals and records all take a toll on oil workers.

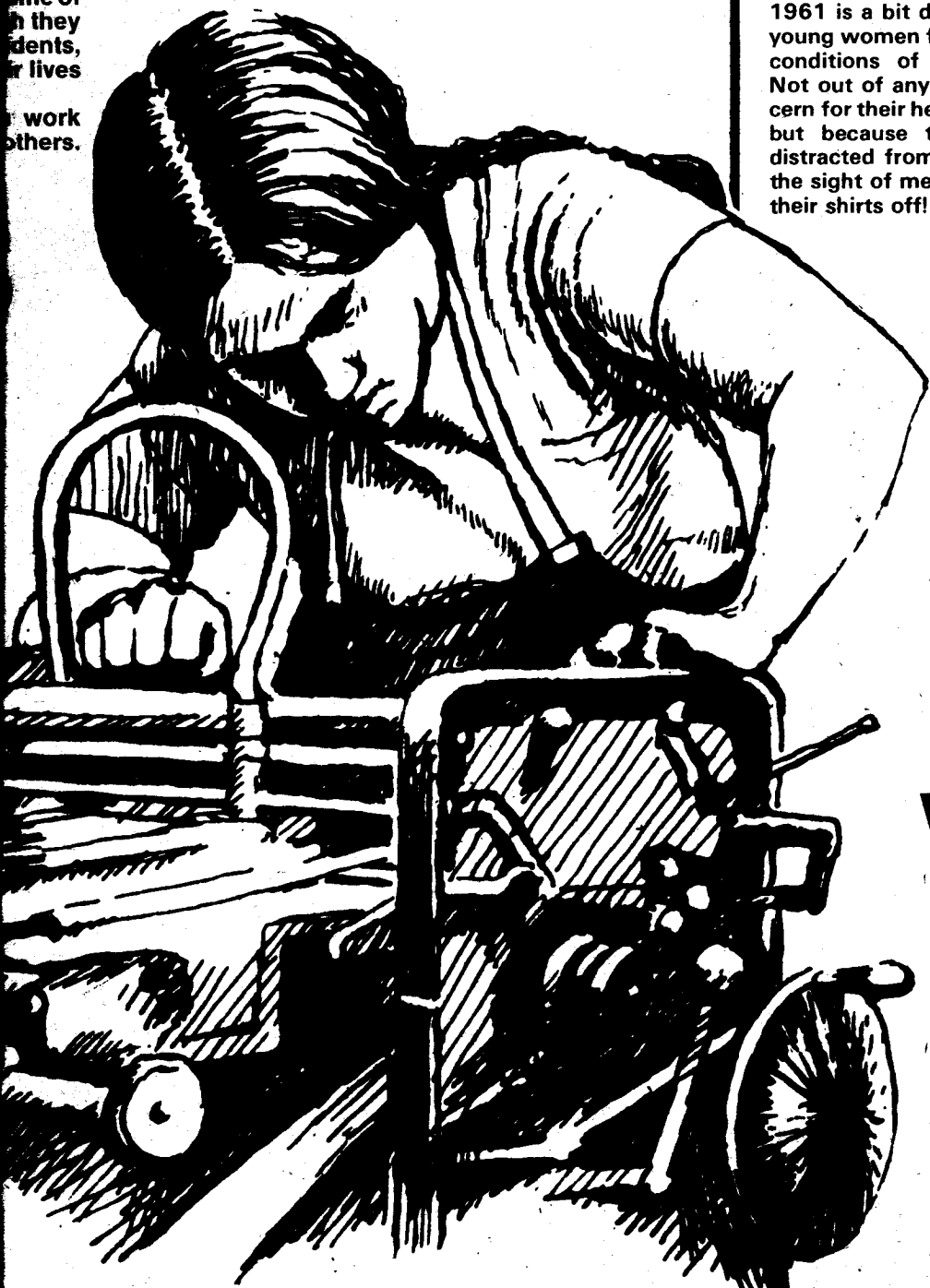
The wives of the strikers understood that in order to strike the plant had to be shut down. They saw the value of keeping the scabs out. The wives were arrested at refinery gates, blocked the scabs. In North Carolina women held demonstrations in front of the plant protesting about the safety of strikers. They carried signs, leaflets and stood on picket lines. Although health played an important part in the women's struggle, even more was understood that the wives had to bargain with the men. The attack on all the husbands had forced

'You send your husband in the morning and you get the question: 'Am I





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One section of the Factory Act 1961 is a bit different. It bars young women from working in conditions of extreme heat. Not out of any particular concern for their health, mind you, but because they might be distracted from their work by the sight of men workers with their shirts off!

**Books and Pamphlets**  
**The Hazards of Work**, by Patrick Kinnersly. Pluto Press 90p.  
**Work is Dangerous to your Health**. Jeanne M Stellman, Susan M Daum. This book is American, but still quite invaluable. It covers a much wider range of toxic substances than Kinnersly's book and includes an index of likely hazards by occupation, £1.15.  
**A Cause for Concern**, handy, short pamphlet on the new law. Published by the RFOC, 5p.  
**Oil**. A workers' guide to the health hazards and how to fight them. BSSRS, 75p.  
**Noise**. Fighting the most widespread industrial disease. BSSRS, 25p.  
**Asbestos—the dust that kills in the name of profit**. SW pamphlet, 10p.  
**EVERY SHOP STEWARDS' COMMITTEE SHOULD HAVE THESE PUBLICATIONS.**  
 All are available from IS BOCYS, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4.

