

Womens Voice



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Womens Voice 8

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Editorial

The Tories have problems! But unlike most people, they don't suffer from their problems—we do.

Problem Number One—Inflation. First solution was to freeze wages—but they discovered that it wasn't 'greedy' workers that caused inflation because prices rose quicker than ever. The signs are it will get worse—prices will keep rising through the winter and as usual working people will suffer most.

Problem Number Two—Housing. House building has slumped—private houses are hard to sell because mortgages are difficult to get as well as expensive, so that builders aren't keen to build; and Council houses because interest rates are high and councils can't afford to borrow the money to build. For homeless people, people in slums and young couples looking for their first home the situation is dreadful. For those paying rents and mortgages its costing more and more to keep a roof over their heads. The people who already own houses are laughing—the rest of us will suffer..

Problem Number Three—Education.—Part time schooling for our kids at secondary school. The government didn't bother to plan for extra teachers when they raised the school leaving age, so now many schools are short of staff. Who suffers—teachers, having to teach larger or more classes—kids, having sub-standard schooling—and parents, worrying about what their kids are doing when they're turned away from school—some mothers may have to take time off work.

All these problems, that we feel the brunt of, will really start to bite as winter approaches, with higher heating bills and an even tighter control of wages under Phase 3. The only way the Tories know how to keep the boat (or yacht) afloat when the sea gets rough is to attack living standards.

Women, who are the ones who feel the attack most, must be involved in the fight against the Tories' solutions to their 'problems'. In places like GEC Coventry, women have shown the way forward—and have fought on for a decent living wage despite having no support from men in the factory (see article in this issue). Other women in places like Liverpool and Manchester are leading tenants in action against the Housing Finance Act.

We can expect a lot of resistance by workers in the coming months. Women workers must join these fights and fight alongside their brothers. Housewives must back these fights and organise around their estates for decent rents, living conditions etc.

The Tories say that the only way to save our economy is for us to suffer hardships. We say to them—'We're not supporting the system that lines your pockets and keeps us working all our lives in order to keep our heads above water (if we're lucky) and to spend our retiring years in frozen poverty. We're going to fight you and then build a society based on human need and not on profit and riches for 5% of the population.'

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Women fight back



Rosie Ingleby's Eviction.

Morning Star

East London Eviction

Hackney, East London is an area with a housing crisis as the Ingleby family know only too well. Rosie Ingleby, her husband, who is under the hospital, and her six kids have been fighting for a decent home for nine years now.

They are fighting against the odds. Rents go up and up and accommodation of any sort is almost impossible to find unless you're one of the rich who is now buying up houses in Hackney. They are also fighting the council which is failing to provide decent homes for many working-class people in Hackney who desperately need them.

Rosie and her family have been in and out of 'half way houses', a reception centre, and have squatted five times. They were once given a flat but it was over-run with rats and the council refused to improve it. Rosie applied through all the welfare channels—social workers, health inspector, child inspector—all agreed that the flat was in a deplorable condition. But still nothing was done. Eventually Rosie squatted once more and was again evicted. This time the council offered her a house which did not have a proper toilet, the floors were a mass of holes due to woodworm and dry rot and the kitchen was supposed to be a bedroom as well. In addition to all that, the area was about to be redeveloped anyway.

Rosie has refused the offer and was squatting again until she was evicted by the bailiffs.

Women's Voice interviewed her the day before her eviction. She had collected a petition with hundreds of signatures from women on the local council estate who supported her demand for a proper home.

The councils believe that because you're homeless, you will accept anything. Rosie is one of thousands in this plight all over the country, but she is still fighting back.

London- Tenants Win Adventure

In the early summer of this year, as secretary of the Avondale Square Tenants Association in South East London, I discovered that a derelict plot of ground in a nearby road was being deliberately left unused by the Southwark Borough Council to provide that essential facility for the development of the area—a lorry park. There were abortive negotiations with the local council who advised us to be patient. Several mothers from the estate along with husbands and children and tenants from the two other local estates, marched to the site and took it over for the Rolls Road Play Action Group.

This forced Southwark Council to recognise their claim, and they are using the site as an adventure playground, with a trained playleader. The local children who in the past have been constantly accused of crimes such as 'climbing' and other acts of unbridled vandalism have found that on their adventure playground these acts are not 'crimes'. They are building their own structures, eg an aerial runway, cooking baked spuds on their own fires and using their own tools. Council tenants should insist on having such facilities on all estates as of right, instead of harassed mothers being forced to 'discipline' their kids by forbidding them to indulge in any play activity whatsoever.

PS. On a less optimistic note, in spite of all the efforts (leaflets, posters, word of mouth etc) of the parents and children immediately involved, hardly any adults have been prepared to help on the site. Suggestions would be welcomed from successful playground ventures. **Deidre Hickey, Secretary, Rolls Road Play Action Group**

Playground

Reports from
womens'
struggles over
the past two
months...



Birmingham- Lucas women ready to carry on fight

The women of the Lucas plant in Birmingham, who have been offered the government's £100 million 'Charity' wage offer, can only be seen as disappointed. The offer is a small and lower rate than the £100 million offer. That is why the women are so angry. They are angry by giving the women £100 million, which is an extra 38p towards Equal Pay. The conveners gave the women £100 million, but the offer was not passed through in most factories.

At the Lucas plant, the WLU and TOWU shop stewards said: 'We are disgusted with the offer. We are also very angry about it being a differential offer. The whole production group, particularly the women, were being used to subsidise the well-organised, skilled section.'

The company hoped to distract us from how low the offer was by setting one section of the workforce against another. The skilled section is well organised and therefore in a position to fight for better wages. The women though larger in number, have always come out worst in pay deals, because we are so badly organised. The union leadership has failed to involve us and represent us properly.

Concerning rises towards Equal Pay, the company first hoped that we would sit back and accept half of what we're entitled to. (Even the Tories' Phase 2 entitled us to one third of the difference between male and female rates—90p).

They wanted on selling the offer to the women to weaken the backbone of any opposition by offering us almost all we could get towards Equal Pay. The women were blinded by the company's 'Charity' in giving us this extra 38p, and forgot how small the offer really was. In fact it's the unskilled men who come out worst from the whole offer, and many of them feel that the women have let them down. The company hopes to pay out less towards Equal Pay by keeping the whole production group's rate as low as possible. The women must fight WITH THE MEN for a decent across the board wage for all.

Although it sounds a story of defeat, we haven't given up. There are good trade unionists prepared to have a go in the different factories. They are not given the leadership they deserve, and rank and file organisation on the shop floor is weak, especially among women. We must change this throughout the whole combine. We produced leaflets throughout the claim explaining how women were being used, we also held meetings of workers from the different factories. These were only small, but are the beginnings of the organisation we hope to build up. Too few women are prepared to stand up for themselves, but we must start making our voices heard, and make sure all our shop stewards are representing us properly. We need more good women stewards.

We're sick of being told we go out to work for pin money, nobody works on a production line for fun. We go out to work because we have to and we're determined to get a fair deal.

