

Womens **VOICE**

No 14

Price 10p

February



KEEPING THE LID DOWN ON
MAGGOTS LIKE THE NATIONAL
FRONT. **MIRIAM KARLIN**
TALKS TO WOMENS VOICE.

J. Mardy

THE WOMAN WE DON'T SUPPORT

Labour Party	
Conservative Party	
Liberal Party	
Nazional Front	

Labour Party	
Conservative Party	
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YOUNG Black girls in Wolverhampton have been beaten up by white thugs disguised in Ku Klux Klan hoods. If you're black in Britain it's the sort of thing you have come to expect, along with constant harassment from police, discrimination by employers and landlords. If you're black and want to come and live in Britain, every obstacle is put in your way to keep you out.

Now Margaret Thatcher has ensured that these racist attacks on black people will get worse.

When she made her recent speech she didn't mention all the other people with different language, religion, or dress who came to live in Britain—white Rhodesians, white Canadians, white Europeans. She only selected out one group: black people. 'By the end of the century there would be 4 million people of New Commonwealth or Pakistam here. That is an awful lot! People are afraid this country might be swamped by people with a different culture.'

The truth is, and Margaret Thatcher knows it, that there are more people leaving Britain every year than moving into it. The birth rate is falling dramatically. There is no overcrowding, there is plenty of room. What she objects to is that there are *black* people moving into Britain.

That's what she says this year. There is an election on the horizon. The Tory Party is in need of votes. They are being outflanked on the immigration issue by the National Front. So she hopes to buy a few votes for the Tory candidates by taking a harder line, moving closer to the politics of the British Nazis.

In fact she only encourages more people to vote for the National Front. The more respectable racism becomes the easier it is for the NF to carry on their vile activities.

accommodating to the politics of the National Front. Jim Callaghan is up to it as well. The day after her speech he spoke to a group of black journalists and without mincing his words said that if illegal immigrants could be found then they should be 'booted out'.

The search for illegal immigrants means midnight raids on families who have every right to be in Britain and have lived here for years; sudden round-ups and arrests of immigrant workers; weeks and months spent in jail whilst police dither around checking papers of perfectly legal immigrants. Fear and humiliation for every black person in Britain.

Jim Callaghan also has an election to face this year; he dare not stand up to Margaret Thatcher.

The reasons which bring any immigrant to Britain are simple, human ones: they are looking for work, they are being persecuted in their own country, they want to join their families who have already come here for similar reasons. Very few people pack up their belongings and move thousands of miles because they fancy a change. Rich people might do it, jetting around between their penthouses in San Francisco, their gurus in India and their clubs in London. But not ordinary working people.

The problems we face can't be blamed on black people. There is unemployment, because industry is being run down by the rich who own it; there is shortage of housing for working class people because fewer houses are being built: council house building is at an all time low; the Tory Greater London Council for example is scuppering all its housing plans and sacking its architects. The quality of education in our schools is low, because Shirley Williams, the Minister for Education, keeps reducing

It's not just Margaret Thatcher who is

Womens VOICE

Womens Magazine of the Socialist Workers Party

Womens World: more than just statistics.
Page 4

News: campaigns and conferences;
maternity leave and abortion. Will you
send us your news for next month to
arrive by Friday 17 February. Pages 5 to
8.

Womens Voice Interview: Miriam
Karlin, actress and fighter against the
Nazis. Pages 10 and 11.

Women against the Nazis. Page 12 and
13.

Rights of Lesbian Mothers. Page 14

Reviews: Dutiful Daughters tell their
story. Pages 15 to 17

Do it yourself: Silk screening posters.
Pages 18 and 19.

Your Voice: sorry to those who couldn't
get a word in edge ways. Letters to us by
17 February please. Pages 20 and 21.

Your Health: The Spina Bifida
controversy. Page 22

What is going on: indeed. This part of the
magazine will change next month so get
your ads in early please. Pages 23.

Why not send your friend a subscription
to Womens Voice. Back cover.

The March issue of Womens Voice will
go back to the old production date — the
first Wednesday in the month. So please
get your news, letters, ads in early.

Printed and Published by Larkham Printers
and Publishers, PO Box 82, London E2
4DS.

YES! I'LL JOIN THE FIGHT

- Can you send me information about my local Womens Voice group and the Socialist Workers Party

● NAME

ADDRESS

Post to: Womens Voice,
6 Cottons Gardens, London E2



Labour Party	
Conservative Party	
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Nazional Front	

the number of teacher trainees and the Government has cut millions from the education budget, just as it has done with the hospital budget and the social services budget.

We have to oppose racialsists whatever shape they come in: National Front, Tory or Labour. Racialism is used by them to divert our attention away from the real causes of our problems. They say blame the blacks, you need look no further for the cause of your ills.

We know that if we lived in a society where everything was equally shared there would be enough to go around, and we wouldn't have to be scrapping amongst ourselves for the crumbs off the rich man's table.

FOR A little over a year we have been producing the *Womens Voice* magazine. We have every right to be pleased with ourselves; sales have been much higher than we ever dreamed of, and the magazine has stirred a lot of women into action.

We began by keeping the price of *Womens Voice* as low as possible. We want to carry on with the same policy, but costs are forcing us now to put the price up to 15p.

As the price is going up next month, in March, we thought we should take the opportunity to shake up the appearance of the magazine too, introduce a glossy cover, and start advertising.

With the additional money that is beginning to roll into our £1000 fund we hope to be able to expand all the other things we do as well: printing posters and stickers, producing pamphlets, organising campaigns.

We'll be out early next month too. On the first Wednesday in March, remember, the new *Womens Voice*.





Womens World

by Judith Condon

LAST MONTH something nice happened in our family. My sister-in-law gave birth to her second baby. I went down to the hospital to see her a couple of days later.

It's a smashing place. A thirties-built one-story maternity hospital, catering for about thirty women. Inside it's small enough to seem personal and caring. The women are attended by their own local doctors, on small wards of four or five beds.

The building is set off the main road in its own park. There's a winding roadway up to the main entrance.

It was a wet night when I went along, so nowhere showed up at its best, but I bet in spring it'll look green and lovely. *Only there won't be any babies being born there then.*

You see, this very pleasant little hospital, the kind of small-scale, efficient local place you really feel at home in, is being axed.

In a few weeks time the builders will be moving in, stripping the wards, clearing out the beds. They're turning the building into something, it seems, we don't have enough of. Offices. A hospital is being destroyed to make way for offices.

As for local women, well, they'll have to make their way several miles over to a bigger hospital in the next borough.

As for the nursing staff, they're still on tenterhooks waiting to hear where they'll be transferred. One nurse just heard she's to go to another maternity hospital many miles south. Only it, too, is due for the axe in a few month's time. Yet another statistic has been recorded in the long list of public spending cuts.

There's an even unhappier part to this story. The bed my sister-in-law was in had been occupied immediately before her by a woman having her fourth child. That woman had just suffered the most tragic loss. Her husband was one of the nine men crushed in a lift shaft tunneling under the Thames on the site of the Littlebrook Power Station.

The accident occurred when the passenger hoist taking them underground plummeted to the bottom of the lift shaft after a rope snapped. There was only one safety device—wedges to jam the cage against the rails—and it had failed.

The men were trapped for a full half hour while rescuers tried to reach them with inade-



A demonstration to save a maternity home

quate equipment. Because there was no lift operator, ten vital minutes were lost before anyone realised what had happened. And this on a site where already three workers had just lost their lives.

Yet another statistic has been recorded in the long list of workers killed in criminally unsafe conditions.

For one unhappy woman, those two sets of figures cruelly converged last month. In a hospital already stripped of emergency facilities, with two wards already closed, she gave birth to a child whose father is already dead.

She's gone home to the task of bringing up four children on her own. And if their past record is anything to go by, the main contractors, John Laing, are at this very moment briefing their expensive lawyers how to avoid paying her anything but the lowest possible compensation. Little wonder we come screaming into the world.

I'm glad to say my visit was a happy one. Mother and baby, as they say, are fine and hearty. I'm sorry if this page isn't as happy as the way it started out. I wonder if we'll have managed to turn things around by the time my little niece grows up.

Little wonder we come screaming into the world!!



The funeral of one tunneler. A lot of...



picture: Mark Rusher (JFL)

FIRST THE HOSPITALS THEN CLINICS

THE AREA Health Authority in Brighton in £250,000 in the red.

The first bright idea they had to save money was to close the women's hospital, the New Sussex. It is small and personal.

The *Womens Voice* group and the Hospital Worker group worked together. We had a stall on Western Road, the main shopping street, and a petition.

Even more important to my mind—we made a point of going around the *hospitals* to get signatures. We did that to make other hospital workers realise cuts are going on everywhere.

We also invited workers from Hounslow Hospital, which was closed after they had occupied it. The Area Health Authority whisked the old people out of it without telling the patients or their relatives anything.

We invited Hounslow workers because the tendency is to be ever so polite. You think, 'the idea of closing this new unit is so silly, surely they will see reason'. We needed to show that politeness doesn't get you very far. The petition got 16,000 signatures.

But what really rattled the Area Health Authority was the fact that the ambulance drivers said they would not move patients from the New Sussex if it were closed. And the hospital workers in other hospitals agreed they wouldn't treat patients moved from there.

So the AHA decided no to close it. Then they said they would close all four Family Planning Clinics in the area—at Newhaven, Brighton, Lewes and Sussex University.

They could save £50,000, they said. At the end of January there was a huge lobby, with more than 200 people, of the Area Health Authority to protest against this. At the meeting they suspended their decision to close the four clinics. In our local paper, it said the NUPE Area officer came away happy. I don't know why. Because they will still try to make the cuts somewhere.

It seems to me they are playing a game. They will threaten to close this or that until they find something that people won't protest about. Or wait for us to get tired.

But they are also trying to make cuts that aren't easy to see. For example, the operating theatres at the New Sussex Women's Hospital are not used any more. Gradually they will try to run it down.

It's interesting to see what's at the top of their cuts list—first, the women's hospital; then, the family planning clinics; and—though they deny it—redundancies of women hospital workers. Gill Poole, Brighton.

HOSPITAL CUTS

EAST END NO DEAD END

150 PEOPLE marched to Bethnal Green Hospital in the pouring rain last Saturday. They were wrapped in bandages spotted with tomato ketchup, on crutches, in wheelchairs. We left placards in the railings outside the hospital and then marched down to the London Hospital to hand in a letter to councillors, protesting at the cuts in our hospitals. We then held a street meeting and had a little play which the Half Moon Theatre did in the market across from the hospital. Yvonne Walker.



picture: Laurance Spaham (IFL)

SOCIALISM AND FEMINISM

MORE THAN five hundred women came to the Socialist Feminist National Conference in Manchester on the weekend of January 28th and 29th.

It was bitter, raining weather, and women coming from Scotland had had to drive through snow drifts, but the atmosphere on arrival was busy and positive and comradely.

The first day was made up of workshops, well organised so that you stayed in the same group all day. Discussion centred on a number of topics.

The attitude of 'non-aligned' socialist feminists toward those who are in political parties.

The attitudes of socialist feminists toward non-socialist feminists and separatists.

How to bring questions of sexuality into political campaigns.

Whether socialist feminist groups are principally for theoretical discussion.

Where women could report on their experience in outside campaigns such as NAC, fighting the cuts, nurseries etc.

Or whether socialist feminist groups should be mainly concerned with outward activity in their own right.

And whether there should be a national structure for all the different socialist feminist groups.

'What do you do as an individual if you're involved in organising a local nursery, and then you also want to go out and organise against the National Front and you don't have time to do both?' some women asked. 'If you're in a political organisation then you can divide up your forces and decide your priorities and send people off to do

things accordingly. But if you're not in such an organisation, then you have to try to make your own decisions, and often feel very divided, or else try to do too many things too superficially.'

'We don't want to be just a pressure group within the left. We want to organise on our own behalf. Women against Racism groups are one example,' said another.

'Does Socialist Feminism include everyone across the whole spectrum from the right wing of the labour party to the SWP?' asked another.

'What about the difference between those of us who want to overthrow capitalism and patriarchy completely, together, and those who believe in reforming things bit by bit.'

All these questions and many more were discussed in a very open and un-sectarian way in the Saturday workshops.

On the Sunday morning there were groups on specific topics. Opinion on these varied and the one on racism in particular came to no definite conclusions. Similarly the main plenary session which included the report backs from the groups did not arrive at any definition of socialist feminism or how we could go forward collectively.