There are certain trades that are more harmful to women than to men in consequence of the injurious influence they exercise upon the child-bearing powers of women. From such trades it is desirable that women should be excluded. The manufacture of white lead is one of these industries. Women if pregnant can scarcely follow their work in a lead factory without miscarrying; if they proceed to term, the children are born dead or they die shortly after death from convulsions.  
 'It was the knowledge of the greater susceptibility of the female to plumbism and the tremendous waste of infantile life that led me to recommend the abolition of women's labour in the dangerous process of white lead manufacture...'  
 Chief Medical Officer of the Factory Inspectorate, 1890s.

## WHAT WE CAN DO

**THE RANK and File Organising Committee** can arrange for day schools on health and safety at work if these are sponsored by trade union bodies. Many such schools have been run successfully up and down the country. The Organising Committee and BSSRS (the group of radical scientists who help run the schools) have a large body of expertise on the subject of workers safety.

Womens-Voice urges all trade unionists to try and arrange a school in their workplace or factory.

We would suggest that all workers read **THE HAZARDS OF WORK** by Pat Kinnersly. This, although a bit out of date on the law, gives invaluable advice, written from the worker's point of view, and covers how to claim compensation and a directory of poisonous sub-

stances. BSSRS is a group of radical scientists who produce a bulletin called **HAZARDS**. This gives ongoing news of struggles over work conditions, new hazards, changes in the law. It is available from BSSRS at 10p a copy.

BSSRS, 9 Poland Street, London W1.  
 RFOC, 46 Prince George Road, London N16. Tel: 01-249 1207

against Shell Oil plants across the country. The issue was in Shell's appalling

an oil refinery. For the men who work inside it is a hell, poisonous fumes, steam are everywhere. It's a vast jungle of pipes and hundreds of pressure. Great quantities of chemicals. Fracturing fire and maintenance, speed-test dangerous keep medical deadly toll from

many strikers in order to win the had to be shut the importance of out, and many in front of the the exit of and Martinez, demonstrations in the harrasment boycotted service the community, the picket lines. and safety issues role in draw-to the struggle, involved. They Shell's refusal to union was an they and their fight for.

husband to work all during the our mind is one ing to get a call

from Shell today? Is my husband going to get hurt? What's going to happen if my husband gets hurt? Where's that going to leave me?"

Dorothy Curlee, who had been employed by Shell for thirty years and was a shop steward said: *Health and Safety is a matter of life and death, it's a matter of survival as far as we're concerned. If we don't have protection, a lot of us will die. It's pretty obvious that I'm not going to be at the plant for another 30 years, so I feel real strong about getting this for the younger people coming in, the men and women working in the plant after I am gone, and after my brothers have gone. That's really what unionism is about. The conditions are getting more advanced and more dangerous. We must win this. Our lives are at stake. That's what we're fighting for, and that's what we'll win.*

They did win. It was a tremendous struggle against an industrial giant, but with support from other unions and community groups the strikers and their wives won.

This must be the solution—rely on our own power and our common interests with male workers. You can never trust employers or their representatives to give you safe conditions—safety costs them money. Don't be blinded by their 'scientific' talk. Science serves the bosses unless it's researched by workers for their own purposes.

Remember, it's not just about safety, gruesome accidents and obscure deaths. Your day to day health is often subtly eroded by bad working conditions.

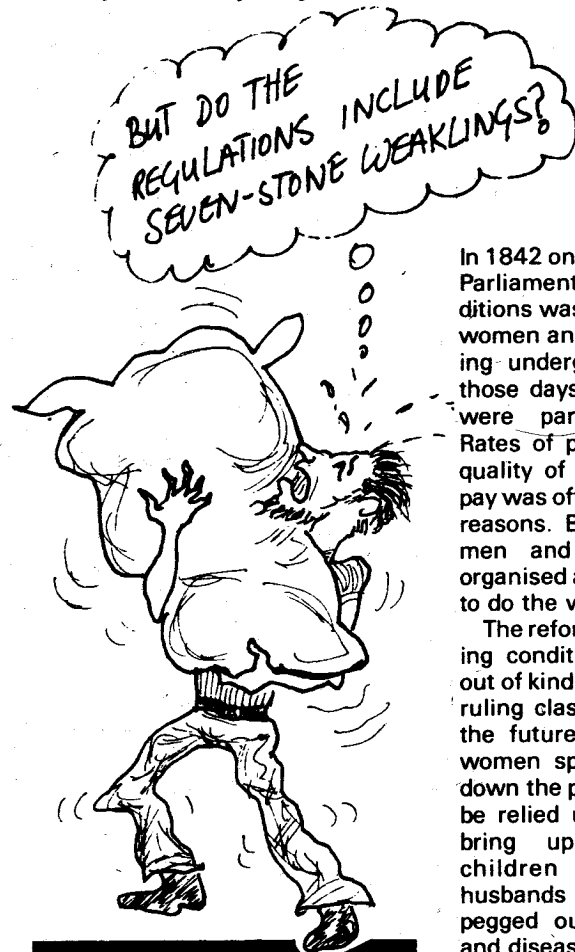
In a future article I hope to go into some detail about how to organise against health hazards, how to use the law and how to fight it.

