

womens **VOICE**

20p July '79 Issue 31

**'Get us out
of these
slums'**

**SPECIAL
FEATURE:
No sale
of
council
houses**

New technology is having its most immediate and radical impact in the office. Word processors, the electronic replacements for the typewriter are being introduced at a rapid rate by private companies and in the public sector up and down the country. There are already 11,000 in use.

Three million jobs at risk! Will yours be one of them?

- * Three million jobs are at risk.
- * Word processors mean a dramatic change in office work.
- * Visual display units are bad for your eyes.
- * In America they call word processors 'the spy in the

typewriter'.
A new Womens Voice pamphlet **Job Massacre at the Office** explains:
* what a word processor is, and what it can do
* the threat to womens jobs
* the changes to typists jobs,

deskilling, more supervision, less control
* the dangers to health
* how to organise against job loss and for shorter working hours
If you have not yet been alerted to the dangers of new technology then listen to

what Jim Prior, Tory spokesman on Employment has to say: 'The benefits of the silicon chip should be passed on reasonably equally not just to those who still have jobs but also to those who gave up their work so that Britain could take advantage of automation.'

Available from Womens Voice, PO Box 82, London E2 8DS, 01 986 6222 Price 25p & 15p p&p. 4 copies or more post free.



'I have nearly the whole world against me. Men, because I demand the emancipation of women, the owners, because I demand the emancipation of wage earners.'

A SHORT HISTORY OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION BY BARBARA WINSLOW



REVOLUTIONARY FEMINISM

● Flora Tristan 1848

In this pamphlet Barbara Winslow spells out the complexity of women's position argued in Flora's words. Revolutionary feminists (not to be confused with the extreme separatist variety) have the dual role of fighting not only for their own liberation as women but also for the liberation of the whole working class.

It's an extremely useful potted history of the Womens Liberation Movement put in its political and historical context. It traces the history of women's resistance from as far back as Joan of Arc, through working womens struggles in Europe and America, the Russian Revolution and counter revolution, through to the present day.

It shows how in the past the fighters for womens liberation were often part of the working class socialist movement. It exposes the position of many middle class women who put their class interests first and were only interested in the 'rights of ladies'.

The three main strands of the Womens Liberation Movement today, the reformists, the separatists and the revolutionaries are looked at, and the first two positions rejected. A lot of people would argue that there are more than these three positions, but it would probably take a much longer pamphlet to do justice to the history of the movement since the sixties. Then the exact relationship between a revolutionary party and an independant organisation of revolutionary feminists could also be spelt out. Here it is too sketchy.

This pamphlet is easy and exciting to read, full of lovely quotes, and it certainly wets the appetite for a lot of further reading. *Alison Kirton*

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Features

Special on housing: 'No Sale' wall poster: Seven reasons why council houses should not be sold. Plight of council tenants in London and Coventry, pages 13 to 16

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News

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Have you got ideas for articles in Womens Voice? News, views and criticisms? Our next editorial meeting will be on Wednesday 25 July. If you want to come along ring 01 986 6222 for more details. Or write to us at Womens Voice, Box 82 London E2. Send your letters, articles, news to the same address to reach us not later than 13 July for the August edition.

Cover photo by Virginia Turbett

Here we go again

Defend our abortion rights!

A new bill to restrict abortion is to be put before Parliament. It was bound to happen. We all expected it. The exact contents of the bill we don't yet know. But we do know that a major feature will be to reduce the time limit with which women can get legal abortions.

The case is presented as a humanitarian step to stop the horror stories of live, aborted, babies being left to die on draining boards that we heard so much about during the recent election campaign. But as Professor Peter Huntingford, of the London Hospital, declared the only way to stop this happening is to ensure that the foetus is aborted—and that means dead—not born alive.

It is important to ask why late abortions occur and to understand that this new bill like the James White bill in 1975 and the Benyon Bill in 1977 will not stop late abortions, but will increase them. It is not created out of an idealistic desire to help women or children but out of a wish to prevent women from having any kind of control

over their bodies, over when, and in what circumstances, they have children.

Late abortions happen for two reasons. First, because in some areas the difficulties and red tape involved create such long delays that by the time the abortion takes place it is well over the safest 12 week period.

The second and most common reason is that late abortions take place for very serious medical and social reasons.

We do not have abortions lightly. Most abortions are caused by failed contraceptives, and it is a traumatic experience that no woman goes through without a great deal of thought. But perhaps the most important thing to remember is that abortions which take place for very serious, medical reasons, whether late or early, would have been legal before the 1967 Abortion Act. And probably will still be legal if restrictions are brought in.