S Wales - Housewives get backing in Gas Fight

Housewives and women trade unionists have been playing a leading role in the fierce battle that is being waged in the South Wales village of Hirwann near Aberdare.

Hirwann sheltering within the grandeur of the Brecon Beacons is an industrial village close to several collieries and a large new industrial estate. What natural beauty survived the wreckage of nineteenth century industrialisation has been further eroded by the two massive blocks of flats which the council recently saw fit to build.

Now the Gas Board has plans to take this process of destruction a stage further and endanger the lives of local inhabitants and workers with the construction of two huge gas tanks on a site less than half a mile from the flats and a junior school.

These tanks, for storing natural gas, were to be 150 feet high and 150 feet in diameter; after construction they would employ only a handful of workers. Similar tanks in other parts of the world have proved lethal—only three months ago tanks like these exploded in New York claiming 46 lives.

For the bureaucrats and planners Hirwann was obviously an ideal spot to put the monster tanks: no olde-worlde charm like the Vale of Glamorgan, and no wealthy and influential inhabitants to protest about the effect on the value of their property.

But the people of Hirwann have given their plans a nasty jolt.

Round-the-clock picketing of the construction site was started by people from the village, mostly women, supported at the weekend by workers from the industrial estate. And very soon the women picketers were learning in whose interest 'our' police are employed—as the bruises they proudly bear go to show.

What has been a striking and decisive feature of the struggle ever since has been the support received from local trade union branches, shop stewards and miners' lodges, over 50 of which have helped with picketing, declared the site 'black' and are now pledged to stop every pit and factory in the area if the Gas Board persists.

And twice there have been mass walk-outs in working hours from the Hirwann Industrial Estate, led by a women's band. It has been this uncompromising show of strength by the organised workers which has now stopped the Gas Board and government in their tracks; whereas earlier deputations and use of 'official' channels proved absolutely useless.

Construction has now been halted and the Gas Board is being forced to look for alternative sites.

This struggle was won by the brave defiance of local residents and the demonstration of strength by the local labour movement. Jill Jones



South Wales:—Women demonstrate



Members of the Leeds Action group demonstrate

Leeds - Victory against Corporation Planners

Matthew Murray is a 1500-pupil comprehensive school set in the drab, underdeveloped landscape of industrial South Leeds. The last thing it needs is a motorway feeder-road for heavy traffic outside the school windows, through the playing field, only 120 feet from the building. Yet this was the Leeds Corporation's proposal two years ago.

The dangers were obvious—noise, distraction, air pollution, spoiling the playing fields—not to mention the possibility of kids trying to retrieve footballs etc from the road itself. An Action Group including two members of the International Socialists, one a parent and one a teacher, was formed to fight the plan.

Councillors and City Planning officials produced bland assurances and complicated calculations to prove that 'landscaping' would get rid of these problems. Replacement playing-fields would be provided by filling-in a disused quarry.

The Action Group was not satisfied and lodged an official objection with the Department of the Environment. The job of raising the £500 for legal help began. Sponsored walks and swims, jumble sales and raffles were held and parents sent donations that they could ill afford.

A Public Enquiry was ordered by the government. The four-day long enquiry was an education for many who attended. Jean Horsman, mother of two boys at the school, said: 'It was clear that we were up against the might of the Corporation's wealth, experience and influence.'

The Corporation had hired an experienced and no doubt expensive barrister, whereas the Action Group's young, sympathetic barrister was taking less than his usual fee.

Half the hall was filled with planning department employees, presumably on full pay, whilst parents attending as witnesses lost a day's pay.

The result of the Enquiry, almost a year later was a victory for the Action Group. The Inspector's report said that the road should be put in a tunnel where it passed the school; that work should not begin until adequate extra playing-fields were ready for use, and that construction work should be outside school hours. He also suggested that an indoor sports arena should be built as added compensation.

Now the Action Group is keeping a close watch on the Corporation to make sure that the Report's recommendations are carried out.

Elsie Johnson, one of the parents who started the campaign said: 'People told us we were wasting our time, but we've proved that united action by ordinary people can make councils and governments change their plans. If we can do it so can other people.'

Kirkby - Protest at Rent Rises

'On Tower Hill where rents are high
Demands to pay we still defy
The bailiffs' threats we still ignore
They fortify us all the more.
So come with us and join the fight
Preserve your homes, They are your right.
With ordered step and flag unfurled
Unite to build a better world.'

Chanting and singing, hundreds of men, women and children marched through Kirkby on 1 September in a big protest against the latest rent rises under the Housing Finance Act. The march, led by the banner of the Kirkby Unfair Rents Action Committee marched to the town centre with groups of tenants from all over the north west, and local trade union organisations. About 500 tenants are still alive in the rent strike after a year of resistance. At a meeting at the end of the rally Ethel Singleton, a Liverpool tenants' leader, urged every trade unionist to support the tenants' struggle—rent rises are

effectively a wage cut, she said.

Since the last batch of council notices informing the tenants of the further 50p increase, more and more tenants are re-joining the rent strike. As one woman told the Action Group, 'Last time I put the money to one side. This time I'm going to spend it, I can't afford not to.'

Since the demonstration a Liaison Committee has been set up between tenants from all areas of Kirkby, including 12 rebel Labour councillors, to raise support for Tower Hill by trying to get other rent strikes off the ground. Unfortunately though, it looks as if other areas will be going for partial rent strikes, that is, just withholding the increase, and as past experience in Kirkby, and nationally has shown, these have been far less successful.

Tower Hill tenants are making preparations to celebrate their 12 month anniversary on total rent strike in October.

Slumberland- Management have been asleep for years

On 25 June, 23 women and 6 men went on strike at Slumberland Ltd, Paisley. After 12 weeks they are still out fighting for union recognition. They are all members of ASTMS, but when they applied for negotiating rights back in September, the bosses replied by doing a deal with the shopfloor union (FTATU) behind their backs. Now the girls have been told to get back to work or consider themselves sacked. None of them have any intention of going back to work without the union being recognised, for although the office has only been organised for 12 months, the women are well aware of the advantages. As Peggy McGroarty—supervisor in the machine room said: 'We are more determined than ever now. We discovered no two had the same wages, some got paid for overtime, others didn't. And that's the way the bosses like it.'