**Interview with a woman working at Lesneys matchbox car factory in East London . . .**

**Q. Did many women collapse from fatigue?**

Helen: Oh yes! The first night I was there, a girl near me collapsed from her stool. The foreman, instead of picking her up, put someone in her place first before helping her. . . . This apparently is quite common—other women who'd been there a few weeks said that most people didn't last long because the heat is so bad. . . . The heat was terrific; especially if you were unlucky enough to be on the end of the belt. The girls there had to lift the cars off and put them into boxes, then the mould came round to fill up with more cars.

If you were the first three or four of these girls, the moulds were still red hot and your fingers got blistered from touching them. The foreman had got some gloves in his belt which he should have given out to women who were liable to be burnt, but he said he only had a certain number per night. Even if you did manage to get some gloves, by chatting up the younger men, after about two hours the finger tips had gone as they were fine gloves, not meant for heat work. The women on what was called heat work were provided with heavier gloves. So lots of women had blisters on their fingers. One woman's watch melted on her wrist—a plastic watch which blistered all her wrist.



'As soon as the working class, stunned by the noise and turmoil of the new system of production, recovered, in some measure, its senses, its resistance began, and first in the native land of machinism, in England. For 30 years, however, the concessions conquered by the workpeople were purely nominal. Parliament passed five labour laws between 1802 and 1833, but was shrewd enough not to vote a penny for their carrying out, for the requisite officials etc.'

Karl Marx, Kapital

In 1842 one of a series of Acts of Parliament about working conditions was passed. It prohibited women and children from working underground in mines. In those days conditions in mines were particularly disgusting. Rates of pay depended on the quality of the coal seams, and pay was often withheld for trivial reasons. But it was work, and men and women were unorganised and had no choice but to do the work or starve.

The reforms in women's working conditions were made not out of kindness, but because the ruling class was worried about the future of its workforce. If women spent 14 hours a day down the pit, they could not also be relied upon to produce and bring up healthy obedient children to replace their husbands when they finally pegged out through overwork and disease.

Despite this, it took several years before the Act was implemented. The reason? The government was not prepared to pay for more than four factory inspectors to even attempt to make sure the Act was carried out. The women themselves had to take any work that was going, just to make ends meet, and the pit bosses wanted women to carry on working; after all they were much cheaper than men.

This pattern, with variations, was repeated every time a new piece of protective legislation was brought in.

# WHY PRODUCE WOMENS VOICE ANYWAY?

I HAVE just read an issue of *Womens Voice* for the first time, and I must confess to finding it disappointing and puzzling.

As Marxists, you surely view men and women primarily in class terms, and put the class struggle before the struggle against sexism?

Why, then, do you produce a 'women's paper', with women reporters, on 'women's issues';

(even the book reviews were on the family, women's health, Freudian attitudes towards women etc!)—and similarly why do you produce *Flame*, a paper for black workers—over and above *Socialist Worker*?

It seems to me that this sort of focus does more to create separatism than discourage it. It may be understandable among the

specifically feminist groups, but surely not a group of IS's nature.

Not to mention the time and money that must be expended by a black woman worker, who presumably is required to buy and read all three papers!

Joking apart, I would seriously appreciate an explanation, as I do find it genuinely puzzling.

MOYRA E GRANT

## Canada: One woman shows the way

I HAVE worked about three years as a long distance operator, for Bell, the telephone company in Ontario and Quebec. My union is the Communications Union of Canada, motto, 'Never underestimate the power of women'.

On the long distance board there's a very boring job we do called 'cama'. It's for if you're placing a call from a remote area, and involves a routine and repetitive procedure for billing the caller. No one likes to do a whole night shift on this job, saying the same words over and over, and punching in seven digits each time. So we try to share the job out, to make it easier on all of us. Just a tiny way of trying to control the job and make it better.

One night I took the job over from someone. Someone else took it over from me. Then the supervisor told us we weren't allowed to trade.

We were so angry we wrote up a grievance, and several of us signed it. It wasn't on a grievance form, as we hadn't ever seen one! We gave it to the union rep. And can you believe it, the first thing she did was to hand it to the management, just as it was with all our names on. Next thing we knew, we were called in and told we were in the wrong. No one had filed a grievance in that company for a long, long time. Next, the chief operator picked me out and told me I was causing trouble.

Then they started harassing me, listening in to my calls, sitting beside me writing everything down. Within a couple of days they sacked me.

I went straight home and wrote down everything that had happened while it was hot and fresh in my mind. I made it into a leaflet, explaining how they were out to get me because I was active in the union.

I went down next day and handed out my leaflet, all alone. I stayed all day to catch all the workers on the different shifts. A lot of them said they felt sorry for me. They told me the boss was afraid to come out and pass me. That was the Friday.

On the Monday, I gathered together some of my friends and we held a lunch-time protest march outside the office where the bosses are. I phoned up reporters on the local TV and Radio so they were there.

After it was on the news I had lots of sympathetic phone calls, some from former operators saying they had been victimised, but had been afraid to fight back.

Eventually, the union filled a grievance against my dismissal, though at first the union rep had come out of the building and told me to go away.

And I won! I prepared my case carefully, and won it on the third stage of grievance procedure. I was interviewed on TV and Radio about it, and the other operators were really pleased.

It was hard to stand out there on my own, and sometimes it's easier to fight for someone else than for yourself. But you've got to prove it can be done. The others at work have realised that we can fight Bell.

Now we're fighting over vacation leave and a few other issues. The idea is catching on. And as soon as I can I'm going to stand for Union rep. Fraternally,

Janice McClelland

## Womens Voice replies . . .

But you don't make divisions go away by pretending they don't exist! We believe you have to take account—serious account—of the divisions, in order to be able to wipe them out.