Nevertheless the conference was a clear indication that there are hundreds and hundreds of socialist feminists up and down the country. As yet there is no structure to draw these people together. An organised form is absolutely essential and a great deal of thinking along this direction needs to be done before the next conference in ten months or a year's time. **Women's Voice reporter.**

CONFERENCES

TOO SMALL TOO SOON

CHILDBIRTH is still highly risky for working-class women despite doctors' inflated claims for modern medicine and its technological advances. So claimed Jean Robinson, of the Patients' Association, in a passionate speech at a conference on Midwives and the Law in London on 21 January. The conference was organised by the Association of Radical Midwives (ARMS), a group who want to restore the role of the midwife and encourage them in their support of women's participation in birth.

One of the main themes of the conference was the way health authorities are phasing out home births—all in the name of safety and progress. But Jean showed that the figures which consultants bandy about with such skill, of reduced 'perinatal mortality' (which means the death of the baby between the seventh month of pregnancy and the first week of life) were actually grossly misleading: the major decline in death of babies is largely due to the fact that working-class women have caught on to contraception, and are now choosing to have smaller families. The chief cause of babies' deaths among working-class women is that they're born too small and too soon. Yet obstetricians (who do little to help this group of women) are concentrating on not keeping babies in the womb too long, by inducing them.

Diet is particularly important for pregnant women but do doctors ask working-class women if they are able to afford a proper diet? No. They tell them at all costs not to put on too much weight! Jean described from her own experience, as a dockworker's daughter, how it's usually the man in the family—if he's doing heavy manual work—

who gets the protein and how the women have to accept an inferior diet. Another complaint that came up many times was the thorny issue of continuity of care: many women who had their babies in hospital complained of never being seen by the same person. It is easier to get continuity with a properly run domiciliary service.

Jean Robinson also told of the continual queries she got from women asking if it was still possible to have a home confinement. She tells them they have a legal right to do so. Margaret Wright, from the Society to Support Home Confinements, who spoke with her home-born baby Alison in a sling on her back, described how procedure forms in Newcastle warn midwives not to book women for home births as they could be guilty of malpractice.

Also present at the conference attended by 60 women, were representatives of NUPE and COHSE. In response to the midwife's complaint about how isolated and frustrated they felt, the union speakers advised them to join a union and use the unions to put across their arguments. **Anne Karpf.**

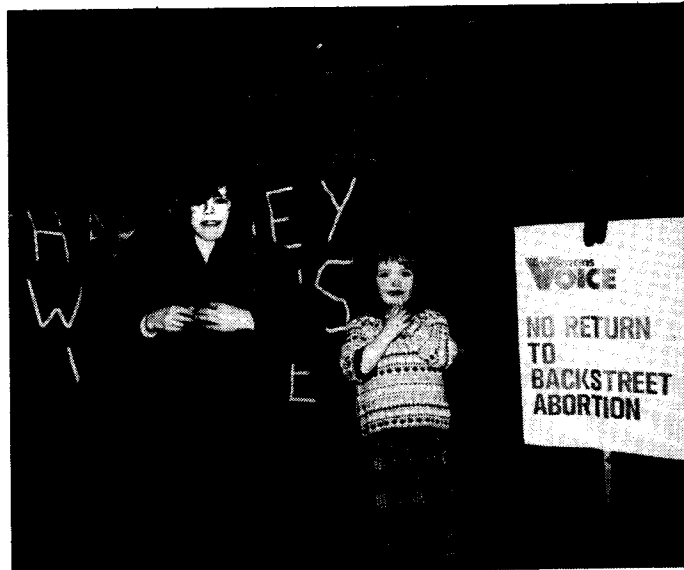
WE WANT to know what you are doing. News from Womens Voice groups, news of campaigns to keep hospitals open, to open new nurseries, for better maternity leave where you work.

Write to Womens Voice, 6 Cottons Gardens, London E2.



picture: Angela Phillips (IFL)

A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE



MORE THAN 100 women turned up to picket Hackney Council. The council was going to hand over responsibility to an anti-abortion group, Let Live, for housing single pregnant homeless women.

While we were picketing, four middle-aged National Front members (men and women) came up to us and started shouting abuse like 'Wait till Tyndall gets in!' Fifty of us went into the council meeting, and they said that they *hadn't* decided to let Let Live take over—a change from what they said before.

ABORTION NEWS

BABIES FOR SOAP—NEVER!

LIE NUMBER ONE... Abortions are being carried out so late that babies are alive and crying on the way to incineration.

LIE NUMBER TWO... Foetuses are sold for soap.

Two LIES that hit the headlines, and provided the anti-woman, anti-abortion campaigners—James White MP, Malcolm Muggeridge, Mary Whitehouse, Leo Abse and friends—with their main source of 'information'. Two LIES on which SPUC built their repulsive, sickening literature. Two LIES which many people ended up believing.

These are only two of the series of fantasies, lies and forgeries which appeared in the book 'Babies for Burning' by Susan Kentish and Michael Litthfield, published in 1974. The book gave a fantastic boost to the anti-abortion campaign. Every story was seized on by the headliners as absolute truth. The filth was spread so thick and fast that it became part of the folklore in Britain, Italy, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Preached from the pulpits, taught in the schools, screamed out by the media, who could totally avoid the pollution?

But the 'evidence'—the 'confessions', the 'interviews', the 'experts and doctors' don't exist. The

'tape-recordings' have never been produced—even in court cases brought against Litchfield and Kentish by BPAS. They *lost* the cases—but always had excuses for not producing the 'evidence' which could have helped them and on which their book was supposed to be based.

Twice they've been forced to apologise for their ghoulish lies. *The Sunday Times* has exposed them comprehensively—in 1975 and 1978.

But the lies are repeated, and repeated, and believed. They have, as they intended, done massive harm to women's struggle for humane living conditions. It's impossible to talk about the abortion campaign without these lies being paraded. The women and men who are fighting for early, safe abortions are fighting for a more humane way of life for all—adults and children. We love our children—and strive to understand and encourage all those things which will enable adults and children to have happier relationships. That's why we want to make 'every child a wanted child'. You won't find among our ranks the people who believe in birching, compulsory sterilisation, the denial of happy sexuality. They are the James Whites, Mary Whitehouses,

Malcolm Muggeridges, Keith Josephs and their followers.

By their campaigns to restrict our already limited access to safe, early abortion they are in real danger of forcing women to have late, dangerous backstreet abortions. They are in real danger of making some of their own horrible lies come true. **Judith Hamilton.**

DOCTOR PROSECUTED

A DOCTOR practising menstrual extraction as a method of abortion at Thameside General Hospital, in Ashton-under-Lyme, has stopped under threat of prosecution.

SPUC, the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, complained to the police that the doctor was misrepresenting the treatment. Their excuse for this complaint was that the green form notification for abortion was filled out for all women using the service, when not all the women were pregnant.

All the women did have all the legal requirements: two doctors' signatures, a valid reason and a pregnancy test. But because menstrual extraction must be done within 18 days of the first missed period and because early pregnancy tests often come out negative (even if the woman is pregnant) about 20 per cent of the women treated were not pregnant.

To everyone's surprise this charge was upheld as a cause for prosecution by the Director of Public Prosecutions Office.

The whole case becomes more serious for women because menstrual extraction abortions fill the gap between faulty birth control methods and D and C.

Like D and C (dilation and curettage, a common method of abortion) menstrual extraction can be used for curing heavy period pains and for examinations of non-pregnant women, but it is a much less serious treatment. It works on the principle of suction rather than scraping; the opening of the cervix (neck of the womb) is not stretched as much, which is important to lessen the danger of future miscarriages for women who eventually want children; menstrual extraction doesn't require a general anaesthetic, which means that it can be done on a day-care basis.

On 11th February Thameside National Abortion Campaign, with Women in Thameside and *Womens Voice* will be leafletting the Thameside health area (which includes Ashton, Hyde, Hattersley, Mossley Greenfield, Duncanfield, Adfield and Glossop). A public meeting will be organised some time in mid-February, with a lawyer and a doctor. WV supporters in the area can phone Mary (061-330 0671) for further information. **Claire Bacha.**

THE NATIONAL Abortion Campaign is co-ordinating the campaign for day-care abortion clinics around the country. If you want to know if anything is being organised in your area write or telephone the National Abortion Campaign, 30 Camden Road, London NW3. 01 485 4343.

NOT 10, BUT 19%

FORTY-seven women working for a Manchester solicitors have won big pay rises—up to 19 per cent. The clerks, copy-typists, legal stenographers and secretaries at Brian Thompson solicitors, Manchester, decided that a strike was the only possible action to end the discrimination against them. They held a one-day strike one Monday and planned to strike one day a week until they won. But by the Friday the employers had given in. Now they're back at work but working to rule: only doing things that are specifically dictated rather than taking the initiative and dealing with anything that came up.

Gaining official support for the strike was a struggle as the firm the women work for are APEX's own solicitors! The women put in their claim as long ago as last May but have only now got the wages they deserve. At least as a result of their struggle, implementation of their claim will be backdated to October 1st.

DEADLY ASBESTOS

WE ARE still working to get the asbestos on the Lambeth Council building site in our street removed. Asbestos dust is deadly. We had a really successful meeting about it. Forty people came—local residents and teachers from the junior school next to the building site.

We all signed a petition at the meeting to go to Lambeth Council. And we set up an Action Committee with people who live on the estate, a teacher from the school and a social worker.

Almost all the leaflets and pamphlets I got for the meeting were sold. Everybody wanted them.

We are getting nowhere officially. There is an ongoing correspondence in the local paper—a letter from us and a letter from the council contradicting everything we say. This week though, they said they didn't use vacuum equipment to take away the dust because it wasn't dangerous, and in another place they say they *did* use the vacuum equipment!

We are going to see the school caretaker, because in November he made a complaint that the school was covered in white dust and he was expected to keep sweeping it up. We are going to try to get that in writing.

There are still lumps of asbestos all over the road. Occasionally they cut bits of it up—not so much as before, but the dust is still everywhere.

The teachers can see the whole of the site from the school, (we can only see a small part) so they are going to keep a check on just what does on. **Chris Gunter**



here's my/our donation/collection for the NEW WOMENS VOICE.....

NAME:

ADDRESS/ORGANISATION:

TO: WOMENS VOICE COLLECTION, 6 COTTONS GARDENS, LONDON E2 8DN

WILL you help us raise some money? Is your only problem that you don't know where to start? Here's a few ideas that *Womens Voice* groups have organised:

Social evenings—if you can find a warm not draughty hall or a friendly pub, a band, or a local theatre group, they are what you need for a big social. Tickets and publicity in advance and a lot of hard work and organisation will bring results. But be ready to spend money too—you can't organise on this scale on a shoe string.

One *Womens Voice* supporter suggest Greek or Indian evenings. Find someone who has a large enough house, another person to organise the music—records or

tapes, and a couple of willing cooks. You need a float to buy in the food, and then you ask for a £1, or whatever, from the eaters. Pot luck dinners spread the cooking load—everyone brings their favourite dish, and a small charge is made for a slice of this or a portion of that. Most towns have a cash and carry where you can buy your booze.

Sale—a jumble sale takes a good three weeks to organise. Hold it wherever your local jumble sales are usually held. If you have it on a weekday evening you won't be competing with the boy scouts or the girl guides. 5p to get in and tea and biscuits will help boost your profits, but remember that you will expect to make most of your money in the first 10 minutes so have plenty of helpers. Advertisements in the local paper, local newsagents and

leaflets round the houses nearby will bring in the buyers. The only other thing you need is a van to collect the jumble: leaflet at least a week in advance in middle class areas (they throw most away) and then go back the following day to collect.

If you do get offered an old piano or a wardrobe and your van will stand the weight, auction them at the sale.

You can organise smaller sales, if you have got the people to make them—does anyone do a nice line in *Womens Voice* T-shirts, or knitted scarves? Are there any potters out there firing *Womens Voice* ashtrays and egg cups? Can you make silk screen posters or stickers?

We're not asking you to raid the housekeeping, or tip out your piggy bank; raising money can be fun and we'll certainly put it to good use.

camden
nalgo
newsflash

Camden Nalgo
have now negotiated

THE BEST MATERNITY LEAVE PROVISION IN BRITAIN

(PUBLIC SECTOR)

NOW 40 WEEKS LEAVE ENTITLEMENT
16 WEEKS AT FULL PAY
24 WEEKS AT HALF PAY

Applicable to officers with 2 or more
years' continuous service. In operation
from 12th January.