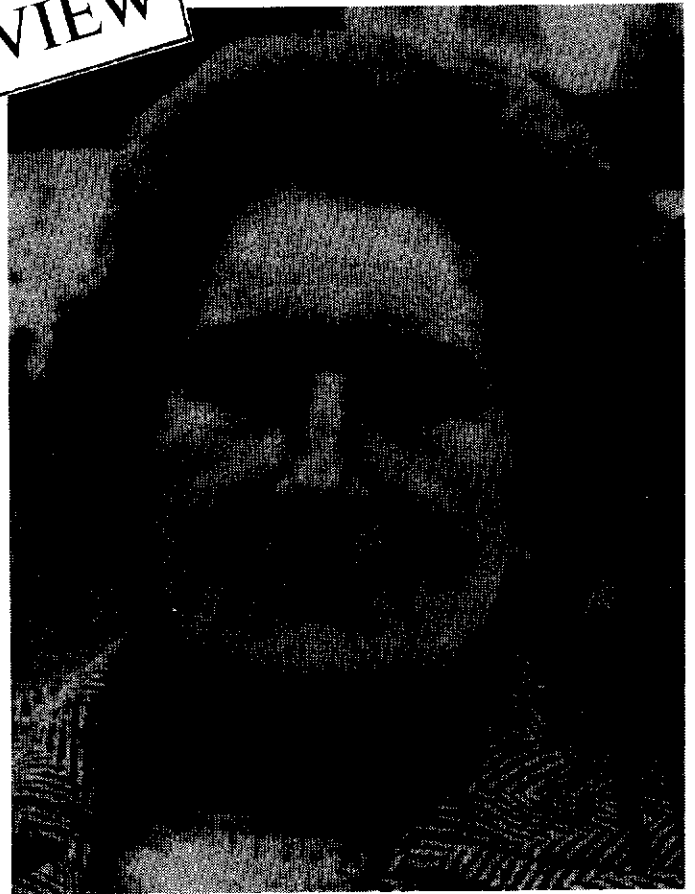
The bosses have done their best to confuse the workforce and wriggle out of the hot seat by putting around the story that this is an inter-union dispute. But Pat Caulfield, ASTMS Group Organiser at Slumberland told Women's Voice: 'This is definitely not an inter-union squabble. The management went behind our backs in doing this deal—the fight is with them.' And workers at the Southwold factory have called on their union, the FTATU, to publicly deny the bosses' claim.

So far the strike has been solid, though two women were forced to leave when their children were turned away from nursery school because 'they were no longer working'. The management have tried the usual trick of breaking the strike by getting in agency staff, but a strong picket has effectively stopped this. And although they have resorted to calling in the forces of 'law and order', morale on the picket line is still high. Mrs Kennedy, the wages clerk told Women's Voice: 'If it hadn't been for the women in the houses opposite who have made our tea and let us use their toilets, the past 12 weeks would have been a lot worse for us.'

This weekend, talks are due to take place between the management and ASTMS officials, but if the outcome doesn't satisfy the Paisley workers, they plan to step up the fight by bringing other workers onto the picket line. Support has been pledged by Chrysler Linwood, Babcock & Wilcox, workers at Glasgow Airport, and other local firms. Workers at J & P Coates have blacked supplies of thread and this is beginning to take effect.

The girls at Slumberland are determined they are not going to be pushed around by the management anymore, but they are a small shop and will need all the support they can get if they are going to win this important fight. The shopfloor at all Slumberland factories should openly back the office workers and put paid to the bosses' antics once and for all.

INTERVIEW



JOAN DUCARROIR

English-born French housewife and revolutionary socialist candidate at the last French elections talked to 'Womens Voice'.

Joan Ducarroir became a revolutionary firstly because, as she says, 'I've always been a rebel.' Joan is now 51, she was reared in London's East End where as she says, 'I saw living conditions and working conditions I try to forget, but I don't forget them.' After the war she married a French worker and went to live in France where she brought up her five children. She now lives on a large council estate dumped on the outer edge of the Paris suburbs. Life for her as for other working women has been a struggle, 'Now I had responsibilities I found myself always thinking about the problem of living. But I thought I was isolated. Although I could see there was lots to be done, I thought 'nobody else thinks like me'.

In 1967 Joan tried to join the Communist Party which is the largest working class party in France. But the Communist Party thought she was too much to take on, too much of a rebel, and they refused to let her join. Joan says, 'I was getting quite a complex, thinking I was different from other people, which I'm not at all. 'If the Communist Party won't have me, what is there,' I thought. Then one Sunday morning a young man came to the house selling the revolutionary socialist paper Lutte Ouvriere (Workers' Struggle). When I asked him what it was about, to my surprise, I found that what they were saying was what I'd been thinking all along. So of course I had to join them. I'm not with Lutte Ouvriere because I like them, but because they think like me.'

Since Joan found she was not alone she has begun to

organise on her estate. Although there are lots of problems on the estate— as Joan says, 'it's one continual problem—it's not so easy to organise to get things done. It's hard for French women to get involved in politics. Not because they don't understand their problems. But when you've worked hard all day long and worked when you get home at night too and have to look after the kids and get up early in the morning to take them to school, well that stops you from being active. It's not because women don't want to. Often we just can't. But it's a question of upbringing. French women especially are expected to be good housekeepers and mothers and they have been prevented from realising that they have a part to play in local and political life. Most French husbands don't realise that their wives could be active in these sort of things. Women will sign a petition but it's very hard to get them to do things.'

However with more and more problems, prices and rents going up and so on, facing working class women in France, as they do in England, women are becoming more and more frustrated and angry. On a big estate like the one Joan lives on there is always something people are dissatisfied about, something to fight about. And whether it is a big matter like rents or charges or little matters, Joan is always there fighting, in the forefront of every campaign. 'For example there was the heating business. We protested because they had a set time to turn the heating on and off. Well we said 'summer and winter don't stop and start on your set dates.' They used to cut off all our heating on the 1st April, and you know April can be colder than midwinter. So we protested. We went to the town hall, signed petitions, went to the estate office but we got no satisfaction. The tenants committee was controlled by the Communist Party who were trying to be respectable on the council so they wouldn't do anything. So another woman and I got together and organised and we asked other tenants around whether they were satisfied with the position. No-one we spoke to was. We found that all tenants were concerned and decided to have a petition over the whole estate, all together. We asked every tenant to sign our petition. Everyone did. And after that we won. Now they tell the caretakers to come and see us, the tenants, before they turn the heating off. There was another occasion when the heating boiler broke down—in the middle of winter. We phoned and asked the council to mend it. After a week nothing had been done so we phoned the firm and asked them how long it would take to mend the boiler. They said that if they had the authorisation from the mayor it would only take a couple of hours. So then the tenants asked the mayor to come to the estate. When he got there we locked him in the boiler-room and told him that we wouldn't let him out until he'd signed the piece of paper that would get the boiler mended. In ten minutes he'd signed the authorisation and in four hours the job was all done. That action was very successful.'

'There was another campaign about a crossing light. On our estate there was a lady killed as she was getting off the bus because there was no crossing light and no proper pull-in off the main road for the bus. So she had to get off in the middle of the road. We all agreed that there should be a pedestrian traffic light. We decided that four people killed on that road was enough. We collected over a thousand signatures. Then a deputation of 18 of us went to the police administration and asked why we couldn't have traffic lights. They told us it was because we were going to have a by-pass in a year's time and that the mayor, who leads the Communist controlled council, had said that traffic lights would not serve any useful purpose on the estate. You can just imagine what the people on the delegation felt about that. So we rushed straight to the town hall and told the mayor exactly what we thought. I think he took the point because we got our traffic lights and the pull-in for the bus.'