It's no good just saying we want women workers to join the struggle, we support the liberation of women, but first we have to fight the class struggle. What is the class struggle? It is the self-activity of working class men and women involved in fighting in many different ways the class that exploits them, and that holds political power.

A very important part of this struggle is to conquer the ideas and practices that have helped keep us down for centuries. Racism and sexism don't just affect blacks and women. They affect all workers, directly, in their work life and their private life. Fighting racism and sexism is not an alternative to the class struggle. Not an added extra. Not a thing that comes in priority behind the class struggle. It is part of the class struggle. And where, in history, that fact has been forgotten,

it has proved to be the herald of defeat, or the result of defeat.

At the same time it is no use just stating such facts. We believe in actively taking account of them.

That means special newspapers to put forward our concerns and voice our demands. It means special organisation, meetings that fit in with the lives we lead. It means, for example, women workers taking a lead in fighting for free abortion, and for nurseries, because these are things that directly concern us. Unless we fight for these things, we will not be able to fight equally, alongside men. Remember, for many years in the socialist movement women took a back seat, were the butt of jokes and jibes, or were just plain ignored. Only an active women's movement, and the increasing militancy of women workers changed that . . . and that particular battle isn't over yet.

You may be interested to know that the Bolshevik party had a women's newspaper.

And that Alexandra Kollontai form-

ed the first political women's clubs in Russia in 1905—which grew into the backbone of the revolutionary women's organisation, the Xhenodetl. Kollontai believed that you can't have a class victory where half the class are excluded or passive, and she also believed that even after a working class socialist revolution you will still need special organisation to press forward the complete emancipation of women in every area of our lives.

We reach many more women with socialist ideas by having *Womens Voice* than we can reach simply with *Socialist Worker* because we address ourselves to things that particularly concern women in greater detail than *SW* could do.

The 600-strong *Womens Voice* Rally last November showed that our paper has helped bring many women into political activity.

In this way we hope to draw many more women actively to our position—that the only way to overthrow this rotten system is to build a revolutionary party of both men and women workers.



The lights are hazy,  
The beautiful soul music  
Churns out of the new record-player.  
People are dancing close,  
Or doing something rubbish no one,  
Not even themselves, can interpret.  
Girls, pretty, dressed to kill—  
Boys, thinking themselves it,  
Deciding who they will 'capture' tonight.  
Some eye the girl with the low-necked dress,  
Some her friend.  
They stand surrounded like honey,  
The boys being the bees.  
They giggle,  
Feel sweet.  
I sit in my corner,  
Half a glass of warm orange juice in front of me,  
Alone.  
Now you must be thinking, 'She's jealous'.  
Don't be silly,  
All I want is someone to talk to me.  
Can that be jealousy?  
I suppose it can in a way.  
I'm bored, feel foolish,  
Sitting in my corner all alone  
Like a disease.  
So I do the best thing I have done all evening—  
Leave!

Sandra Agard

## If it weren't for Skegness

HOW I echo those sentiments in Jean Clark's article in the March issue of *Womens Voice*.

My husband is on a low wage and all we can do is save like mad so that we can pay some of the bills when they come in.

We only have one child of 15 months. We would love another but how can we afford two children on £30 a week? So far we have managed, but with electricity going up another 15 per cent and a possible gas increase, I don't know what we will do.

If one of us needs new clothes it means using the rent money, or money put by for bills—then hoping we can save it up again in time. If it wasn't for clothes sent by friends and family, that their kids have grown out of, goodness knows what my won would be wearing.

I resent having to wait for 'bargains' and having to buy second hand push-chairs.

I worked for 13 years, yet because I had to stop when my baby came, my husband and I *plus* the child are expected to live off *one* person's wages. When previously two of us had *two* persons' wages.

This system is bloody illogical. It seems we are being penalised for having children. Yet the bosses need a new workforce don't they?

I think I have every right to expect the best for my family. We work and produce (goods and babies) and whilst not exactly starving or going unshod this year—what about next year?

If it wasn't for the *Socialist Worker* Skegness holiday we would not go away either.

Why should this be all we have to look forward to? My husband works bloody hard, but although he has three weeks holiday (wow) if it wasn't for staying with parents, we'd just be stuck at home. Yet the bosses go off to the South of France or somewhere equally exotic.

Eunice Sharples

Reproduced with thanks: from *TALKING BLUES*, a collection of poems, published by Centreprise, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8. Price 20p.

Feeling fed up, angry? Feeling happy, feeling militant?

Write to *Womens Voice*—we want to hear from you.

Send letters to *Womens Voice*, 8 Cottons Gardens, London E2 8DN.

*Womens Voice* is Sorry! to those of you who receive the paper by subscription. Owing to the lack of a business manager at present we have been very late in posting your March issue to you. We are desperate for someone to take on this very important job to handle our accounts and press forward our sales. Please write to *Womens Voice*, 8 Cottons Gardens, London E2 8DN if you live in London and think you could do the job.



## notices

**Socialist Rally, Skegness.**  
Easter Week-end, 1976. Friday April 16th to Monday April 19th at the Derbyshire Miners' Holiday Camp in Skegness. Lots of events, political and non-political, plus entertainments, and sports. You don't have to be a member to come! Films include:  
**State of Siege** brilliant film based on the kidnapping of a CIA agent in Uruguay by the Tupamaros.  
**Battle of Algiers** possibly the best political film ever made.  
Also **Viva Maria, Executive Action, Klute** and others.  
For the children: a nature trail, a pageant, fun and games.  
Cost £16.25 per person, covering all meals, accommodation and entertainment. Children under 14 FREE. Book through your local Womens Voice seller.