Full details from your
departmental rep.

MATERNITY LEAVE

THE MAGIC INGREDIENT

CAMDEN Council's new maternity scheme has received a great deal of publicity. Judging from most of it, you would think that the initiative came from the employers. The union and women members in the NALGO branch barely get a mention. The truth is somewhat different.

Pressure on equal rights in Camden started when a 'Women in NALGO' group was set up in late 1974. The group tackled a number of issues over the next 18 months, including creche facilities.

The council discussed the possibility of a staff creche in early 1975. The 'Women in NALGO' group wrote an article in the union branch magazine and circulated a questionnaire. All this came to nought at the time.

In June 1975 NALGO (National Association of Local Government Officers) conference voted for an equal rights policy. Local pressure in the branch led the branch executive of Camden NALGO to set up an equal rights working party in September.

This was most definitely not just a talking shop. It contained some 'Women in NALGO' members plus interested activists on the branch executive—some of whom were well experienced in negotiating.

They mapped out and worked through pay, training, and service conditions. The working party produced a reply to a fairly poor management paper on equal rights in early 1976, but its main report

was presented to the branch in September 1976. It was 25 pages long with more than 30 practical objectives and seven statistical appendices detailing the position of women working for the Council.

The two major improvements to first aim for were an improvement in maternity arrangements and staff creche facilities.

There is no space to detail everything we did, but councillors received copies of our report. We made it clear we wanted to seriously negotiate on the subject.

Negotiations proved to be extremely frustrating. At first they were postponed because the council did not have an overall policy on equal rights.

We eventually did win a good improvement in the maternity leave provisions and the staff creche—although it is less than we originally aimed for.

We are now working to improve training for women members. Our branch has a motion down for annual conference on a campaign for improved abortion rights. And there's a lot else besides.

Our branch executive is furious that the maternity agreement is being portrayed simply as a great act of philanthropy by the council.

Their chief negotiator, Alun Evans, does deserve some credit—particularly with the provision of the staff creche—but the pace and initiative has come from the union side all along the way.

We want to publicise the agree-

DEFEND GAY NEWS

SINCE THE vicious newspaper campaign against the Lesbian mothers began, Lesbian Line has noticed a real increase in the number of women contacting them with difficulties in gaining custody of their children.

Attacks on lesbians and their children as 'unnatural' are all part of a right wing attempt to reimpose strict boundaries on sexuality and sexual relations outside the traditional, legal, family. The prosecution of Gay News for blasphemous libel last year is just one step further in this moral backlash.

The National Front is following the lead, organising vicious assaults on gays. On 21 January a gay pub, the Royal Vauxhall, in South London was attacked by 20 NF

thugs. Several people were injured.

It's not just in Britain either that the moralists are at work. In America Anita Bryant has led the campaign against gays, and gay rights have been lost in some states. In Canada, police armed with machine guns have raided gay clubs, beating and arresting. The offices of the Canadian gay paper Body Politic, have been sacked in an attempt to close it down.

The attack is against all of us; our right to control our bodies, our thoughts, and our lives. **All women and socialists as well as gay women and men should support the demonstration for the Gay News Defence on Saturday 11 February. It starts at 1pm at the Temple, with a march and rally in Trafalgar Square.**

HOUSEWORKERS UNITE

"ONE WAY to stop yourself thinking you are worthless if you're a housewife is to remember to call yourself a house worker—that's what you do at home, you work in the house." That's how Dolly Farrell describes herself and how she began her talk on organising women at home at the Manchester *Womens Voice* rally.

Women at home, she said are not lacking in confidence during the day. They just surrender at 5 o'clock when their husbands come home. In fact, when she described some of the things that she and the women on her estate had been up to, the opposite seemed true. Their private landlord wouldn't see to the repairs, so they paid him a visit. 'He hid behind the grill that we pay the rent through. I could have pulled him through that grill and made chips of him!' she said.

We showed the film *Union Maids* and in spite of feeling that we should rush out to the nearest picket line it led naturally to the discussion on women organising in the unions, led off by Penny Simmons.

Mary Ann Stuart gave a talk on women and rape which led to a very frank discussion on women's sexuality. *Womens Voice* is for organising women. Fight for socialism and women's liberation was the message that came from Margaret Renn.

It was encouraging to see how many women contributed, sharing experiences many of them hadn't talked about before. We learned a lot, planned to do more, and raised a good contribution to *Womens Voice*. Our thanks to all the men who supported us by organising the food and the children very efficiently. **Manchester Womens Voice.**

ment as an example of what can be achieved by campaigning and negotiation, and encourage others to do likewise.

The improvements are *only for women office workers whom NALGO negotiates for*. The women manual workers employed by the Council, who are in a different union, NUPE (National Union of Public Employees) are now trying to get improvements for their members as well.

The great advantage of maternity pay and leave from a negotiator's point of view is that there's a general view they need improving, and they are a great benefit to the women involved.

Yet it will cost the employer very little. The cost to Camden Council will probably add only 0.2 per cent

to its salary bill.

There is no one set way to go about improving maternity leave and pay. It depends on local circumstances.

What is true is that if you do nothing, you'll get nothing. If you do decide to set about it, do your groundwork and develop a good case. Make sure you have support among your members. Get your union branch to treat it as an important issue. The final magic ingredient is sheer tenacity. The best of luck! **Pete Ainsley**

• For more details send a stamped addressed envelope to *The Branch Secretary, Camden NALGO, The NALGO Room, Camden Town Hall, Extension, Argyle Street, London WC1.*

MIRIAM KARLIN TALKS TO WOMEN'S VOICE

The night before we spoke to Miriam Karlin she had been out speaking in Kingston on behalf of the Anti Nazi League. The day before, an advert had been placed in "The Guardian" newspaper, calling for more support. Miriam had just signed up two more members of the acting profession and a musician who were willing to stand up and be counted against the threat of the National Front—John Geilgud, Mia Farrow and Andre Previn.



'Shut up you dirty Jew!' they told my father

I AM old enough, unfortunately, to know a great deal about the nineteen thirties.

The real reason I am desperately involved with the fight against the Nazis is this. My family, which is Jewish, suffered from the last upsurge of fascism. My mother came to England originally from Holland. All her family were murdered in Auschwitz. It's as plain and simple as that.

My father was a barrister, an expert on industrial law. When I was a small child, about three or four, he would take me up to Hampstead Heath, where Moseley used to rally his supporters. My father would heckle them. I remember one of those louts, and this will stay with me to my dying day, shouting at my father, "Shut up you dirty Jew". In spite of all I know about the gas chambers in Germany, and everything I've learned since, it's those words that stay with me. That's

what I know black people go through all the time in this country.

I feel I should have been born blue or green, then the whole world could see I am different, like them. I know my father, and mother and his children, were on Hitler's blacklist. I have seen a photostat copy of the page where our names and our address appear, among the people he would have killed first if he had made it to Britain.

Well, it took a world war to get Mosley and his kind behind bars. I'd hate to think it's going to take the same to get Webster and co. in the same place.

So it isn't very hard to explain why I'm in the Anti Nazi League. At first I really believed, as a lot of people do, there was a possibility right at the outset, provided they were given no publicity, that the National Front would just go away. But that's like living in cloud cuckoo land.

There's this phrase I keep hearing everywhere, "It's good to bring it out into the open". I don't believe that for one minute. I think probably the majority of people have prejudices of all kinds deep down. The only people who don't are babies and children, because you're not born with prejudice, it's given to you later.

The way I look at it, it's like a dustbin where you know there are maggots. It's better to keep the lid firmly down. It's better that people know it's not acceptable for them to make racist remarks, that they won't be tolerated.

"Bringing it out into the open," as Margaret Thatcher claimed to be doing the other night, really means making racialism respectable.

Enoch Powell started the process off in 1968 when he made his speech about the rivers of blood. Here is this politician of tremendous status with a brilliant classical trained mind—albeit warped—saying it's ok, it's fine to be a racist. He takes the blame for the whole thing from that moment.

And the media have fed the fire. Always looking for confrontations. Inviting these Nazis to come and debate with churchmen and liberals, so they look like decent people. I myself, and my colleagues in the Anti Nazi League will not sit down to debate with a Nazi. They asked me to go onto Thames television to debate with Webster. I will not do it. Why should the media give these Nazis so much space and time to spread their poison?

The television companies like confrontation, it makes good television. The danger is it comes right into people's homes. They can make the National Front look exciting. What do you see when they have film of a National Front march on the news? You see the anti-Nazis being herded and arrested by thousands of police. You see the Nazis being protected. Two thousand police to a thou-

sand anti-Nazis there were in Manchester the other night. Whatever you do, that's the way they'll make it come over.

It's the same with those phone-in programmes on the radio. Who has time to sit by the radio all day and phone them? Of course they're used as therapy by complete nut-cases half the time. The National Front organise people to phone in with racist comments. And they let it all go out in the name of immediacy and free speech.

That's what "Bringing it out in the open" is. Margaret Thatcher made her speech thinking she was taking back all the votes the



'It's like a dustbin where you know there are maggots—far better to keep the lid firmly down.'

Tories have lost to the Front. In fact, I believe she's handed them thousands more, lock stock and barrel. Because if it's all right to be racist, well at least the National Front have been saying it all from the word go, you might as well go to the real source.

How can we show they're wrong, how will we beat them. Well this black minicab driver I know had a good idea the other day. He doesn't believe in confrontation, he has a splendid cool mind. But he came up with this great idea. Suppose all the immigrants were to strike for one day, he said. Suppose every black, every Asian, every Jew and all the others were to down tools for just one day? The country would grind to a halt. The hospitals, the buses, the London underground, hotels, shops, plenty of factories, artists, the whole lot—then you'd see what kind of a mess there'd be. Because all those jobs, especially the menial ones, are being done by immigrants.

I told my doctor that idea. He's white. and

about as a-political as you can get, though actually I don't believe people are a-political, its usually just another way of saying they're reactionary. He said, do you know if you got that one day strike going, all the nurses here would stop, and I'd stop with them in sympathy.

When it comes to getting the support of people in my own profession, well first of all I've been writing piles of letters like a maniac! There's a list of people who always respond immediately to a call like this, like Janet Suzman, Peggy Ashcroft and Glenda Jackson. Now this is especially interesting for your magazine.

It's not because I've been writing to more women than men. But there's a difference. Women are far more prepared to stand up and be counted on their gut reaction to something. Rather than to think, will taking this stand harm my career. The man will think in terms of his commitments and his future prospects. I deplore that. I inherited from my father the idea that it doesn't matter, the first thing is you have to stand up and say what you believe. Men have needed more reassuring, you have to go over the argument with them and show them all the other people who're in support.



'Suppose all the immigrants were to strike for one day ...'

And this time it's not just the people who've been active in radical causes before. Lee Remick applied to join as soon as she heard about it, and Dorothy Tutin too. This has thrilled me about my own sex. We've really shown the other side of ourselves over the Anti Nazi League.

I campaigned for Labour in the 1970 general election and I always blamed the women voters for letting Ted Heath get in because he made that eve of election speech



'Women are far more quickly prepared to stand up and be counted ... This has thrilled me about my own sex.'

about prices. If only it hadn't been for that woman Pankhurst I was joking at the time.

But now I feel we're redeeming ourselves. Women respond quickly. They don't just put self interest first.

But the National Front will try to appeal to women. They'll get going with a constant battery to get at women at home, as they do on the phone-in programmes.

When it comes to that part I play in "The Rag Trade", I suppose its a bit of a chicken and egg situation Which came first? I think I probably got cast as Paddy because of the kind of person I am. I was always reasonably involved in my own union, Equity. Just the other day I was saying I thought we ought to have an equity deputy for the series, and I suddenly thought, here I am doing it again.

In fact, I regard Paddy as a bit of a joke when it comes to trade union activity. I take my union far more seriously than she does. Their union is self-created, self-appointed and really non-existent.

It's amazing how the programme has caught on again this time round. I was worried about it, because when we first started the unions were not so villified as they have been lately. I thought people might respond in the wrong way, and say, you see this is how those bloody trade unions carry on.

But it's all done tongue in cheek, and that's how people seem to take it. I've met a lot of people in the garment trades. There are thousands who work in little sweat shops like that, very badly organised.