Local issues can sometimes also be for national issues. And when the government announced that it was going to put up the bus and tube fares in the Paris area yet again, Joan played a leading part in a local transport committee which linked up with committees over the whole of Paris and the surround-

ing area, formed to fight these fare increases. Very many people got involved in this campaign and there was a massive demonstration through Paris. 'It was a great success—but not a great success for the government because they had to go back on their decision to allow the increases.' Joan says that it is from that point on that revolutionary socialists really began to make themselves heard in the area. People have taken a great interest in the passenger committees and felt it was something valuable achieved.

Joan is well-known on the estate where she sells *Lutte Ouvriere's* weekly paper. She says 'what people like about our paper is the information they wouldn't get in the ordinary press. When they read it it's clear to them that things are not going as well as the radio and television would have us believe. I know people who, when they have read it, are amazed that there are so many strikes going on, little strikes that they've never heard about. Of course they've not heard about them because we are not supposed to know, the government don't want people to get organised anywhere. They wouldn't feel safe if they did. After people have read our paper they really feel they know something about struggles which are happening and which of course we don't hide.'

ELECTIONS LEGISLATIVES du 4 MARS 1973
8^e Circonscription de la Seine-Saint-Denis

Joan DUCARROIR

Ménagère - 51 ans

candidate de

LUTTE
OUVRIÈRE

Suppléant :

In the last French elections Joan stood as a revolutionary socialist candidate for *Lutte Ouvriere*. *Lutte Ouvriere* put up 170 all working class candidates, including 46 women. Between them these candidates got 200,000 votes. Joan got 1,500 votes. The main idea was not to get a place in parliament but in order to take advantage of the election campaign, which as Joan put it, 'gives us a chance to do on a big scale what we try to do all the time. That is to express what ordinary workers think and want. We didn't expect to win any seats and some people may think we're not very serious but they can't get away from the things we say. I know what I mean and mean it. Being working class may not seem very important to the professional politicians and the people who have their place nicely set out in society but my husband and children we contribute to the riches of the capitalists. We have the right to say what working class people want. They don't understand what we want, only working class people themselves understand that. The people in the flats round here often think of revolutionaries as people who burn cars and throw stones. The impression they were given in May '68. But the people who know me on the estate have seen me with petitions, perhaps shouting when necessary. They take me for someone ordinary, not mad. We want people to know that they are talking about the struggle for working class people's rights and you don't have to burn a cat to tell a worker he's exploited and he has the right to live decently. Our aim is to make people think, men and women, to make them realise they must fight to get their rights. Because once we realise that the struggle will not be won by elections, and that we have to struggle in the factories, on the estates, in our own organisations everywhere, only then will we get our rights.'

VICTORY FOR GEC WOMEN

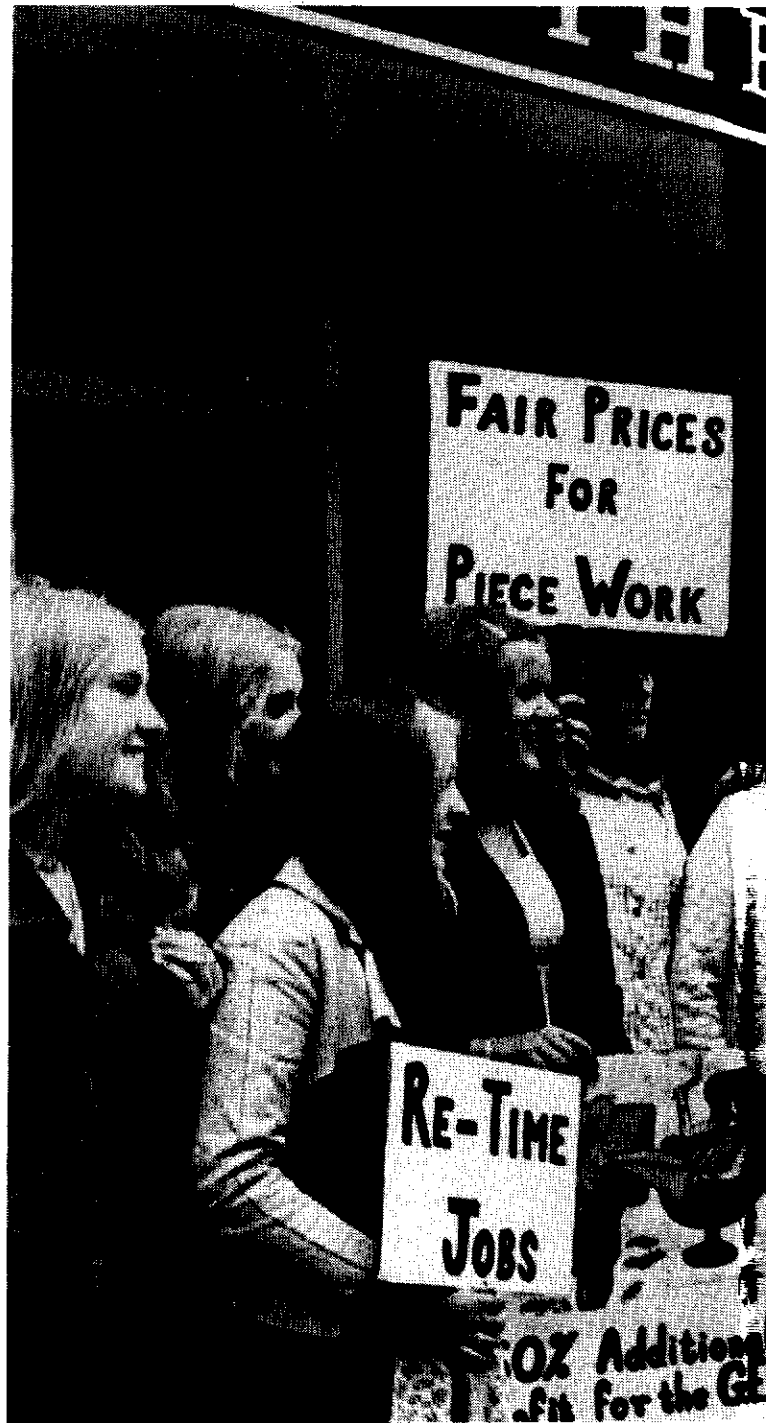
Just before the holiday fortnight late in July 200 women on the first floor of the GEC Spon Street plant in Coventry walked out in protest at management refusal to retime the jobs of 6 girls. The girls, working for a basic £13 a week, have watched their bonus earnings drop to a mere pittance since changed materials were introduced into the job. Management used the freeze as an excuse to refuse a retime—although Phase 2 specifically allows for a retime where job method, or content have changed.

When the women first came out, everyone was expecting to win a speedy victory—GEC had a huge American order on their hands, with a heavy fine and a threat of no more orders if the work was not completed on time. This however was to reckon without the sabotaging activities of the Spon Street AUEW convener, Albert Beardmore. After a week spent telling lorry drivers to cross the women's picket line, suggesting to management that they should bring goods through the gates during mass meetings, calling in the company personnel manager to talk to the women and returning from the pub after lunch abusing, and swearing at the pickets, Beardmore finally managed to get the women back to work. He told them that the strike was 'illegal' and they would have to give 7 days notice to management before they came out again.