**Special Notice**  
Socialist Worker Rally, Skegness. **WOMENS VOICE** events. **IMAGES OF WOMEN.** How they treat us in films, TV programmes, adverts, books. Joy Leman.  
**THE FAMILY.** Its history and its future. Joan Smith.  
**YOU TOO CAN BE A WRITER.** Womens Voice Editorial Board.

**EQUAL PAY** and the **ANTI DISCRIMINATION BILL** lessons so far

April 10th and 11th.  
**National Working Women's Charter Conference.**  
at the Lanchester Polytechnic, Coventry. Delegates £1.50, Observers £1.00, Visitors 50p per day.  
Last minute credentials from: WWCC, 49 Lowther Hill, London SE23 1PZ. Tel: 01-690 5518.

**National Demonstration.**  
Sunday 25th April.  
Against Cuts in the National Health Service. Ban all private practice. Called by National Co-ordinating Committee against cuts in the NHS. Sponsors include: NALGO; Socialist Medical Association; NUS; AUEW District Committee, Sheffield.  
March from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square rally.  
For posters, leaflets, further information contact: Dr P Stren, (secretary), 55 Bridge Lane, London NW11.

**FIGHT THE CUTS!** A film made with the help of the Rank and File Organising Committee.  
Excellent for campaign meetings, lunchtime meetings at work etc. for details of hiring contact: CIS, 9 Poland Street, London W1. Tel: 01-439 3764.

Monday April 26th.  
**North London Womens Voice Group.**  
Meeting 8pm. The Beehive, Tottenham High Road. Get off bus at Bruce Grove. Subject: Abortion: which way forward for the campaign?

# Where could this be?

**Where in the United Kingdom is abortion still a criminal offence?**

**Where in the United Kingdom is a woman entitled only to half share, not all, of what she saves from her husband's allowance?**

**Where can her husband evict her, or sell her matrimonial home over her head?**

**Where is there no attachment of earnings order, to ensure maintenance for the woman and her children?**

**Where does a wife have no legal right to equal guardianship of her children?**

**Where does the Sex Discrimination Act not apply?**

**Where is education, from junior school to college, segregated in almost all cases by both sex and religion, while the 11 plus exam still operates, to segregate even further, by social class?**

And where is divorce still a matter of proving adultery and desertion, as laid down in the legislation of 1939 - in spite of the estimated 200 separations per week?

**Answer: IN NORTHERN IRELAND.**

# OFFICIAL STRIKE FOR EQUAL PAY

## When will the union stop men breaking the picket line?

**THE GENERAL and Municipal Workers Union, second largest in the country has just produced a pamphlet called *Equality at Work—the way forward.***

**It is apparently a practical guide on how to achieve Equal Pay and Opportunities for women workers under the present law.**

**It urges women to become involved in the Union, and in representing their work mates.**

**Great. BUT in Wednesbury male General and Municipal workers are crossing an official picket line of their sisters, also in the GMWU, who are out on strike for Equal pay.**

**The 25 women at H J Barlow are demanding a £3.40 increase to put them on par with the rates for the 115 men**

employed in the factory. There is a closed shop at H J Barlow—everyone who works there is in the union, the General and Municipal Workers Union. And although the strike has been made official, the full time union official has not asked the men to come out; he is

letting them walk through a picket line of their own union.

As one of the pickets said: *'When they've got a closed shop they should close it—and come out in our support.'*

The women were confident that they would win, but the lack of support from

the men has led to their becoming very cynical.

June Williams, Works Convenor at H J Barlow said: *'They think because you're a woman you shouldn't stick up for your rights. Women have always been treated as cheap labour. You must do something about it.'*

*'We don't have any shop stewards. I'm the only representative, for everyone, men and women. If we do this on our own then we've proved something. Half of the men are for us, the others against. They think if you're a woman your husband earns enough—but not only are a lot of women single or widows, those of us who are married need that money for rent and food. The women have amazed me with their willingness to stop out.'*

The wages—£46 per week for skilled workers—and the internal working conditions are a reflection of the lack of organisation in the factory. But this is changing. Last year, the boss (who drives a Rolls Royce) tried to con them into signing away their rights to equal pay for £1 in October. Now, the twenty five women are picketing the factory—negotiations have failed.

Everyone of the women on the picket agrees that if the men in the factory supported them, the strike would be over quickly, with a victory. The picket represents that willingness to fight is building up all over this area. This dispute over equal pay has sparked off other women to become active.

**Messages of support:** June Williams, 45 Manor House Road, Wednesbury, West Midlands.

## COLOUR TREND VICTORY

**THE WORKERS of Colortrend, a film processing plant in Rugeley, Staffs, have won their dispute. Management had refused to accept the transfer of six workers from the Transport and General Workers Union (T&G) into ASTMS (Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs).**

Both unions and the government's conciliation service had recommended the transfer, so the ASTMS members came out on strike. But the T&G members crossed the picket line every day as management had lied to them about the strike.

When the T&G members who are mostly women, found out that they had not been told the truth about the strike, they came out in support of the ASTMS strikers; and suddenly management was agreeing to talks which they'd refused for months!

Now the technicians and the trainees have gained recognition of their new union. They have also won the demand to go on weekly salary, instead of hourly pay, after working for 12 months in the factory. And also the personnel manager did not intervene in the final stages of negotiations—which was one of the demands of the strikers.