Personally I would have preferred to have seen a more multi-racial workshop in this

series. I was a bit perturbed at having just one black worker. After all there are a lot of Indian workers in the garment trades, and I hope in the next series we'll branch out more.

For the Anti-Nazi League, we're hoping to put on a big show in April. One of our most important tasks is to catch the imagination of the younger people, who haven't grown up with the same knowledge as we have about what Hitler and his ideas did to the world. There are lots of footballers and pop stars supporting the Anti Nazi League and this all helps. But I don't want you to think it's all stars or show-biz folk. We need to build the movement and spread the word as wide as we can. I don't believe in fisticuffs or violence, but nevertheless, wherever the National Front demonstrate we have got to be there with our counter demonstration.

I believe very strongly that we cannot, for all our sakes, afford to sit back and let them grow.

BY JUDITH CONDON

PHOTOS ANGELA PHILLIPS

THE National Front are planning to stand 500 candidates in the next General Election, probably later this year. In May they are putting up nearly 1200 candidates in local council elections.

The Anti Nazi League will be campaigning to stop people from voting Nazi. But the work needs to start now: the National Front are already on the rampage in Wolverhampton. They are distributing their leaflets around housing estates. They sell their racist papers in almost every major town in Britain.

We need to organise women to stop the spread of Nazi ideas, particularly to other women. Women Against the Nazis needs your active support. This leaflet, reproduced over page, is available at £3 for 1000, from the Anti Nazi League.

If you want more information about local activities, supplies of leaflets and badges, if you want to become an Anti Nazi League supporter, write to: Women Against the Nazis, Anti Nazi League, 12 Little Newport Street, London WC2.

Name _____

Address _____

Please send me
enclose

leaflets. I

DON'T BE CONNED BY NATIONAL FRONT LIES!

Housing, education, hospital treatment and public transport have got worse and worse over the years. Prices go up, and wages stay down.

- The National Front tells you this is the fault of black immigrants. Don't believe them. It is a lie.
- The National Front say this country is overcrowded. Since 1961 more people have left Britain each year than came in. The birth rate is falling.



Women of the Warsaw Ghetto before Nazi firing squad

■ The National Front say black people are flooding into this country. More white people move into Britain than do black people. White immigrants from countries like Rhodesia, Australia, Canada, New Zealand can get into Britain far more easily than black people. Immigration officers behave as if black immigrants are trying to lie their way into this country. That's how they treated Zahira Galiava. She was nine months pregnant. Her

baby died when immigration officials kept her in detention at Heathrow airport. They wouldn't even call a doctor to help with her birth. In 1977 four out of every 10 applications by wives and children in Bangladesh were refused.

■ The National Front say that black people are causing the housing shortage; they are taking the houses that white people should have. It's not true there aren't enough houses. There are 800,000 houses lying empty, owned by rich people who have two, or more. Houses are kept empty by rich landlords waiting for house prices to go up before they sell. Black people can't afford the high rents that landlords charge, so they are pushed into cramped housing, in the worst conditions. There are 300,000 unemployed building workers who could build more houses.

■ The National Front claim that black people cause unemployment, taking jobs from white people.

■ There aren't enough jobs. There are 1½ million unemployed. But that's the fault of the people who run industry not the people who work in it. In the 1930's there was massive unemployment, and no black people in this country. Unemployment is highest in Glasgow and Northern Ireland where there are almost no black people. Black people find it much more difficult to get jobs than white people — amongst young West Indians unemployment is 15 per cent compared to 7 per cent among young whites. Still, more than 90 per cent of black people are working. They build houses, staff hospitals, produce goods. If they were forced out there would be less houses, less hospitals, less buses on the road.

■ The National Front say black children in our schools hold back the education of white children.

■ There is no evidence to support this. Money has been cut from education spending making education for all children worse. There are almost no nursery schools left open. Shortages of teachers mean bigger classes and less learning. Most school buildings were built nearly 100 years ago.

■ Black people are not to blame. They don't sack people, or evict them from their houses. It's the landlords and employers who do that. It is hard trying to keep up a reasonable standard of living and bring up children in this country. But that is not the fault of black people. Blaming the blacks lets the real culprits off the hook.

WHAT WOULD LIFE BE LIKE UNDER THE NAZIS?

■ The National Front are Nazis, just as Hitler was in Germany. "We are busy building a well-oiled Nazi machine in this country" claims Martin Webster, their organiser. What would life be like for you in Nazi Britain?

■ They would segregate the schools our children go to: one school for blacks and one for whites, just as there is in South Africa. Only Nazi books would be read in schools. In Germany Hitler said: "Everything, from the baby's first story-book to the last newspaper will be put to this end."

■ The National Front are already stirring up hatred between pupils and teachers in schools, getting the children to tell lies about teachers, labelling their teachers as 'reds', distributing nazi literature to other school children.

■ "When we come to power all black people will be sent out of the country back to where they came from. No matter for how long or how many generations have been in our country, they will be repatriated." says John Tyndall, leader of the National Front. They will have to use cattle trucks, just as Hitler did, to ship women and children out of the country.

■ The Nazi's would make womens' lives a misery. The National Front believe women too are inferior. John Tyndall said: "It is a reflection upon the abilities of the men in the Conservative Party that their present leader is a woman." If you want to know what Tyndall and Co. would do for women, listen to their heroes in Nazi Germany. "Women should not be given work which calls for special presence of mind, powers of decision or a capacity for swift action. Women should not in general be entrusted with work which calls for special technical competence or knowledge." Women teachers, doctors, and nurses, women engineers and technicians would all lose their jobs.

■ The Nazis believed women had no right to independence. They said: "The woman of the future shall be at home in her kingdom, will not torment herself with fruitless worry about equality, will learn to find happiness in the accomplishments of her man."

■ The National Front don't believe in womens' rights. They are against women having the right to choose about abortion. In Nazi concentration camps women were forcibly sterilised; they were subjected to the most humiliating and degrading sexual experiments.

■ In Nazi Britain someone else will decide who you shall marry. Women in Nazi Germany were made to have children, to provide more soldiers for the battlefields. Women were mated with young Aryan soldiers: "Every Aryan hero should marry only a blond Aryan woman with blue eyes, a pink and white skin, and under all circumstances virginal. A blond blue-eyed man must marry no brunette..."

■ Today, the National Front have organised young school kids to demonstrate to force a ban on a school film which shows a young black boy and young white girl preparing for married life.

■ The "well-oiled Nazi machine" in Germany caused children to spy on their parents; families to be broken up; conscription for young boys; mindless allegiance to the Fuehrer, Hitler, for everyone.

■ The National Front say they are just putting Britons first. But their Britain will be just like Hitler's Germany. A country divided against itself: race against race, family against family, men against women, children against parents.



Women and children led to death by Nazis

■ Don't be fooled. Don't let them repeat in Britain what happened in Nazi Germany.

For further information please write to:
Anti Nazi League
12 Little Newport Street, London WC2.

Anti Nazi League

the rights of lesbian mothers

IN RESPONSE to the hysteria whipped up by the press against the lesbian women who had used artificial insemination Lea Valley Womens Voice Group asked a lesbian mother to speak to one of their meetings. This article is written by them.

In the never-ending search for sensational news to sell their newspapers, the media have recently picked on lesbian mothers. Joanna Patyna, a reporter from the Evening News, posed as a lesbian wanting to have a child through artificial insemination. This is the process of inserting male sperm in the hope that they will reach the fallopian tubes for possible fertilisation.

Joanna Patyna had done her research well. It was only because someone became suspicious, that they managed to stop the names, addresses and photos of women trying to get AID being published. But the doctor was exposed, and since there are only three in this country willing to help lesbian couples, this was a great blow.

This story threw the whole question of lesbian couples being 'capable' parents into the melting pot, with MPs like Rhodes Boyson and Jill Knight calling for legislation against AID for lesbian couples.

Lesbian mothers we

have spoken to feel that all this publicity has harmed their campaign for better custody rights for their children, possibly putting back all their work by years. The women dealt with Joanna Patyna, who is known as an anti-homosexual campaigner, by spraying her and her flat with paint.

But this cannot counteract the harm this sort of sensational reporting does to women who are anxious to bring up their own children in the best way they can, but have chosen to divert from the so-called 'normal' family structure.

A man is supposed to go to work every day, while his wife cooks, cleans, maintains the home and sees to the welfare of the children. She is the cornerstone of the family. He in turn provides money each week for these basic necessities of life and this is termed the 'normal family'.

Any diversion from this road is instantly seen as strange and not quite nice. There is a lot of pressure on married couples to carry on the straight and narrow, if only for the sake of the children.

If the strains and tensions of an unhappy marriage mean that the children are subjected to beating or neglect, then the social workers and courts

will step in. Where it comes to it, nine times out of ten the courts will grant custody of the children to the mother. Looking after children is the accepted role of women in our society—that is, if you are not a lesbian.

If a woman discovers her sexuality is not the accepted norm, if she prefers the company of women as friends and lovers, she is climbing a lonely, rocky path.

Often women feel these different needs after being married for some time, but because the law is so biased, keep quiet about their feelings and stay in their marriages solely for the sake of keeping their children. Others will leave with their children and fight for legal custody later, others leave without the children and then start the legal battles.

Either way their chances of success are slim. The courts are not there to encourage what they see as a deviation. The judges are usually sick men, with backward values and ideas in a predominately men's world.

The attitude of judges towards lesbianism has changed little since the 1930s, when the judge in a slander case said that lesbianism should be a criminal offence because 'unnatural relations with other women are likely to incite

abhorance on the part of average reasonable people'.

It's only been in recent years that judges have been encouraged to look into the welfare of the individual child in custody cases; but again, this is different in the case of lesbians. If, for instance, the lesbian mother's previous husband has remarried, then she has no hope of keeping her child. Even if she and the child have a strong relationship, if she has cared for the child for years, the father presents himself as normal and she is not.

The courts treat the lesbian mother as a moral danger to her children. They think children brought up by two women are in danger of becoming gay themselves in later years.

They claim to worry that the child will be embarrassed at school. But what about the large numbers of single parent families? Or the families that struggle on the poverty line, but who are never questioned because they are 'normal'?

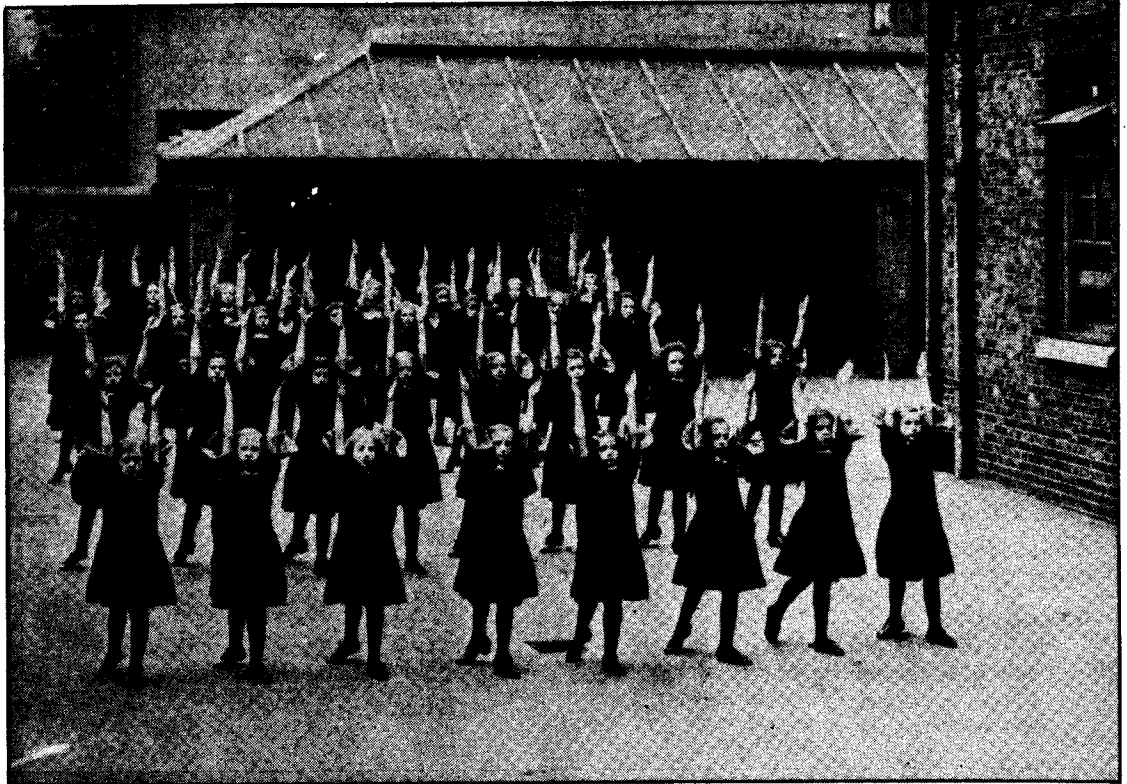
Lesbian mothers face many difficulties, typical of the society in which we live. They run the constant fear of being exposed and having their children taken away from them.