When everybody went back to work for a week after the holiday fortnight, Beardmore attempted to prevent another walkout by using the shopstewards committee to move against the deputy convener, Elsie Moles. Elsie had played a leading part in the girls fight for decent work rates.

Like many factories where the majority of workers are women, the men are ever represented on the shop stewards committee. Whereas 6 shop stewards represent less than 100 men, the 400 AUEW production women have only 3 stewards between them. (In the machine shop, where the majority of AUEW male members are concentrated, wages are over £50 a week—a big contrast to the meagre pittance earned by the girls who are demanding that their jobs be retimed.) Because this is the composition of the stewards committee, Beardmore was able to get Elsie Moles voted out as deputy convener, and the old deputy re-elected. Elsie walked out of the stewards meeting in protest after being prevented from taking notes and having witnesses. Outraged at the outcome of this 'kangaroo Court', 600, women, T&G, as well as AUEW members walked out of the factory, marched to the union's district offices and held a protest meeting demanding that Beardmore be removed as convener. AUEW district officer, George Butler was forced to assure the women that Elsie Moles was still deputy convener until a union enquiry was held into the situation. At the end of the week, the women came out on strike again.

After a 24 hour picket at the weekend management tries to provoke the picket by bringing the police in. But the women made it perfectly clear that they were not going to be intimidated by any talk of black marias coming to arrest them for obstruction. Within a week, the picketing really began to bite, and management were forced to lay off other sections of the factory. However despite the firm stand taken by the women and girls on the picket, it was to be another 4



weeks before GEC was finally brought to its knees. Meanwhile messages of support and substantial collections of money came in from other Coventry factories. A delegation of women and girls went to London for a day to picket the GEC headquarters. The police turned up now and again to help the odd scab smash his or her way through the picket. And management tried to turn different sections of the factory against each other by telling the DEP that workers who had been laid off by the strike were not entitled to any benefit.

A big boost to the pickets' morale came in the 5th week of the strike. Women at the nearby Raglan Street GEC plant, outraged at the 'black' work management were smuggling out of Spon Street, and into their factory, came out on indefinite strike.

Despite all this, convener Albert Beardmore's section—the machine shop—worked all through the dispute. The women suspect a deal with management. At mass meetings over the 6 week period Beardmore continually tried to get the strikers back to work, although management consistently

GENERAL ELECTRIC



Is Weinstock a Male Chauvinist Pig?



ELSIE MOLES: Walked out
The women workers' picket at GEC



refused to retime the jobs. When lobbied by women who had been laid off by the strike Beardmore announced that he 'couldn't possibly bring his breadwinner men out in support of mere girls'.

At the time of writing a mass meeting has unanimously accepted a settlement negotiated between management, union officials and the strike committee. Although this does not give a retime of the 6 jobs a solution which is at least equally favourable has been arrived at. After 4 weeks on guaranteed earnings the girls are to be moved onto another job on which good bonus can be made. Their original jobs are to be phased out in 12 months time, and meanwhile they will be performed by trainees whose earnings are guaranteed by national agreements.

The outcome of the strike at Spon Street is a victory, not only for the girls and the women who came out in support of them, but for the whole factory. With the experience, and the confidence gained during the strike the women and girls will be able to go back into the factory knowing that they have the strength to win the battles with management that lie ahead.

Not only are there many other jobs that need retiming if a decent bonus is to be earned, but the overall conditions of work at Spon Street are among the worst in the whole Coventry GEC combine. Women and girls persistently claim that management treat them like dogs.

However, at the moment one issue is foremost in everyone's mind: the question of democratic representation of women production workers on the shop stewards committee and the likely fate of convenor, Albert Beardmore.

After the September break negotiations begin on what could prove to be the biggest battle of all: equal pay. GEC is not only the largest private employer in the UK, it is also one of the biggest employers of cheap female labour. Profits for each worker rose from £213 in 1969 to £424 in 1972 (over £8 a week).

If the women and girls are to chalk up a victory on equal pay then the lesson of the strike must be taken to heart: a situation where women have to fight not only the management but also their own shop stewards committee must never be allowed to occur again.

Getting Organised

Hester Blewitt
-AUEW Shop
Steward
Birmingham

Who can be the most half-soaked and easily conned workers any management could wish to employ?

On the other hand, who can be more grimly calculating, suspicious and defiant than any management could wish to meet in a head-long confrontation?

The answer to both these questions is women workers. And don't think that you find the half-soaked variety in one factory or district and the uncompromising type in another. Because the only difference is that the second 'type' used to be the first type until she discovered that she could do something to change the things she always used to grumble and moan about.

The task of working this transformation—from the couldn't-care-less moaner to the self-confident human being—is what getting organised is all about. It's not just about improving our wages and working conditions or the benefits such improvements may bring to our standards of living and health. The biggest gain of all is in the self-respect of the people who are involved in bringing about these changes. Initially you may, of course, knock people's confidence by implying they are fools to have put up with the things you say should be changed. But if you can show them **how** as well as **why** you can jointly set about changing things, you will soon begin to get a more lively response.

So, getting down to the nitty-gritty, this means that you must be ready with the ideas and willing to take the initiative. If it's any consolation I have never suggested an original idea to this day—all you have to do is learn off others, through friends, fellow trade unionists, newspapers, meetings, how they have successfully or unsuccessfully struggled and what tactics to use. But ideas alone are not enough. Of course you can encourage your mates to stand up for themselves, but it needs someone to take the first step. If there's no one else around braver, then it has to be you. Nine times out of ten, the rest will back you up—they've been wishing someone would come out and say it for years. If you find yourself stranded and support melting away in the face of the boss, don't give up in disgust. Try fighting on small things, eg, minor improvements in working conditions—plumbing repairs, a tea machine or ventilation—which even the most 'moderate worker' could not fail to support. Once you have established in the eyes of the management and your mates that you are making demands on behalf of the group and these requests are attended to, people will develop the confidence to back you up in things that seem more of a challenge to management's so-called rights, eg, how long, or how many times you can go to the toilet, or what level of work you can be expected to keep up eight hours a day.

What I have been pointing to is the need for leadership of the most basic and important kind—of the people in the sections and departments that make up a factory or office. This of course means talking about . . .

It does not need to be emphasised what an important job this is. The shop steward is the foundation stone of the union movement, and it is the good stewards who have built up the bargaining power of trade unions as a whole. On the other hand the shop stewards who can't be bothered, or who use their job to feather their own nests or to discourage any rumblings of discontent, are a disgrace. Their actions bring discredit on the whole movement and can demoralise people to the point of never being prepared to stand up for themselves.