On returning to work, some engineers in ASTMS faced being forced to immediately take two days holiday they were owed, even though they had already included these days in their summer holiday bookings. When it became clear that this was an attempt to penalise those who had helped the strike and picket—and that these attacks would be fought by the union—the threat was withdrawn. As Trevor, one of the ASTMS members said, 'This dispute has strengthened our organisation.'

The task now is to build links between the T&G members and the ASTMS members in the factory. One of the women in the T&G, who came to the Right to Work Rally in London, said that it would be a long process, and a hard one. But for people like her who are resolved to fight, the future appears a lot better than it did one month ago.



**Women in China** by Katy Curtin, published by Pathfinder Press, 65p.

**Reviewed by Judith Lancaster**

*'A woman married is like a pony bought—to be ridden or whipped at her master's pleasure.'* Old Chinese proverb, which reveals something of the conditions suffered by women in pre-Communist China.

Another proverb refers to the barbarous custom of binding women's feet. This was introduced in tenth century China as a sign of gentility, but its real reason is shown by another proverb: 'Feet are bound, not to make them beautiful as a curved bow, but to restrain women when they go out of doors.' The result of this vicious practice was to reduce the foot to three inches in length from heel to toe.

**Women in China** outlines the struggles of the early women's movement, and explains the changing attitudes of the Chinese Communist Party towards women's emancipation. Before 1927, the Chinese Communist Party saw the women's movement as an ally on the road to socialist revolution. But after the massacres of Communist workers by the nationalist troops (with Stalin's backing) in 1927, the Communist Party, firmly under Stalin's grip, viewed the women's struggles as secondary to the needs of the Party.

The Chinese civil war ended in 1949, and the People's Republic of China was proclaimed. Women were given the right to vote, female infanticide and prostitution were forbidden. New marriage laws were introduced which gave women rights to own property, free choice in marriage, divorce and the custody of children.

## WOMEN IN CHINA

### reviews

However, in 1953 the first five year plan came into operation. While millions of women had been involved in various movements, and in the civil war before 1949, now this involvement was seen as threatening the New Economic Plan. The Chinese Communist Party ordered all the different women's organisations to disband. Women's liberation is now complete, was the claim, and no longer required independent struggles by women.

As a result, the political role of women was downgraded, and more emphasis placed on their role in population and within the family. This led to the gains that had been won being slowly eroded as the old patterns re-emerged. Arranged marriages reappeared in some rural areas, and women activists reported great difficulties in distributing booklets on the marriage laws in coastal towns.

The book also discusses attitudes to birth control, abortion and sexuality. The official line has apparently never been put down on paper, but it appears that the right of women to control their own bodies has always been totally subservient to population needs. In 1956 an editorial in the Peking Kuang jih pas reported that in several pharmaceutical plants the 'production of contraceptives had been stopped. Later on that very year, with population

growth soaring, a mass birth control programme was launched.

Many women have entered into areas of work that were previously totally male dominated; operating lathes repairing ships and so on. In 1957 China had a squadron of jet fighters run entirely by women. But the other side of the coin is that jobs like kindergarten and nursery teaching, and nursing, are still all done by women. The higher up the teaching scale one goes, the smaller the percentage of women.

Women don't even get Equal Pay. At Tachai, the model production brigade is visited by millions of peasants and used as an example they should be striving towards in their own localities. There are ten pay categories: ten points for a strong man, seven points for a single productive woman, down to six and a half points for a married woman. The women get less points because they are considered 'weaker', though a visitor noted that the women did heavy work in just the same way as men. The point system was clearly based on sex. A male would earn 450 yen a year, but a woman only 300.

I have tried to point out a few of the things that most struck me from this book—to go further into many important aspects of women's conditions in China you will have to read the book.

Although important gains have been made, other areas have been disregarded. Not only do pay differentials exist between men and women, but also between workers, peasants and members of the ruling bureaucracy. Any society where sexual needs are repressed and the oppression of women within the family reinforced cannot claim to be truly socialist. Only when this oppression is challenged and overturned will women gain complete emancipation, in China as anywhere else.

# WOMENS VOICE

# THIS PROVES IT!

## The abortion battle can be won but only through rank and file trade union action

THE 3 April National Abortion Campaign demonstration was a success, with 15,000 people turning out to march for abortion rights. Yet the number of marchers was less than half the magnificent 40,000 who turned out last June.

A look at the list of trade union banners carried on 3 April reveals an interesting fact. Trade union support has not declined. Our list of the trade union banners shows almost the same number as the list for 21 June, published in the July Womens Voice. It is also interesting to see that although Trades Council support in June was overwhelmingly from London, this time places further afield predominate—Sheffield, Manchester, Newcastle, Hemel Hempstead, Leicester, Braintree, Chelmsford, Nottingham. In addition to the banners carried, many other trade union branches supported and helped sponsor the demonstration.

In other words, on a demonstration less than half the size, in the weary wake of two week-ends of national mobilisation over the Right to Work, rank and file trade union support has kept up.

Ever since last Spring, Womens Voice has argued that the campaign should organise in the unions and workplaces, to involve working class men and women. Those who have supported this position have been proven right. In Manchester, Sheffield, Newcastle and many other places their work is beginning to pay off.

At the same time, in spite of some excellent local initiatives, and hard work, many NAC groups have dwindled. And whereas after 21 June new groups were set up, we are unlikely to see this after 3 April.