So any new attempt to restrict the 1967 Act will in fact be, as previous attempts have been, an attempt to restrict abortion in total, and the result, a return to the dangerous and often fatal backstreet abortions of pre-1967 days.

The only effective way to ensure unnecessary late abortion does not take place is to have freely available abortion facilities, carried out in day-care abortion clinics, staffed with willing, sympathetic and understanding staff.

We must fight any attempts to restrict the law, and campaign for proper safe facilities for all women, not just those who can afford Harley Street fees.

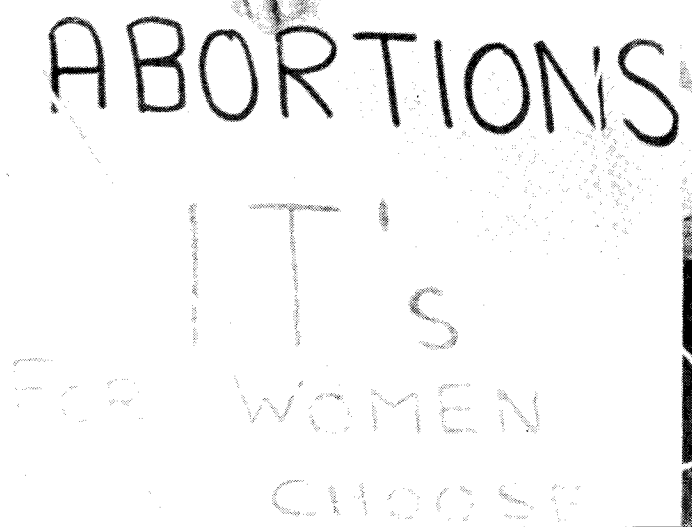




photo: Andrew Wiard (Report)

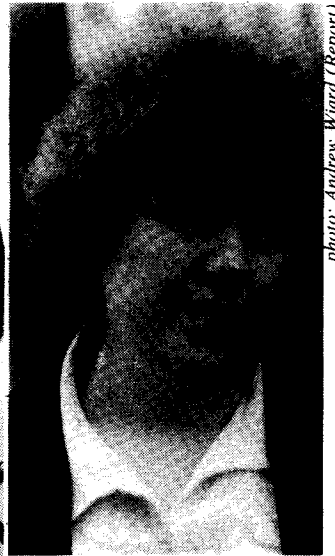


photo: Andrew Wiard (Report)

Ellen Gallagher

Dumped on
the street with their
suitcases

CHAMBERMAIDS ON STRIKE AGAINST THE

ON THE first of June, 30 chambermaids at London's richest hotel—the Grosvenor House—found themselves sacked by their notorious Trust House Forte management. Fifteen of them were made homeless as well as jobless; some women have been living there for as long as nineteen years. They were left sitting on their suitcases outside the hotel, wondering where they were going to sleep that night.

Ellen Gallagher, their shop steward, had been asked to change her section and clean different rooms. She refused on principle; the women had already refused to sign their contract precisely because of an unfair flexibility clause. All the women supported her and promptly stopped work to have a meeting. Management gave them five minutes to get back to work. The women refused and were all sacked on the spot.

They started fighting back and within a day had organised a picket line to get support from other workers in the hotel. Management tried to threaten workers who didn't cross the picket line and the other union in the hotel (the General and Municipal Workers Union) tried to persuade its members 'not to get involved'. Despite all this, some of the chefs and electricians supported the women.

The women are still trying to get

all out support from inside the hotel, but it isn't easy. Trust House Forte does all it can to make sure the catering workers are weak and divided. The women have had a lot of support from UCATT (Building Workers Union) members setting up an Antiques Fair in the Hotel. It was due to be opened by Prince Charles himself. As soon as they heard what had happened to the women, they stopped work and joined the picket line. 'Their support has been fantastic,' says Ellen. 'It shows how strong solidarity can be. They've boosted our morale no end'. Now the Antiques fair has been cancelled which will be more than embarrassing for Trust House Forte.

Organising the picket line has not been easy, especially now the chambermaids are scattered all over London, 'but we've learnt a lot and gained a lot of confidence' says Ellen. 'It has shown us how strong we can be and that we women can be as strong as the men. We've got to win this strike to prove we're right. It's not only for us, but for all the low paid women in hotels—if we win this it will be a real breakthrough.'

The women have already got support from other Trades Union branches. Ellen spoke at the Garners conference on 9 June and she is going to the Rank and File con-

ference on 23 June. 'Going around to these meetings makes you realize how strong the union could be,' she says, 'and we need the support to win.'

Women's Voice groups can help by organising collections and sending messages of support. Send them to Grosvenor House Strike Committee, Nuflo Hall, Jockeys Fields, London W.C.1. If you are in London you can help on the picket line from 5.30 - 9.00 in the morning and 5 - 6 in the evening. Contact the strike committee and get Ellen or one of the other chambermaids to come and speak at one of your meetings.