The choice of a steward is very important, and it seems a lot of people are not aware of how this is supposed to happen, or are afraid to insist that it be done properly and democratically. Different unions have different practices, but most stewards are supposed to be elected by the union members who work

in a particular department or section. A meeting should be called of all by the present steward (or any member if there is no steward) at least once a year. Even if it is only to re-elect the old steward or to elect the only person who is standing for the job, the members should have the chance to put up their hands, for or against. It makes a good reminder of what she is there for—to fight for her members first and foremost, because it is they, and no one else who put her there. The election must usually be approved by a higher body (in my union, the AUEW, it is the district committee, and the approval is in the form of an appointment. The district committee is the only other body of people, apart from a steward's members which can remove her from office). If you are unlucky enough to be in a union where you have no choice to elect any of your leaders, you'd better start trying to change the rules! Remember that only someone who is directly accountable to the membership can be removed by them if he or she sells out.

What are the main qualifications for the job of steward? Someone you can trust always to put your interests first, someone who isn't fooled or flattered by big titles, big money or big words, and someone who is willing to learn, not just from books and courses, but from her members. Experience is always desirable, but it only comes with doing the job. It's better to have an inexperienced fighter who can learn, than an old hand who gave up trying 10 years ago.

If your steward is well-meaning, but doesn't seem to get you very far, don't dismiss her out of hand. What have you done to help her in her job? Do you take an interest, make suggestions as well as criticisms, support her when she puts herself on a limb on your behalf, pay your union money on time? If you don't do any of this, don't be surprised if your steward doesn't show much interest in your problems. But if you do play your part, you have a right to expect—regular information on all the meetings he or she attends, a chance to bring up your problems with management and other stewards, the power to decide by majority vote about all the matters which bear on your wages and conditions, and regular copies of union publications including the union rule-book. If she never does any of these things, never calls meetings to discuss anything all together, then ask her to call one tomorrow. If you can get nowhere by polite methods, your final resort is to stir things up among others, call a meeting yourself and move a vote of no confidence in her. It is a good idea on such occasions to make sure beforehand that the majority feels the same way too and that there is someone who is willing to take over the job! Otherwise you will be causing bitterness and personal bad feeling without achieving any change for the better. If you are lucky, the steward may resign if she feels she has lost the confidence of the members. This may sound a nasty business, and most people will put up with a lousy steward for months or years rather than cause offence. But I suspect the level of tolerance is not so high now. A steward's inadequacies show up only too well when prices keep rising, and the bosses get more stingy. And YOU can't afford an inadequate steward.

What follows concerns the steward's job as negotiator and spokesman for her members, the role of shop steward's committees, methods of action to back up demands, and how to link up with other workers. I will cover this in the next issue as far as my own experience, and second-hand information can help me.

Brighowgate lodge — Womens' workhouse

Brighowgate Lodge is a temporary accommodation unit run by Grimsby council for homeless women and their children. The local Claimants Union became concerned about conditions in the home and contacted the Grimsby Womens Group who have made repeated attempts to find out more about the running of the home and to publicise the disturbing information they obtained. Here the group describe what life is like at the Lodge and how they have campaigned on behalf of the women there.

After several fruitless attempts to gain admission to Brighowgate Lodge and a hostile interview with a Social Services employee who tried to put us off and would give us almost no information on conditions at the home, we managed to make contact with several women who lived or had lived there. Many were frightened of being evicted if they talked to us, but some were prepared to. From these women we gradually built up a picture of bleak living conditions, pointless authoritarian rules and callous treatment by staff.

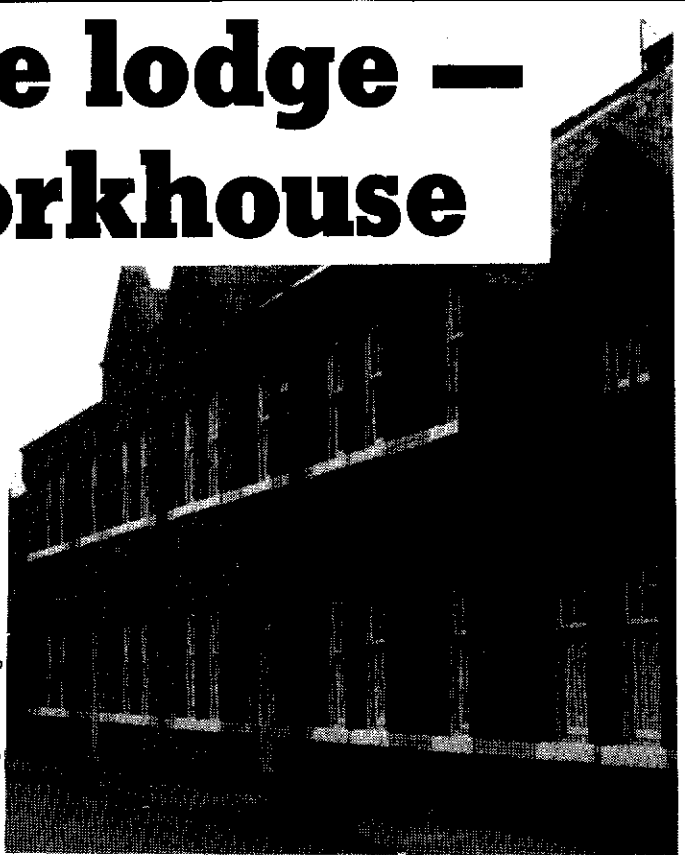
During the first week in the Lodge the women are not allowed out after 5pm without permission and then only for such brief errands as to make a telephone call; there is a telephone in the Lodge but the women are not allowed to use it. Thereafter they are only allowed out on one evening each week until 11pm, and the evening is specified by the Matron. One woman who stayed out all night was told to leave by the Matron and her child was placed in a home where he still is. Although the women are allotted tasks in cleaning the house thoroughly each morning, the same process has to be gone through again each evening.

Everything has to be done by the clock: they must get up at 6.45am even at weekends and have their children washed and dressed and ready for inspection. Supper must be cooked and cleared away by 6pm. No child under the age of 10 is allowed anything to eat or drink between 6pm and 7pm. Floors are covered with linoleum, the only exception being the lounge, which the families are not allowed to use during the day; in wet weather there is no play area for the children. There are no locks on bedroom doors or food cupboards. The women must use this lounge if they want to talk to their husbands, there is nowhere where they can go and talk privately. We know that on occasions up to 24 people have shared these facilities, supposedly for only a few days or weeks, although we know that one woman was there for 11 months. Women have to wash clothes every day; the luxury of a weekly wash is not allowed to them.

Until our Group started its campaign there was no television set—we are told that a group of women collected sufficient money to buy a set, but were told that this was unnecessary as there was a set being repaired. This set never materialised. The women and their children are not protected from fire risk: there is no visible fireescape and a fire drill is never carried out as far as we can ascertain. The building has timber staircases, the doors open inwards and all windows are nailed and wedged so that they cannot be opened more than 3 inches, yet the Chief Fire Officer has assured us that it is not a fire hazard! For the privilege of living in this 'home from home' the women pay £3.15 a week and provide all their own food.