The gutter press has made matters worse—for the sake of increased sales.

the rights of lesbian mothers

DUTIFUL
DAUGHTERS

Dutiful Daughters is a number of women talking about their lives. In their own words, the women interviewed describe their childhoods, their work, sex, marriage, childbirth—all with an openness that makes the book powerfully moving and utterly gripping. Judith Condon spoke to Jean McCrindle and Sheila Rowbotham who put the book together.



Jean: We both thought about the idea of this book for ages. There seemed nothing at that time for older women to read about the lives of their generation. So this seemed the natural way to go about it.

Sheila: It would be very rare for working class women ever to have written about their lives. It's difficult enough for working class men, though a few militants of that generation have written their memoirs. Then there had been one or two good interviews in Spare Rib with old suffragettes.

Jean: Yes but we especially wanted women who hadn't been extraordinary, who hadn't done such unusual things. Within the women's movement we've always tended to be limited to younger women with time and energy. So in the book we set out to recreate with older women the sense of liberation that comes from relating your own experiences. And finding out that they have not been yours alone.

Sheila: We wanted it to be a book that if women read it—or men come to that—they would recognise parts of their own life in it.

Jean: When it comes to the themes that emerge most strongly

from the interviews, I think it's been interesting that most reviewers have picked up the parts about sex and childbirth, and the women's hostility to their own mothers. But one of the things that I remember most clearly were the parts about work, about how women's lives were affected by their work experience. I think we both found the description of night cleaning particularly harrowing, how that whole experience affected the woman's life.

Sheila: And the description of a younger woman of how she went as a working class girl to teacher's training college and the effect that had on her. One of the most dramatic differences between the lives of the older and younger women in the book is the impact of education.

Jean: We found the women in quite an arbitrary way, really. Most of them don't know each other. Some were first contacted as mothers of our own friends. There's a

strong representation of Scottish women from when I worked in Glasgow. I felt when I first knew them that they were strong and interesting women, especially in the context of Scotland: their's being a culture very oppressive to women, because their life was so hard and there is such a tradition of heavy drinking among their men.

Sheila: Most of the interviews were done over a summer when we took off with our tape recorder. Most of them we did together.

Jean: We asked a lot of questions at first. But as we became more confident we found it better to just let the women talk as things came to them. It wasn't difficult to get them to talk, if we could create the right atmosphere. Many times we felt they were pleased because no one had ever taken the time to listen to them before, or to think their stories and memories important. We would just explain that this is a book about women's lives. Perhaps it seems extraordinary in a way that they talked

so freely about sex, given the time they lived through, and the puritanical nature of some of their backgrounds.

Sheila: At the same time we found the interviewing very exhausting. And most of the women couldn't talk to us for more than about two hours. One in particular cried as she told us her stories.

Sometimes we would find ourselves crying as we played back the tapes, when we slumped down for the evening. I think the fact that Jean had had a baby made some of the women feel she had more in common with them than they might have felt otherwise.

Jean: Some of our own feelings about the book are in the introduction. I think the political points we've tried to make there are important to anyone who's a socialist. We've tried to suggest a few ideas about the nature of the socialist movement in Britain and its attitude towards women.

At one time, we feel socialism was seen more as an alternative

way of life, and people provided a cultural side that later went missing. For instance, they organised socialist camps and Sunday schools for their children, as an alternative to the culture of the churches. The Independent Labour Party with its Christian clubs at the turn of the century meant social fellowship as well as political activity. It was as if the church and the socialists were fighting it out for the working class people's leisure time, before there was real mass culture in the form of film and television.

In the late twenties the forms of political organisation became more narrowly linked with workplace agitation and the language of the factory gate meeting, which tended to leave women right out. The influence of Stalinism obviously made it much worse, but no-one seems yet to have found out exactly how this happened.

Sheila: In the earlier period there were several attempts to link the struggle of

feminists with socialism. It's been learning about some of those activities that's made me realise how much I mistrust 'official' socialist history. One of the reasons why it has seemed so important to look for a tradition of activity among women within the movement is because we know how it disappeared in the bad times, and perhaps could do so again.

Jean: Many of the

women we talked to had been involved in some kind of political activity. There was a kind of tiredness about several of them, especially one who'd had a child in late middle age. But none of them were really pessimistic about life.

Sheila: The main thing for me is that their whole beings seemed to go against the idea that there's just one kind of working class woman—just one type.

Their lives are all so complex. I felt angry that these people, who've had so much to give, so much inside them, should have been so thwarted in their lives. And I felt their experience of the humiliation of class.

Jean: I myself felt the humiliation of class was the strongest thing of all. Not all the women felt a burning personal resentment towards the men they lived with, though it's true that one

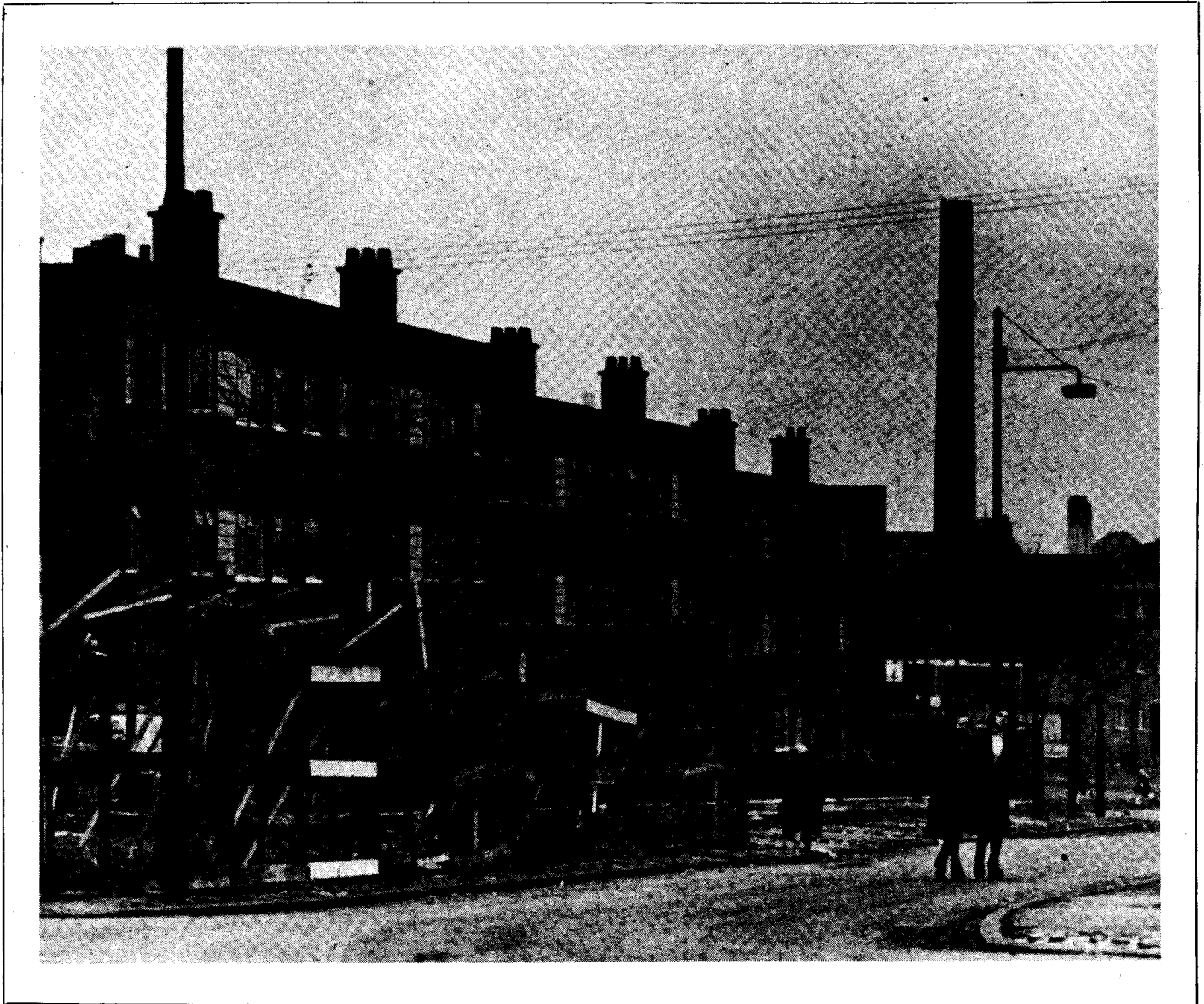
of the Glasgow women had suffered very directly at the hands of her bloke. But even her experience seemed to go so deep into the experience of that whole city. The women were trapped, and the men were trapped too.

I felt their class anger, though they didn't name it that way, was stronger than their anger at men. The things that had most limited them, and thwarted them, they

identified as lack of education, poverty, bad housing, being ignored by middle class doctors.

They were trapped as working class women—with their own special view of the poverty and bad conditions they lived in.

Dutiful Daughters is published by Allen Lane, and costs £5.95. Get your library to order a copy—and look out for the paperback!



Alexandra Kollontai
Selected writings
Translated by
Alix Holt

LAST MONTH we reviewed *Love of Worker Bees* by Alexandra Kollontai, leading

figure in the Russian revolution, and only woman on the central committee of the Bolshevik party. Now, for the first time in English, a wide selection of her writings is available.

The collection contains copies articles, speeches, diaries and pieces of fiction. There are sections on the

revolutionary movement before the first world war; on the debate between 'socialist' and 'feminist' women and the history of the Russian working women's movement; on the revolution itself; on women before during and after the revolution; the workers' opposition; on sexual politics and the family;

and writings from her later life.

Commentaries by Alix Holt introduce the pieces, and we will be discussing her approach in a later issue of *Womens Voice*.

Published by Allison and Busby at £2.95 (paper back), this book is one of the Bookmarx Club selections for the first quarter of 1978.

UNION MAIDS

WE SAY that women have fantastic potential to fight—and always have had. But the history of women's struggle seemed remote until I saw the film *Union Maids*. Now I realise that labour history is within the living memory of some very brave women.

In the film three women tell their stories of attempts to unionise women in America in the 1930s. Kate, Stella and Sylvia describe the dreadful jobs people took in the poverty and desperation of the American depression. There was no employment security, insurance cover or welfare rights, and people had to work in appalling conditions without guards on dangerous machinery.

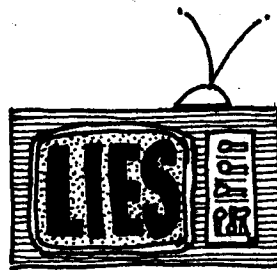
When one woman lost her finger-tips packing meat into a sausage machine there was no organisation to fight for her, but a struggle for better conditions began. These three women were part of struggles like these—each arguing for unions to protect the lower paid workers. One woman fought for black workers like herself who experienced racial oppression as well as poverty and exploitation.

The call to unite and fight swept the country, and the massive demonstrations and huge pickets are shown in photos and newsreel. So are the lines of police and armed thugs the bosses retaliated with.

The power and energy of the workers' fight is inspiring, the women are magnificent — still radical feminists, still with enormous faith in human potential, still believing in the justice of a socialist society and convinced that they were right to fight—though it cost them personally. But they also say that the struggle continues and that unionisation has not removed the evils fought all those years ago. People still work in dangerous conditions, and unions still have to be fought for (and fought in) for the rights to work and for decent pay.

Kate, Stella and Sylvia and the documented evidence of this film are reminders to us all of what was done, and what it cost, and we owe it to them and all the 'Union Maids' to carry on the fight. **Jan Brown**

Union Maids is on tour soon with Rank and File Films. See Whats Going On for details.



WHOSE RIGHTS?

HAVING been brought up a Catholic, I believe that religion has a major part to play in the ideological oppression of women. So when *Credo* came on dealing with Muslims and their fight in Britain for the right to practice polygamy according to their religion, I watched it with interest.