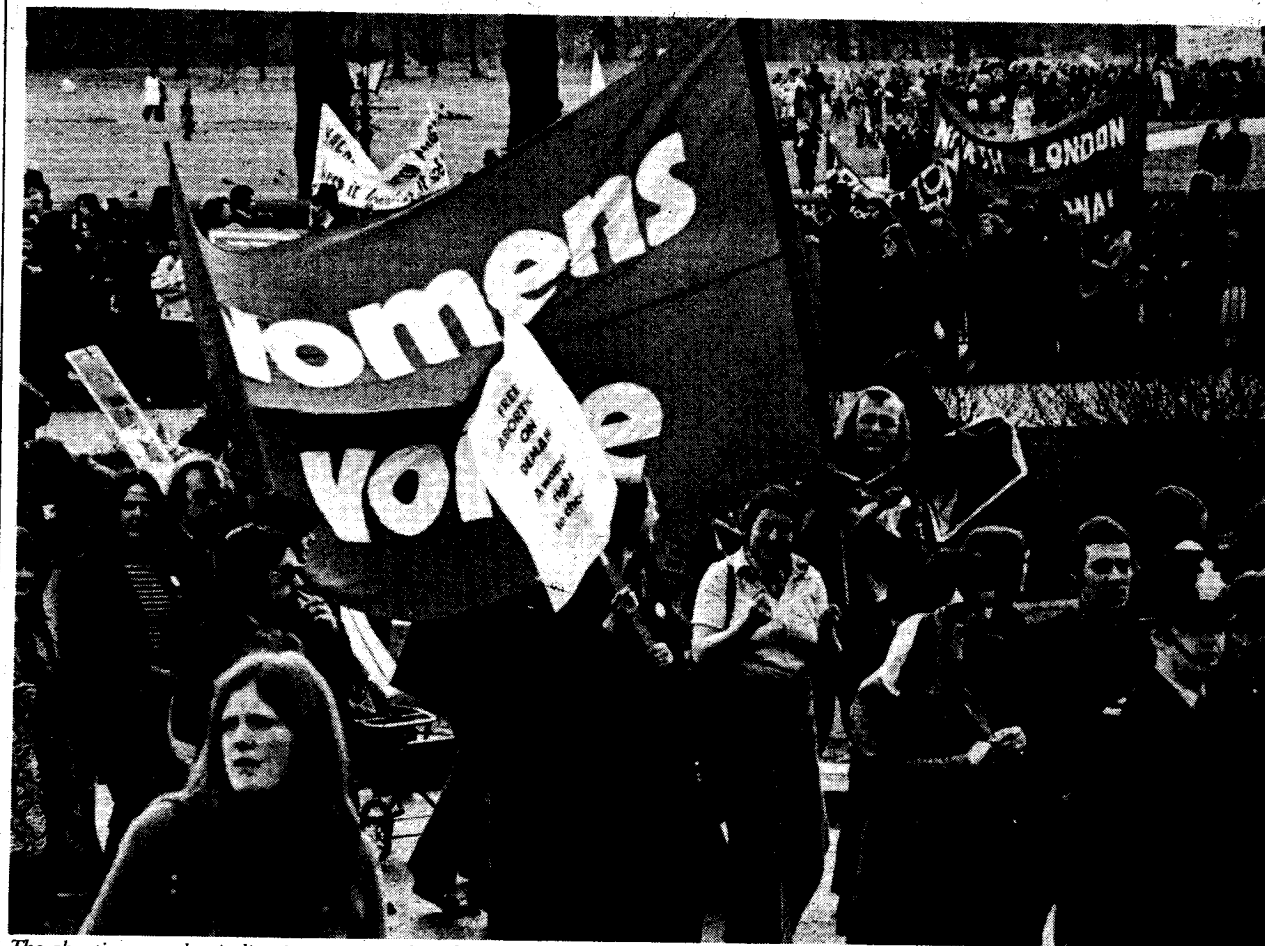
**One major reason has been the failure of the NAC steering committee to build an aggressive and active campaign with national focus. Between June and April all we had was a national conference.**

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**One major reason has been the failure of the NAC steering committee to build an aggressive and active campaign with national focus. Between June and April**

### TRADE UNION BANNERS ON THE DEMONSTRATION INCLUDED—

**TRADES COUNCILS:** Islington, Southwark, Camden, Lambeth, Hemel Hempstead, Hounslow, Todmorden, Bristol, Sheffield, Newcastle, Manchester, Nottingham, Leicester, Braintree, Chelmsford.  
**NALGO:** Essex, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, LSE, GLC, Islington, Hackney, Camden, Sheffield, Rotherham, Waltham Forest.  
**GMWU** International



The abortion march winding its way out of Hyde Park.

Picture: Angela Phillips IFL

### WHY WE OPPOSE SPUC

THE Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC) held a week of action from March 20 to 27th, as part of their campaign against women's rights. They called it the 'Witness one million week', to mourn the fact that one million fetuses have been legally aborted under the 1967 Abortion Act.

They do not take into account that illegal abortion does not mean no abortion. In reality, the highest abortion rates are in countries where abortion is illegal, such as Italy, where the World Health Organisation report states that 1½ million abortions a year are carried out.

In England, in towns where most women who need abortions can get them on the National Health Service, there are less abortions carried out. Where it is difficult to get an abortion on the NHS, the number is higher. Why? Because in places where it is easier to get an abortion, there is usually good family planning advice, which helps prevent unwanted pregnancy.