We are told many appalling stories about the treatment of the women and their children by the Matron and other staff. The Matron tried to undermine the mothers' relationships with their children by telling the children how to behave instead of leaving it to their mothers, and by interfering in such personal routines as bathing and feeding the children. We are told that on one occasion the matron tried to take

Brighowgate Lodge



money from a husband who wanted to give it to his wife, actually snatched the money which was torn in half. One woman gave us a horrifying account of the matron's treatment of a baby. 'A baby 5 months old was not allowed a bottle, Matron said it was too old for one and she made the child have Weetabix. Its mouth was bruised. The brother hid with the baby to feed it with the bottle. Matron took it off him, told him off and put it in the dustbin'. One woman inmate Sheana Macbeth, gave us a statement on how she felt about Brighowgate Lodge and the effect living in such conditions had on her.

'I have not much more fight left in me, but I am determined to fight on. My son and I have been moved from one place to another since we came back to Grimsby. First I went to Brighowgate Lodge in the morning, but not to stop, as they found me a job as a housekeeper. I was locked out at 9.40pm along with my 13 year old son, after being there for two days, so I went back to the lodge for 6 days. All the time you went under supervision; you felt like a prisoner for a crime you had not committed. At least that is how I feel, a criminal who has committed no crime. All on my own, fighting against odds, trying to get what you have the right to have, such as the right to have a home of your own, freedom to do what you want and be happy, to be able to work and have money in your pocket. I feel sometimes as if I am different to everyone else, that I have no right to these things, that I am not fit to live.

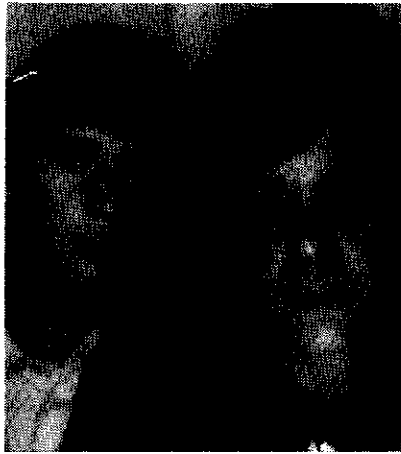
I know that you will say that I am just feeling sorry for myself. Maybe I am, I don't know. I can only write what I feel. There must be other women like me, each thinking and feeling like me. If there are, I think I am speaking for them, trying to put into words how we feel. In doing so I hope I can make others understand how we feel.

We are not second class and inferior to those who have money. I don't know what to say or do to make us part of society. Does it really matter what we are or what colour or where we come from?

There is every reason for us, who have nothing, to fight for what we need and want in life. The best way is to get together and fight as one for these things. Anyone who reads this and feels like me should meet with me to talk together to see what we can do. I have not written this for people to sit down and say, 'poor thing! Maybe everything will work out

THREE

by the Wife of a Fine Tubes Worker - Plymouth



Sheana Macbeth

soon'. I have written it because I want those who are with me to stand with me and fight.'

Since writing this Sheana has been pushed from pillar to post by the Social Services Department. For more than three months she has been living with her 13 year old son in an old peoples-home where they have to share a room. In desperation she is thinking of becoming a 'squatter'.

We in the Grimsby Womens Group tried several forms of action to publicise our findings. We wrote several letters to every member of the Council's Health and Social Services Committee. We organised two demonstrations of women, one outside the offices of the Social Services Department and one outside the town hall at the time of a council meeting. The local press ignored our demonstrations, but one paper later did a story on the Lodge. In these ways a number of people began to take an interest in Brighowgate.

After our letters to the Social Services Department they made a few material adjustments to the Lodge—a television, two sewing machines and the prospect of new curtains! The women were to be allowed to use the lounge all day, but conditions were not improved in any other way. However we heard recently that the lodge is to be temporarily closed in two months time and that the Matron has resigned.

Although we have been successful in making people realise what goes on in one particular home and have been instrumental in its being closed, we are in no way complacent. Thousands of women and children like Sheana and her son are still in the same terrible position as they were before. There must be a Brighowgate Lodge in every town and city in this country, run by those who adhere to the type of moral code responsible for the Victorian Work Houses. Any woman who for some reason is deprived of her home and livelihood could end up in one of these 'homes'. Women everywhere should fight against their existence and the type of society which is responsible for them.

In June 1970 workers at the Fine Tubes factory in Plymouth put in for a pay increase. Their wages were as little as £15 a week, low even for the South West, and conditions in the factory were appalling. The management refused even to enter into negotiations or to recognise the unions. 30 workers then went on strike and for three years until June 1973 the strikers picketed the factory and toured the country speaking to meetings and raising money to keep the strike going. They received almost no official help from their unions and could continue only because of the solidarity shown by fellow rank-and-file trade unionists. Although the strike had to be called off after three years, it was a heroic struggle and a lesson to everyone fighting for union recognition and a living wage.

Here Irene S, the wife of one of the strikers, tells how it affected herself and her family.

Even before the strike started I knew that things were bad at the factory. John had told me that there were no safety guards on the machines and three times he had had lucky escapes when rods came out; he came home and showed me the damage to his clothing. As time went on the pay was getting worse, not better. He complained about the conditions of his work. Something drastic had to happen—and it did.

All the time we've been married we've always worked together—nothing works if you don't work together. When the strike started I listened to all the TV programmes and interviews on it and I've always tried to follow them up. When John came home from union meetings I talked to him about them and we discussed the situation. I think it helps if the woman takes an interest and shares her husband's problems with him. Then he has someone to talk to at least. I think that wives can do a great deal to help their husbands on strike. Of course women must concentrate on their homes and families—they wouldn't be very good wives or mothers if they didn't, but that shouldn't stop them taking an interest in other things. Some aren't interested. Some of the strikers gave up on the strike, but we understand that they and their wives had different pressures on them. We all had different pressures on us and it was up to us to do what we could.

Of course the main effect of the strike was on our relationships with one another. In our family it was like walking on the edge of a sword for months. I was going to bed about nine o'clock just to get away from it; I walked the streets for a full hour in the rain; it was so depressing. Every time I did something or said something, it was wrong. The kids were bewildered. My 15 year old girl was breaking down and crying. She couldn't concentrate on her schoolwork and homework. Our boy used to go up and lie on his bed. They were afraid to ask for help. John just didn't talk to us—we were like strangers and our relationship was going to pieces.

Although the older kids understood about the strike, we all had to put up with a lot from people who said things like, 'Why doesn't John get another job instead'; and 'My husband is working and keeping you on Social Security'. We weren't taking anything from anyone—we were just receiving a little

Information

I would like to know more about

IS WOMEN

IS

Name

Address

Send to: I.S. women

8 Cottons Gardens, London E2 8DN

YEARS ON STRIKE



Fine Tubes meeting

Sometimes people ask me if I'd go through it all again and I say—Definitely Yes!