In general, as socialists we support the rights and freedoms of oppressed minorities. We supported the right of Sikhs to follow their religion in not wearing crash helmets on motor bikes.

So should we support Muslims in their claim for polygamous marriage? Or should we consider the rights of the women and the roles their religion dictates they should play?

One of the leaders of the Muslim community in Bradford put the case for legalising polygamy. A man, he explained, may take a second wife if his first wife becomes barren—and that was the word he used—or chronically sick.

Neither of his two wives were seen at all by the team making the film. Nor were his daughters. Only the sons were present. Women, he told us, are not allowed to mix with men other than close relatives.

This too creates problems—those of sending girls to mixed schools. It is morally corrupting for girls to mix with boys and young men. They should be totally segregated except

chosen by their parents.

I found this very disturbing. These Muslims are demanding the "right" to totally suppress their women as they have done for centuries. They are demanding the "right" to not recognise women as equal human beings, but only as possessions and as baby machines.

I was greatly relieved therefore to hear the young women fighting these attitudes. They were interviewed anonymously for fear of recriminations, but they were angry, and rightly so! They too were demanding rights—the rights that British women fought for a hundred years ago—the right to education for example. Education is our right, they exclaimed, it is not a favour to be granted by our parents if they choose. They felt that religion was a "great weapon" which was used against them, to keep them in their place.

One of the Muslim men spoke of the Day of Judgement. We are concerned about facing Allah, he said, and the argument to a Catholic is hauntingly familiar. It is God who has pre-ordained the roles of men and women.

No. We cannot support the rights of Muslim men to "keep" women, either wives or daughters, as property, just because Muslims are black and oppressed. These demands are even more oppressive.

The Muslims we must support are those young girls who are prepared to fight, as one of them said, with guns against our parents if necessary. They are fighting essentially for the same things as *Womens Voice*—for the right to self-determination, for the freedom to control their own lives and we must support them.

KINFLICKS

by LISA ALTHUR
Penguin 95p

IF YOU enjoyed *Fear of Flying*, or *Combat in the Erogenous Zones*, or *Ruby Fruit Jungle*, then you should enjoy *Kin flicks*. However, *Kin flicks* isn't just another American feminist novel to prove that women too can write about their sex lives...it's a bit more than that, it's funnier, it has more depth and its aim isn't to shock.

The story centres around Ginny Babcock and goes to

in Boston, then drops out to live with a woman on a farming commune in Stark Bog, Vermont. After the death of her lover, Ginny settles for a conventional marriage to Ira Bliss, businessman, and has a daughter. She eventually leaves Ira when she meets a draft dodger who is into mysticism.

Throughout the book there are other strands. She deals with the death of her mother in an honest but sensitive way. She exposes the hypocrisy of the 'back to the earth' modes and

She describes with great humour her early sexual experiences with Joe Ball, the Baseball King, and Clem, the budding maso-sadist. She shows up well the conflicts within her marriage and the problems of not leading the sort of life your parents approve of.

I found *Kin flicks* compulsive reading. I really enjoyed it ... and I recommend it for an enjoyable read. The worst thing about the book is the cover, which is cheap and titillating, but understand Lisa Althur is selling Penguin

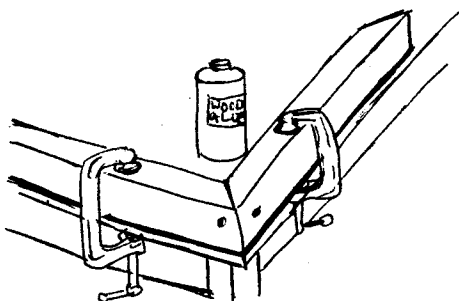
SILKSCREEN PRINTING

WE ARE daily surrounded by advertising posters that make a real impact on us. They persuade us to buy things we don't really want and encourage our kids to nag us for overpriced, rubbishy toys. These ads on hoardings, buses and trains, along with TV, radio, newspapers and so on are part of the way they tell us to live our lives.

We need to get our message across, but of course, we haven't got £5 million to buy a printing press. What we can do though, is to produce our own posters, simply and fairly cheaply, and make an impact in our locality, advertising a *Womens Voice* meeting, campaign or whatever. One method of making posters is silk-screen printing. It's quick and versatile and most of the equipment needed is easy to make.

Making the frame

The first requirement is a wooden frame and this is made from 4 pieces of 5cm x 5cm wood, 90 cm long by 60 cm wide. This will give you a good poster-size printing area. The frame should be strong at the corners and flat on the bottom. Have the wood cut with 45 degree mitred corners. Using the corner of a table as a guide, clamp one length and width piece in position, glued together, with a strong wood glue.



Securing the frame corners

Then hammer nails in the sides for strength. Repeat the same procedure for the other corners.

Stretching the screen

The screen is the fabric that you stretch on the frame to hold the stencil in place. The fabric needs to be nylon or cotton organdie. It's like net curtains, only *very* fine - ask for the finest mesh. It costs about £1 per metre and is available from large stores with fabric departments and fabric shops. If you can't find any, George Hall, Screen Printing Suppliers, Beauchamp Street, Stockport will post to you. Write to them for prices.

Cut the fabric at least 4cm larger all round

than the outside of the frame. Soak the fabric in cold water and lay it over the frame keeping the weave of the mesh parallel to the frame edges. In the middle of a long side, put in three staples 15mm apart and 15mm from the outside edge. Use a staple gun or ordinary stapler opened out. Keeping the mesh parallel, pull tight and repeat on the opposite side. Do the same on a width side pulling fairly tight and repeat on opposite side, pulling tightly. Work evenly around the frame, stretching the fabric tightly and stapling from side to side until the screen is stretched. Staple the overlapping fabric at the corners, to the side of the frame.

Preparing the frame to print

The stretched frame should not move while you are printing so it needs to be anchored to an old table or board. Make an anchor bar with a piece of wood 5 x 5 cm, 60 cm long. Attach it to the frame with two 75 mm brass hinges, about 7 cm from each end. Bolt the anchor bar to the printing table with a couple of fly bolts so that the whole frame can be removed for cleaning.

Preparing the stencil

There are several methods of transferring your design onto the screen. The simplest is a paper stencil. It is made by cutting from one piece of paper the letters and shapes you want to print. Clean newsprint is good, but any fine paper will do.

Decide what size you want your poster to be - making it a little smaller all round than the screen you have now made(!).

Draw your design, words and drawings, onto a piece of paper. If you don't feel confident about drawing letters freehand

buy a letter stencil from W H Smith or Woolworths for about 30p. Trace round this design onto the piece of stencil paper.

With a blade or cutting knife (Stanley Tools make one for about 35p from Woolworths) cut away the areas that you want to print. The ink comes through these spaces onto your poster.

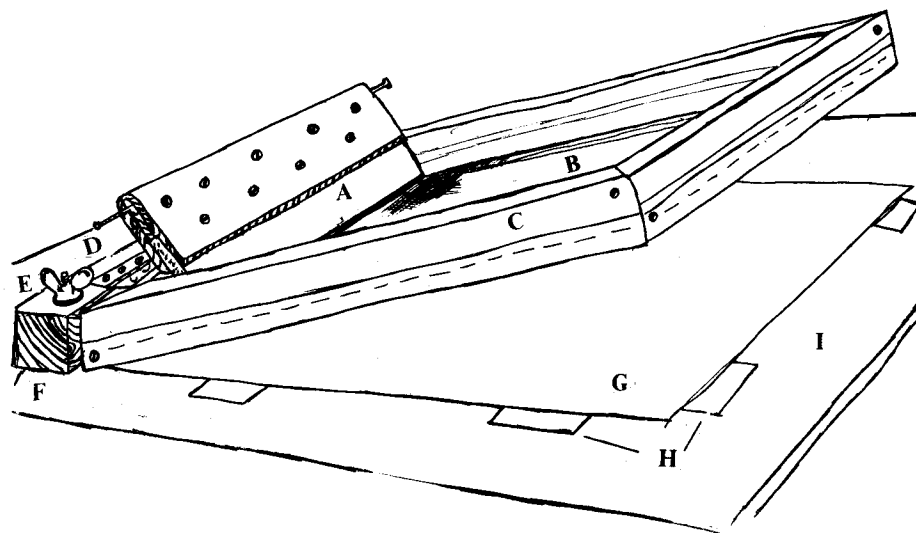
Use wide brown sticky tape to mask all the edges of the screen. This stops the ink from flooding through the screen round the edges of the poster. At the hinge end of your screen, mask off an extra 2 or 3 centimetres. This provides an 'ink-well', and allows you to rest the squeegee between prints without spoiling your poster. Do this on both sides of the screen.

Two colour posters are a bit more ambitious and need two paper stencils one for each colour. Print one colour, wait for it to dry and then print the second colour.

Preparing the ink

There are several different inks you can use to print your posters. The cheapest is a home-made mixture of wallpaper paste and dylon powder dye. Make sure it is not lumpy and of medium consistency. You can buy tubes of acrylic colours (from W H Smith etc) and water them down to thick-cream consistency.

If you've got a few bob to spare and want a really professional-looking finish, you can buy inks from Sericol (see above). Their water-based inks called Taxiscreen cost about £2 a litre and their oil-based inks called Jet Satin are about £5 a litre. With the latter, you need cellulose thinners (from car spares shops) to thin the ink and clean the screen. These aren't too good for your health I'm told, so work next to an open window. You can also look in Yellow Pages under printing suppliers and ring to check the type and price of inks they sell. When you've



Silk screen ready to print: A) squeegee B) stretched silk C) frame D) 75mm brass hinges E) bolts F) anchor bar G) printing paper H) registration tapes I) table.

D.I.Y. D.I.Y. D.I.Y. D.I.Y. D.I.Y.

D.I.Y. D.I.Y. D.I.Y. D.I.Y. D.I.Y.

mixed your ink, pour it carefully along the hinge-end of the frame on the screen, where you should have left extra border space when masking the stencil.

The squeegee

The squeegee pulls the ink across the stencil, pushing it through the open spaces onto the paper beneath. You can buy these from art suppliers/specialist shops and they cost about £3. To make one, you need three pieces of wood and some rubber for the

blade. The first 'pull' sticks the paper stencil to the screen. Remove the first poster and put the next sheet of paper on the printing table, frame down and pull the next one - it's as easy as that. While printing, work quickly so that the screen doesn't 'dry out', and lay your prints out to dry. It's a good idea to have a clothes line with wooden pegs to hang your posters on to dry.

Cleaning the screen

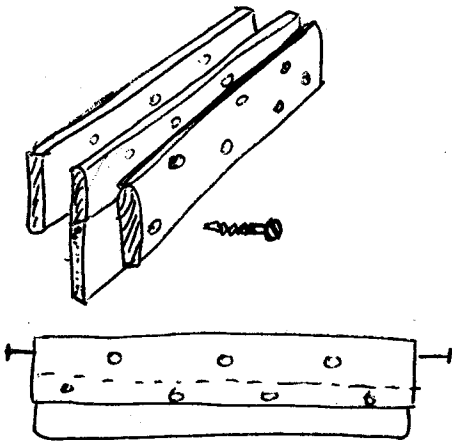
As soon as you have finished printing, always clean your screen and squeegee

thoroughly, then you'll have no problems when you come to print your next poster.

These are all the basic materials that you need, and you'll find that the initial outlay is well worth it for the number of posters you can produce. If you'd like further information on any aspect of silkscreen printing, then contact me through *Womens Voice*.

Lesley Klein.

• Next month: Writing for *Womens Voice*. If there is something you want to know how to do write and tell us. Or if you know how to do something . . .



Making the squeegee

blade. This is available from 'Sericol' (phone: North, 061 643 6211, South, 01-736 3388. They normally deliver the next day). It costs about £1.60 for 18". The rubber and wood should be about 4cm shorter than the inside of your frame. (See diagram). Screw the rubber between the wood into place. A screw in each end stops it from falling onto the screen.

Printing

Place your cut out poster stencil the right way round (ie, so that you can read it) underneath the screen and on top of a spare piece of paper. Lower the blank screen onto this. As different papers stretch at different rates, this allows the stencil to stretch slightly without 'bubbling'. Lift the frame, with your paper stencil stuck to it, and mask over the edges of the stencil. This keeps it in place and stops any leaking of ink. Now print your first poster by removing the scrap paper and placing good paper in position and 'pulling' again.