While SPUC were spreading their reactionary propaganda, Womens Voice and NAC supporters were out on the streets challenging them and to tell as many people as they could why we demand freely available abortion on the NHS.

## ...and SPUC crept off

THE LOCAL SPUC group proposed to march along our local High Street as a culmination to their 'Witness One million week'. But they had shock when they turned into the High Street, for, there to greet them was a group of local Womens Voice and NAC supporters.

We picketed their march, handing out leaflets to the shoppers explaining why we were demonstrating against the SPUC people.

The SPUC group had planned to have a short service in the main shopping precinct but on seeing and hearing our arguments and demands, they soon changed their minds. They crept away after a few minutes and we continued to distribute leaflets and talk to the women and men who were interested in our arguments.

This was the first time SPUC had been openly challenged to Brentwood and they were extremely alarmed. They will find it much less easy to spread their muck around Brentwood in the future, because we will continue to fight and gain support for abortion on demand and the right of all women to organise their own lives.

all we had was a national conference.

Womens Voice took the lead in organising a picket against the SPUC march in October. Without that picket there would have been no opposition to the massive SPUC turn-out in the popular national Press. As it was, for all the imbalance of members we got a good showing. The Daily Mirror reported the action, not the talking, just as we predicted.

Womens Voice argued all through the summer and autumn the need for a national demonstration. We also argued for a democratically structured campaign—so that those local NAC groups would not dwindle, but their imagination and enthusiasm would come through in the national

leadership.

**We still think we're right.**

Barbara Castle has just announced massive cuts in the Health Service. What services are to be cut most of all? MATERNITY! If maternity wards are being axed, and the Labour party MPs are filing like sheep into the lobbies to support the cuts—what chance is there that they will stand up and fight for free abortion on demand? Absolutely none.

Yet many NAC leaders are burying their heads in the sand, still calling abstractly for abortion on demand, and putting their faith in a handful of MPs to do the job for us.

Womens Voice says this is a political campaign, and a very important one. Every cut in the social services, welfare

benefits, hospitals and nurseries, makes it more and more a political issue. All these factors increase the need for free abortion. This is the point where our campaign should be really taking off—not getting fudged by parliamentary procedures. To hell that NAC is in contempt of parliament. We have been in contempt of parliament, of Leo Abse, Barbara Castle, Jill Knight and their ilk for the time for calling on magical members to do it all for us is long gone.

**This campaign has to go back to the grass roots. The only way forward on abortion rights—just as on unemployment and against the cuts—is to make it our own fight in every trade union branch, in every workplace, in every hospital, in every locality.**

**CPSA:** British Museum, British Library, Central London.  
**ACTS** (white collar T&G) Central London  
**COHSE:** Prestwich  
**ACT** National banner  
**TGWU:** High Wycombe  
**ASTMS:** No 15 Division (London), West London Medical, Central London Medical, North West London Medical, Northwick Park, 585 Ipswich.

**NUPE:** Manchester Hospitals  
**NATFHE (ATTI)** Inner London Regional Council, West Ham, Ealing, Kilburn, Enfield, Southwark, Herts, Loughton College, Thames.  
**NUT:** Sheffield, Nottingham, Leicester, Mid Leicester, East London  
**NUJ:** Bookbranch  
**Time Time Out NUJ/SOGAT joint chapel**  
**UPW:** London Overseas Telephone Operators no 1 and no 2 branches

**AUEW:** National banner  
**National Union of Students**  
**Probation Officers**  
**Artists Union**

**WOMENS VOICE GROUPS:** Hackney, NORTH LONDON, Birmingham, Pontefract, Hull, West Middlesex.  
 Glasgow: 300 marched in Glasgow at the same time as the demonstration in London. The demo was supported by the Womens Committee of Glasgow Trades Council and Dumfries Trades Council. There were also banners from NALGO and ASTMS.

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## NURSES THANK US FOR SUPPORT

LEAMINGTON, Warwickshire has for some time been a centre of the anti-abortion lobby. And on Saturday, 27 March, SPUC (Society for the Protection of Unborn Children) held a demo to air their views. Following a meeting attended by many nuns and small children, their demo marched through the town centre to the Blackdown abortion clinic about one mile from the town.

While SPUC were holding their meeting in the town centre a counter rally assembled close by for a street meeting. Leaflets were handed out to Saturday shoppers explaining the threat to womens rights which is posed by the select committee considering

alterations to the 1967 Abortion Act. Some of them gave up shopping and joined us.

Some teenage girls, seeing the two hostile meetings which were in progress came up and asked which side we were on. After someone had explained that we wanted abortion to be freely available to those women who wanted it, one of them said, 'that's great, that's my side'. And they stayed with us for the rest of the afternoon.

Our attempts to join the SPUC meeting, with megaphones, met with some discouragement from local police, but we joined their silent march and continued to put our case. Outside the Blackdown clinic we formed a picket and SPUC were obliged to carry on

their lamentable activities faced by angry pro-abortionists.

A bagpiper, showing little consideration for people who might be in the clinic, struck up a funeral dirge. We replied by calling for 'Free abortion on demand, A Woman's Right to Choose', and the slogan was kept up while the bishop said a prayer.

But the afternoon ended quietly and after SPUC had dispersed the staff of Blackdown invited us in for a cup of tea.

SPUC unrealistically claim to represent a majority view on the abortion issue. And in order to ensure that their views are not embodied in future we must keep up our activities locally and nationally to campaign for a woman's right to choose.