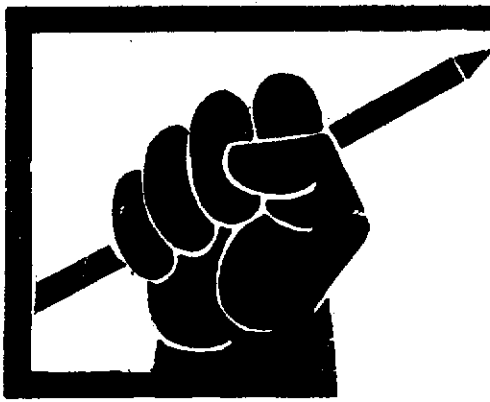
bit back on what we'd paid in all these years. Sometimes John did say that he thought that he would give up the strike and look for another job and I used to say, 'Well, why should you?' If it hadn't been for me I think he would have gone and got another job—I don't think he would have gone back to Fine Tubes though. It was the principle of the thing. He wasn't with a living wage and he was prepared to fight for it so that he'd got something to give his kids.

Other people said that we were selfish in making our children suffer by sticking to our principles. I don't see that at all. On the contrary, we have fought to maintain our standard of living which was falling, and if we hadn't done that we would have just got worse and worse off and reduced the children's standard of living. Instead of that we fought to give them a better one. You see, John's a man who looks

to the future and he won't do anything until he knows he's really right. It wasn't just a question of fighting for ourselves—it's for everybody else down here in the South West. It was bound to come, and if we hadn't done it someone else would.

Now that the strike's over I don't want to lose contact with everybody, because we've all been so close—like brothers really—we've stuck together. Working all those years together and then standing out there for something they knew was right, and then having got nowhere for it.

I've learnt that families should work together, meet together and discuss their problems. I think that contact among the strikers and families is very important. And of course the family itself should discuss problems. People shouldn't bottle things up.



LETTERS

Lovely good & dewey eyed

I would like to add a few points to Anna Pascuska's article on advertising in *Women's Voice* No 7. Manufacturers will pay up to £30,000 to produce a 30 second commercial, and more to get it broadcast, so it is unlikely that they would spend so much without getting their investment back a hundredfold. A series of commercials is always backed up by market research to show the change in consumer buying habits during a campaign, and if sales of the product do not rise, the adverts are rapidly dropped. It is not unusual for sales to increase by 50 per cent when the product is the centre of an advertising campaign, so that whether we like it or not, the adverts *do* affect how we buy.

There are many ways of making commercials effective, and the methods vary from the sneaky to the dishonest, from brainwashing to blackmail. Although housewives have always been a favourite target for the mind-benders, it is only over the past few years that the really malicious blackmailing techniques have emerged. There are many adverts being used at present, particularly those for foodstuffs, which use the angle . . . 'You can't be a *good* mother unless you give them . . .'. A current example, after a shot of the family scoffing the miraculous new product, ends with the father smiling at the camera and saying 'Isn't she a *lovely* mum!'

Look out for other examples of this technique—'What mother *wouldn't* give her children butter!', and 'How could you send your children out on a cold morning without . . . inside them?'. Another one, this time for washing powder, shows the husband so overcome with passion at the sight of his shirt, washed in Whizzo, that he immediately embraces his dewy-eyed wife.

These common advertising tricks, which

"This is where you get it, baby!"

Bath Evening Chronicle
The Con starts with these words!

The 'Organisation' has set up a contract - get fourteen broods to work full-time - part-time - evenings. Don't be a persuader.

Invitation to a Potential Pierson Girl

Come along—with your friends—between 6.30 p.m. and 7.30 p.m. **TONIGHT (Wednesday), November 15,** and see for yourselves the pleasant surroundings and excellent working conditions Pierson Sewing Machinists offer, with the opportunity to earn over £20 for a five-day week. During the evening there will be a fashion show of swimwear and foundation garments, and free refreshments will be available.

If you require any additional information, please contact Mrs. James at Bristol 653274.

J. O. PIERSON LIMITED
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Bristol Evening Post

play on the housewife's love of her family, are cruel and vicious examples of how far the bosses will go in order to boost their enormous profits. The bitter irony, of course, is that the system which

makes such dishonest methods necessary is the same one which pushes prices up and forces housewives to compromise on the quality of the food she buys,

D Watts Halifax

Postwomen

I want to know if there are any other women who, like me, work for the Post Office as a postwoman, and who would like to see some changes made over the discrimination practised by the Post Office against women.

Women are not employed by the Post Office, except in two special categories. Firstly 'auxiliary posts', which are permanent but only part-time, and secondly 'casual' posts, which are full-time, but on a casual basis—no job security, no overtime rates, no holiday or sick pay, plus the fact that you have to take a week off (unpaid of course) every 12 weeks, so that you aren't eligible to invoke the Redundancy Payments Act against the Post Office if they decide to give you the push. So we must either put up with not getting a guaranteed full working week, or be part of a pool of 'second-class' labour with dreadful conditions. The only point in the Post Office's favour is that in both categories the *hourly* rate of pay for women is equal to the male rate—it just works out that, because of the conditions of employment outlined above, the take-home pay is invariably less.

In my experience, the officials of the Union of Post Office Workers (UPW) are quite happy with this situation—it will need a concerted effort by women and sympathetic men workers all over the country to get the union committed to changing the position of women in the Post Office. It goes without saying that most of the men in the union, including union officials, even if you manage to show them that women *are* discriminated against, think you are making a lot of fuss about nothing.

The only thing that is going to make the necessary campaign by the union any easier is the fact that in a number of areas, mainly in large cities and in the south-east and Midlands, the Post Office is so short of staff that they're only too willing to employ women once they realise that women are capable of doing the job and are there to be employed. This means that in areas where women are already working as postmen, the management will be sensitive to any move to gain better conditions of employment.

But we must first campaign within the union to convince men members of the UPW of the justice of our case, and get them to help in pushing for the necessary reforms. Hopefully, if we start to organise now, we could get a motion, supported by as many branches as possible, put to

the next UPW conference in June 1974, calling for equal conditions of employment for women. We will have to campaign for support for this, in our union branches, write letters and articles for 'The Post' (the union paper) and perhaps speak at other union branch meetings.

Any postmen, male or female should send ideas about such a campaign, plus experiences of discrimination from their localities and union branches to me, c/o Women's Voice, 61 Tylney Croft, Harlow, Essex.

**Bronwen Davies, UPW,
Oxford Uniform Branch.**

Working Women

After having read Woman's Voice No 7, I find one argument that is not 'voiced' at all. This being that married women should not *have* to work in order to give their families a decent living standard. In that light, would it not be more sensible for women workers to strike for better pay for their husbands?

Obviously single women and especially young girls have a very great need for better pay, conditions etc, but if husbands earned a decent wage thousands of women could spend a lot more time with their children and husbands.

I feel that hooliganism, mugging, etc, would never occur if children had more time with their parents instead of having to go to nannies and nurseries from an early age.

I invite comments from all (women and men).

Lesley Green (housewife and mother of two)

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