Hold the squeegee with both hands at an angle of about 60 degrees. Place it behind the ink you have poured out and pull it firmly across the screen towards you, spreading the ink evenly. You may find this takes a bit of practise, but 'pulling' posters will soon



An example of what you can do with Silkscreen Printing.

SILKSCREEN PRINTING

YOUR VOICE



by Simon Parkin
age 9
From Leeds.

Dear Womens Voice, I am fed up of an education that just tells me to be an obedient woman when I grow up. Me and my friend Tracy have been told that we have to operate the school washing machine every week to wash the boys rugby shirts, shorts and socks. We are told that girls are expected to do the boy's dirty work. Well we have had enough. If I do not finish the washing on time then I have to miss other lessons - usually my favourite ones. Even my mum didn't have to do this at school 15 years ago. Do you think this is fair? Why does the teachers' union let us girls be treated like this? Samantha Parkin (11 years old, Leeds).

No government too poor

Dear Womens Voice, I am glad you are taking an interest in Alexandra Kollontai. A true feminist, she was exiled by Lenin from the Soviet Union for her opposition to his NEP, which included disastrous anti-feminist measures. Socialist women today can learn much from this very important episode in history.

The NEP (new economic policy) introduced in 1921 was really the beginning of the reintroduction of capitalism and from that time onwards Russia proceeded on its downward path towards counter-revolution. As part of this new policy a housework service, communal kitchens, nurseries, creches etc, designed to release women from slavery at home, were closed down and women were condemned to the double (or treble) burden of paid employment in addition to unpaid housework and child-care, which they endure to this day. How was it possible to achieve socialism with half the population enslaved? Women working round the clock cannot play their part in public life on equal terms with men. Lenin did not see that this was the begin-

ning of the end but Alexandra Kollontai did.

Unfortunately Russian women's leaders in general accepted that the Government 'could not yet afford' the necessary social services and believed Lenin when he said that their turn would come (at men's pleasure apparently, women being considered less important than men).

No government at any time is too poor to allow women the social services necessary for their liberation. In Vietnam today, the revolutionary Government has announced that housework is the equivalent of productive work (a commendable feminist departure from orthodox Marxism) and supplies professional houseworkers for households in which the husband and wife both go out to work and for women alone with children. More often than not these houseworkers are men - which shows that housework is not regarded as 'women's work'. This devastated little country, still striving valiantly for both independence and socialism, deserves all possible aid from socialists everywhere. Yours in the fight, Kathleen Jones

Dear Womens Voice, Congratulations on a magazine that improves with every issue. Just one disappointment: I was surprised at the alternative answers to question 15 in your quiz (Ms Liberation) about a friend who is being battered. You gave most points for beating up her husband. However (even if you feel like going in against a violent, perhaps weapon-wielding husband or boyfriend, even if you feel it serves any purpose) calling the police might have been the best alternative (you gave it least points) since many stations now have a contact number for the nearest battered women's refuge.

There are nearly 100 Womens Aid groups in Britain and I think the liberated women's choice would be 'call your nearest refuge, get your friend out and take her to it'. There she and any children would be safe from further abuse, have the support of other women and time to think about her future. Kathy Kiernan (Telford Womens Aid)

PS: Anyone who is battered and/or would like to get involved in Womens Aid, please write to National Womens Aid Federation, 51 Chalcott Road, London, NW1, or phone 01-586 0104

Dear Womens Voice, Overt pornography is more and more a part of our mass culture. Feminists find little point in distinguishing between 'soft' and 'hard' porn; all of these images (with possibly accompanying literature or sound) exploit women.

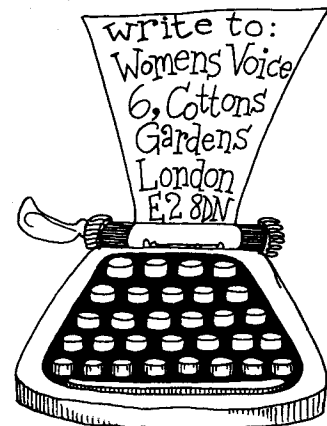
Page three in *The Sun*, with the *Mirror* following cautiously behind it, is accepted without question by many people. Men are duped by the ideas in this society which claim male superiority over women, of which the penis is the traditional symbol. Women are conned by the ideal female form and by fears of being seen as prudish or jealous. It is vital to recognise that this 'conditioning process' around sex roles is directly related to the specific oppression of women in our society.

Socialist feminists must be clear to oppose all exploitative images of women. We utterly reject Whitehouse's opposition,

for it is based on repressive ideas about sexual relationships such as 'the double standard' imposed on women. Her war against *Gay News* is evidence of her politically dangerous stance.

Last week Judge Marnan QC agreed with his all-male jury that a sex film 'The Devil in Miss Jones', was not lewd and obscene, and did not outrage public decency. Both the judge and prosecution accepted the defence application that *no woman* should be sworn onto the jury. This is one of endless examples of the inherent sexism in both the legal system and in the general ideas in our society. In sisterhood, Celia Shalom

Dear Womens Voice, In the recent row about Arthur Scargill's ideas concerning 'page 3' type pictures in the Yorkshire Miners Journal, one quote stuck out. He thought that the protesters about this ideas were being paranoid about something totally insignificant when there were matters of grave concern facing the working class movement. Great! What an attitude! One of the main ways we are divided as workers is on the question of the sexes. Numerous disputes and struggles have been lost and the confidence of women crushed by this sort of attitude. Its an argument that comes up all the time at work and must be tackled head on. With the present crisis, it's women workers who are under attack on every front and widely-publicised comments like this don't help the struggle one bit. Chris Barltrop (Cambridge SWP)

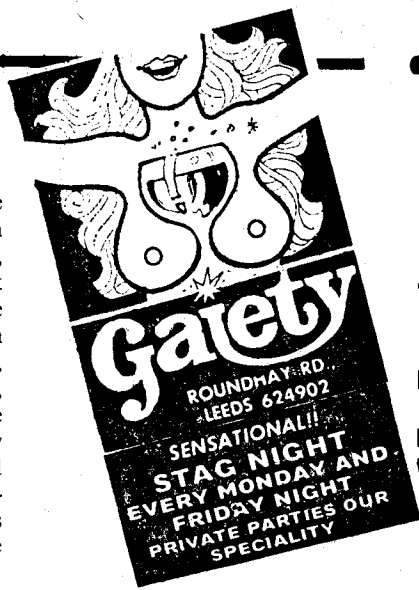


Please get your letters in early next month: to arrive by 17 February.

Fight racism!

Dear Womens Voice, Anyone who lives and works in an area where racials are active, knows what misery and fear it causes. In six months the place I'm in has seen attacks on Asian houses, and families harassed, buildings covered with slogans, Asian shops smashed up. One anti-racist poster in a window provoked a knife attack, and after the Labour Party anti-racist film on TV, burning rags were shoved through the Secretary's letter-box.

At first we tackled the problem in a public way with a clean-up one Saturday morning, and women and children got a good public response, that was when it was legal to clean filth off walls. Since then we've all been frightened, I'll admit it, but something happened recently that must give us strength. An Asian class started for English, and while the men didn't turn up, a 'mob' did who smashed the teacher's car up and the windows of an Asian family's house. The women did come to their class, and 20 of them defied the threats, and in spite of their inexperience and public shyness their need to learn the new language of the husbands and children made them brave. This should make us all determined both to support them and fight this poison in the system for all our sakes. WV reader.



A man's mate

Dear Womens Voice, The Americans have chosen six women astronauts. This bit of news might interest you but you'd hardly react the way the London *Evening News* did on 17 January. Page three, big headline: 'Man Must have his mate in Spaceship'. This was sick enough, but when I read the story I nearly choked. After *man* conquering the stars (how macho of him), the second paragraph says that six women have been chosen as astronauts in America and we are cheered by the further news that Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, later had a baby 'without any apparent ill-effects', (from space or from

YOUR VOICE

Dear Womens Voice, How about this one then? Incidentally, the male stripper that obliges on 'sensational stag night' is, along with vicars, prison warders and the Yolande McShanes of this world, a member of the National Front - that is to say one of the 'new men' that Tyndall and Co plan to replace 'this human wreckage' with! Paul Furness (Leeds SWP Gay Group)

being pregnant?).

Further on, next to a picture of Mrs Shannon Lucid and her obviously normal, wholesome nuclear family, we get the line 'and if man is going to live on the moon, women must go too... if the idea of sex and babies in space sound bizarre' (to whom?). Now we get the drift of the *Evening News* typical view of women: if these highly qualified and capable women scientists were chosen, it can only be to enable highly qualified male scientists to have suitable good lays.

Just to rub a bit more salt into the wound, this piggish story is followed by another: 'Exams before Beauty for Model Schoolgirl.' Shock. The lovely Joanna Darska actually wants to study for O-levels and even A-levels instead of posing for the agencies 'Superchick' and

'Starnest'. We often talk about how the media misrepresents and degrades women, but this must go down on the list for pig page of 1978. Sheryl Yanowitz, Camden, London.

Dyed Blue

Dear Womens Voice, I work in a laboratory of CIBA-GEIGY, a large multinational company which makes pigment for paints, dyes, inks etc. It's only very rarely that I hear who buys the pigment which we make and I was really surprised that one of CG's customers is a manufacturer of washing powder, namely a powder which promises 'blue whiteness'.

As always, what they promise and what we actually get are two different things. The blue whiteness which you are washing into your clothes is actually blue pigment. It's a well-known fact to people who work with colour that a spot of blue in white really brings out the brightness.

The process might work, but why don't manufacturers say so on the packet? Don't they want us to know that we are dyeing our clothes, not just washing them? Elaine Innes (Paisley Womens Voice Group).

Slim for Health

Dear Womens Voice, If slimming makes you constipated, eat wholemeal bread. A 70 lb sack of flour makes flour 11p a lb; it's what the working class used to eat before they were conned.

The theory is that bran is fibre keeps you at your ideal weight by absorbing liquid and making what you eat go through you faster. There are so many size sixteens, because most of us adults eat too much, too often. Solidarity with the Third World sisters means us eating less, so that their corrupt

male governments export less for money to buy guns.

Underdeveloped countries have high fibre diets, only the rich die of overweight diseases. Here, everyone can afford them. Piles, varicose veins, heart attacks, collitis - if you want them, keep eating refined rubbish. Power to the people, Linda Hendy, Edinburgh

Dear Womens Voice, I have just read your article on 'Womens Health' in your January edition and felt very disappointed. The biggest point you missed is that being overweight is a health hazard. Carrying extra fat around is always very tiring and buying clothes is a problem. What you should do is take a positive approach rather than a negative one. Stick to the point and your articles on Womens Health should be just that.

Being slim and staying slim needs education and an iron will. How about giving helpful hints, pointing out that slimming does not need expensive

foods and gimmicky diets.

I prefer to be slim for my own sake and carry on a sport which is slimming. I also know a few young men on diets - to make themselves attractive to the opposite sex! I got 40 in your quiz! Janine Egar (SRN in occupational Health)

Dear Womens Voice, Having read your article 'Not Everyone wants a nice plump bird for Christmas' (January issue), I should like to protest strongly about the thinking behind the last two paragraphs. The argument runs: 'our society does not allow men and women to freely choose either a partnership or independence as a way of life... all too often a relationship with a man is something we are driven into'.

Having always considered myself a feminist, I was disgusted and shamed to read this part of Gail Cartmail's article which so appallingly, if naively, distorts and suppresses parts of its own argument.

The only way to worthwhile feminism lies in having an honest vision of yourself - and by extension of other women: and thus by accepting that while a few women may be literally driven into a relationship they would not otherwise have sought, because of the difficulty of surviving alone financially, the vast majority of women do not see relationship with a man as anything of a burden - they see it in fact as something very much to be desired. "Shameful" though it may be, I know that I am among them in viewing a relationship with a man as an ideal and an aim, and not for the very limited reasons you specify.

Any state of affairs must inevitably be coloured by the methods used to achieve it. If we cannot establish an honest route towards complete equality with men and women, then I - feminist though I am - don't want to see it happen. Hilary Gaskin (Aberdeen University WAG).

SPINA BIFIDA

"If a woman wants a pregnancy, she wants a healthy baby at the end of it. That's the whole point of the exercise."

Dr John Scrimgeour
(Obstetrician at the Western General Hospital,
Edinburgh, and Fellow of
the Royal College of
Obstetricians and
Gynaecologists).

SPINA Bifida is one of the worst foetal abnormalities. It is one of a group of defects of the brain and spinal cord, which includes anencephaly (complete brainlessness). Spina bifida is an ugly, severely disabling disease in which the baby is usually born with an raw, exposed spinal cord.

Even when an operation to close the cord is possible, many babies remain incontinent, unable to walk and subject to slow and severe deforming of the body, if one side is more affected than the other. About 25 per cent of the babies suffer from hydrocephalus (fluid on the brain), with resulting mental damage. In 1977 2600 babies were born in the UK with defects and the brain and spinal column. 50 per cent of them had spina bifida. Many were still-born or died soon after birth. Most of the others will never have a normal life.

Towards the end of pregnancy the mother may develop a 'hydramnios' condition, so that her uterus fills up with large amounts of fluid. Not only is this extremely uncomfortable, but knowing that something is wrong often leads to severe depression, made much worse by a full-term still born or severely damaged child.

Prevention

Britain has the highest incidence of spina bifida in Western Europe, with black spots in South Wales, Belfast and the west of Scotland. There is a very low incidence in south-east England. It is very difficult to predict, as the causes of the defect are still not known. A previous suggestion that there was a link with potato blight has now been disproved.

Dr John Scrimgeour, of Edinburgh, is doing research into likely environmental causes, such as inadequate diet and pollution which may lead to deficiencies or excesses of trace elements (lead iodine, copper, phosphorous) in the body. These affect metabolism and may affect the foetus in early pregnancy. There is hardly any money allowed for such research, and Dr. Scrimgeour feels that there is little chance of preventing the defects occurring, unless the NHS allocates the resources.

Screening

Even though preventive techniques have not got far, methods of screening pregnant women have been developed much more successfully. Screening involves a two stage test, to see if the defect has occurred. The

first stage is a simple blood test, just removing a small amount of blood from the woman's arm sometime during the 10th-21st weeks of pregnancy. If the level of afp (aphafetoprotein) is too high, the woman may be retested. This is because the level of afp varies with the age of the foetus, and women may be inaccurate about the date of their last period. If the test remains positive, the second stage takes place.

Amniocentesis

With the help of *ultrasonography*—a method of photography using sound-waves which are thought to be harmless instead of dangerous X-rays—the baby is located accurately. It is then possible to take a sample of the amniotic fluid surrounding the baby, without any danger to the baby. This test leads to the detection of 88 per cent of the cases of anencephaly, and 80 per cent of the cases of spina bifida. Very few women would need the second test, but of those who need it a high proportion (1 in 7 or 14 per cent) have severely damaged foetuses.

Doing the screening means that women will know if their baby is damaged, and can be given the choice of an abortion.

The screening technique is only effective for 'open' lesions, where the spinal cord is actually exposed, and the damage is serious. It does not show up 'closed' lesions, where the handicap is much less severe.

The technique of amniocentesis, together with ultrasonography, is safe. Women are no more likely to abort than if they did not have the test, according to careful studies in the USA, Canada and the UK. So overall it is extremely unlikely that screening would lead to the loss of healthy babies.

Cuts

Initial screening schemes, particularly in Scotland, have been highly successful. They have led to improvements in detection, and a significant drop in still-births and births where the baby died within a few days. But plans to introduce a national scheme have been postponed. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists have advised the hospitals to 'make haste slowly'...

Three reasons are given. The first is medical—the supposed danger of aborting healthy foetuses. All the evidence shows that this is a red herring. The second reason is money. Screening takes time, skilled medical workers and equipment. It is estimated that it would cost £1m to introduce the scheme. £1m probably wouldn't even cover NHS entertainment expenses. It could save an enormous amount of suffering. The argument is that there are other priorities, which are never specified. But the truth is that *all* medical care has been de-prioritised, and maternal health services are being cut by 10 per cent. Ironically NHS figures contradict their own 'financial saving' argument. Detection of only 70 per cent of spina bifida cases would lead to a saving in terms of initial care and life-long hospital provision.

There are hospitals which are fully equipped for screening—but are not allowed to employ the staff to operate them. Another programme which has been stopped is genetic screening for biochemical deficiencies, many of which

could be corrected by immediate treatment at birth, if the screening has been done.

SPUC

The other argument is that abortion is immoral, and that screening should only be used to allay the fears of mothers with undamaged babies. Professor Robert Zachary of Sheffield is one of the leaders of this attack. Part of the argument is that since most severely affected babies do not survive long, or are still born, the mother should be forced to have a full-term pregnancy. In the words of a television spokes person for 'Life' 'Most of these babies can't be 'salvaged' anyway, so it's not asking much of the woman!' In support of their case they are giving a lot of publicity to one child who lives a *relatively* normal life. But his spina bifida was not apparent at birth, and would not have shown up in screening—he, though affected, is not a serious case!

A SPUC spokesperson has said that we should not abort foetuses, because it deprives 'god' of the chance of performing a 'miracle'! At the same time they are witch-hunting the doctors who decide not to prolong the half-existence of the worst affected babies. What hypocrisy! If they want their 'god' to be left alone to perform tricks, why have any medical care? What a 'god' if he only maintains credibility on the backs of the handicapped!

The SPUC position is the ultimate in irresponsibility. They don't create a fuss about the deaths caused by cuts, the lack of such things as kidney machines and the lack of very basic health care. They refuse to make *any* decisions about the quality of life we want for people. They are prepared to impose any amount of suffering to avoid making that decision: from the agony and stress of the mother and family; to the painful, short half-existence for the child.

The defining feature of human beings is that we *can* make choices—we can choose how to develop our environment. The choices are implicit in everything we do—whether it's abnegating responsibility like SPUC, or using resources to develop atom bombs. Or insisting that resources and research are devoted to developing and providing the sort of medical care we want.


The problems are immense. In the case of spina bifida they involve decisions about the effect of handicaps on the life of both mother and child and whether, in any society, we should impose life on a handicapped child. In a socialist society we would hope that those decisions would not be restricted by money, resources or lack of care. But that is not yet true.

At the moment we should continue to fight for the best conditions in which we can make the choices about pregnancy. In the words of Dr. John Scrimgeour: "The more women that know about spina bifida and the screening process, the better. It should be available to all women. Women should campaign for better health and maternity provision. After all, if a woman wants a pregnancy, she wants a healthy baby at the end of it—that's the whole point of the exercise."

Compiled by Judith Hamilton. Thanks to Stephanie Yanchinksi, New Scientist 12th Jan 1978; Jean M Lewis, West Yorks; Dr John Scrimgeour, Western General Hospital, Edinburgh.

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WV Meetings

- **Aberystwyth WV discussion groups.** Every other Tuesday. Farmers Side Bar.
- **Black Country Womens Voice** meets fortnightly, Sunday afternoons, 2.30 at 27 Glen Court, Compton Road, Wolverhampton. Children very welcome. Phone Wolverhampton 23233 for information
- **Brighton Womens Voice Group** meets every Tuesday; phone Sue 21060 or Gill 687848.
- **Cambridge Womens Voice Readers Meeting:** Wednesday 15 February, 8pm, Basement Flat, 13 Bateman Street. Details from your paper seller.
- **Cardiff Womens Voice Group** meets Tuesdays. Every fortnight 7.30pm at SWP Bookshop, 58 Bridge Street. Look for us in the Hope and Anchor next door if you're early. If you need a baby-sitter, phone Bronwen at Cardiff 43470 (evenings).
- **Edinburgh WV.** For information about WV work, contact Susie at Book Marx, 130 Morrison Street, Edinburgh. Open 10am - 6pm everyday and most evenings.
- **Hammersmith Womens Voice Group** is now meeting every second and last Monday in the month. Contact: Eileen 748 5655, Laura 602 5923.

- **Lampeter Womens Voice** meet Tuesday evenings in college. Details from Womens Voice seller or write c/o SDUC, Lampeter, Dyfed, Wales.
- **Lea Valley Womens Voice Group.** Monday 20 February, 8pm, 27 Nelson Road, N15. Workshop (Women and the Family).
- **Lea Valley Womens Voice Group.** Monday 27 February, 8pm. 'Women and Housing'. The Beehive Pub, Stoneleigh Road, Tottenham N17. Nearest tube Seven Sisters. If you need a babysitter or want further information ring Mary 802 9563 or Di 348 2041.
- **Plymouth Womens Voice** meets every other Wednesday. Next meeting 8 February, 8pm, Virginia House, Settlement Palace Street.
- **Reading Womens Voice Group** meets the first Wednesday of every month. For further information and details of other activities, phone Reading 62150.
- **St Albans Womens Voice** meetings: Tuesday 14 February - Sex and Gender, Tuesday 28 February - Is womens liberation possible without socialism? Is socialism possible without womens liberation? All meetings will be held at the 'Beehive Pub' Watsons Row (off the London Road). Everybody welcome.

- **South London Womens Voice** meets alternate Tuesdays 8.00, Right to Work Centre, 21 Mayall Rd, Brixton. For further details phone Nicky 737 1791 or Linda 737 0914.
- **South West London Womens Voice** group meet alternate Tuesdays 8pm, 91 Bedford Hill Balham. 14 February: Battered women, with speaker from Wandsworth Womens Aid. 28 February: She asked for it, the new Counteract P1 play, 8pm, Balham, Balham Baths, Elmfield Road. Admission 35p. 14 March, Why Womens Voice, speaker Margaret Renn, For more information ring 673 1329

Plays

- **Sheffield Womens Voice** present Counteract in 'She Asked For It' their play about rape. Thursday 23 February, 7.30 Kelvin Youth Centre, Kelvin Flats. Tickets 40p. All welcome.
- **She Asked For It** If you are interested in booking the play please contact Debbie or Dave at CounterAct 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1R OAT Tel: 01-251 4977
- **North London Womens Voice 'Wanted £1,000 Womens Voice Disco'.** Thursday 16 February, 8pm at the North London Poly, Kentish Town Precinct, Prince of Wales Road, NW5. Bar till 11.00 30p to get in.

fun

- **Union Maids on tour,** organised by Rank and File Films.
Sheffield 13 February
Newcastle 14 February
Sunderland 15 February
Glasgow 16 February
Edinburgh 17 February
Liverpool 20 February
Manchester 21/22 February
Leeds 23 February
Norwich 27 February
Nth London 28 February
Southampton 1 March
Portsmouth 2 March
- **Women and struggle:** Poster Film Collective with women from Malaysia, Ethiopia and Chile are coming together to put on an Exhibition, Side Shows, Films, Music and discussion. From 27 February to 18 March, all day programme. Womens Free Art Alliance, Cambridge Terrace Mews, Chester Gate, Off Albany Street. Everyone Welcome.

Help

● **Are you unemployed, or just underemployed?** Do you have a few spare hours a week when you could come and help with Womens Voice. We've got tasks which fit everyone's talents. Ring Margaret 739 1878.

Jumbles

● **Lea Valley Womens Voice** group Grand Fund Raising Jumble Sale: Tuesday 28 February, 7.30pm, Tottenham Community Project 628 Tottenham High Road, N17. Refreshments available. 5p admission. Helpers needed (be there by 6.30 please). Ring Mary on 802 9563 with offers of jumble.

Rape crisis

● **Rape Crisis Centre.** If you have been raped or sexually assaulted and want someone to talk to or need legal or medical advice the Rape Crisis Centre runs a 24 hour telephone line. Contact us anytime day or night on 01-340 6145 or PO Box 42, London, N6 5BU.

Gay Groups

- **Campaign against Whitehouse! Defend Gay News.** Demonstrate Saturday 11 February 1pm, Temple Place, Embankment, London. Bring your banners.
- **SWP Gay Group** meets every other Monday. Ring Richard 790 2454 for details

Conference

● **Women and the Law:** A conference on Women's Rights and State Legislation — the practical application of the Acts and the underlying weaknesses of Government policy. There will be talks followed by seminars:
a.m. Tess Gill. "Women's Employment since the Acts."
co-author of "Womens Rights: A practical guide."
p.m. Jean Coussins. "The other areas: new legislation on tax and social security." women's rights officer, N.C.C.L. Fee £1. Creche available: 25p per child. Contact Lucie Manheim, W.E.A., 32 Tavistock Square, W.C.1. 01-387 8966. Papers will be available in advance. March 11th 10.30-5.30. Y.W.C.A., Gt. Russell St., W.C.1.

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