Marie Holborow

•The Equal Opportunities Commission notes with 'alarm' in its recently published annual report that the gap between womens and mens earnings is getting wider. Strange, they said exactly the same in their last annual report. Perhaps the Equal Opportunities Commission hasn't yet woken up to the fact that they were responsible for this state of affairs, and with the £2 million a year budget they have they should be doing something about it.

Women's gross hourly earnings were 75.5 per cent of men's in 1977. They had declined to 73.9 per cent by 1978.



IT ALWAYS gives us a good feeling to see a demonstration dominated by women—but it was absolutely marvelous to be on a demonstration taken over and organised by black women.

The Indian women's organisation, AWAZ, mobilised the demonstration—'Black People Against State Brutality' on 3 July. Thousands of people, black

and white, marched through central London protesting about the states injustice and downright brutality towards black people. At the rally Mrs. Desai

emphasised the need for women to organise in their workplace. Other speakers highlighted the importance of community involvement.

HELD UNDER THE PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT

Every few weeks we read in the newspapers that someone has been arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. More often than not they are later released and no charges brought. The Act has in fact become an excuse for the police to pick people up on suspicion that they might have done something even if there is no evidence against them.

One English woman who has been arrested eight times is Margaret Crawley. She is a member of the Irish Socialist Party support group in this country. She spoke to Womens Voice recently.

'The first time I was arrested was in December 1974. I was at work at the time, in the Co-op on the Isle of Dogs. It was 10 o'clock on a Monday morning. Three policemen walked in the door, said they were members of the flying squad and would I step outside. There they arrested me under the newly introduced Prevention of Terrorism Act. They took me immediately to Limehouse Police Station.

'I was 22 years old and three months pregnant. They strip-searched me in front of a window that had no curtains. Then they fingerprinted and photographed me and even did forensic tests on my hands. I was really nervous. No, I was bloody terrified.

'I was taken into the detention room where there was a table, and a chair and a rubber mattress, and I

was then questioned by the head of the Special Branch.

'He kept saying: 'You wouldn't like to be in Holloway in July, would you? Your baby would be born there.' They kept on and on about people I had known.

'I thought to myself, they can do what they like with me so there's no point acting stropky. People just make it hard on themselves if they do.

'On the Saturday, after six days, they finally let me go. 'Our bosses have decided to let you go' they said, just like that.

'It all set me back a lot. I felt really isolated, though I must admit we had no aggro from the neighbours. It was just horrible to think that they had been watching my every move for the past months.

'Two weeks later I had a phone call. It was from a police sergeant, Michael Doyle. 'How are you,

Margaret,' he said, 'would you like to come out for a drink with me?' I was more scared than I had been during all that time inside. 'No thanks', I blurted out. Eventually he hung up, saying I wasn't to tell anyone about his calling. I was so scared, I immediately went and told some friends.

'The last time they arrested me under the PTA was on 18 May this year. I had been in hospital the week before with a kidney complaint. It was a Friday afternoon and I had gone to pick up my little girl from the nursery.

'On my return my sister Kate told me the CID had just called for me. I managed to ring a solicitor before they came again.

'I was arrested and taken to Paddington Green, where they finger printed me, photographed me and took me into interrogation. My nerves were so bad I couldn't hold a cup of tea.

'They kept asking me to make a statement about someone I knew, but I was reluctant to without a solicitor present. They suggested I make a 'special' statement, that would only be used by the Special Branch.

'I was questioned like this all

weekend. I noticed that this time I was given a letter as my name. Miss A; I felt I really was a secret prisoner.

'They really tried to divide the people arrested against each other. I heard them questioning Peter Grimes and Jimmy Scanlon who'd been brought in, trying to imply that I had been informing. When I told the police I knew what they were trying to do they said that perhaps if people thought I had been telling what I knew they would get heavy with me, and then I would come to the police, for help!

'They held me for five days. Then let me go. They never charged me.

'Shenade, my little girl, has really suffered. This time she wouldn't let me out of her sight for two weeks. She wouldn't even go to the nursery.

'This Act is really evil. They can hold you for no reason. They can do anything to you in its name.'

•Women in Ireland: Slide Show. 30 minutes of slides about the Irish republican struggle with a particular reference to the role played by women. We offer to bring slides with a speaker to your meetings. Ring 01 790 3528, evenings.

WHAT A BUDGET!

WHEN the queen read out what her new government's policies were just over a month ago, it really made me laugh. Because between her and Maggie T you couldn't have two people who could have possibly been the least affected by the contents of that speech. And, probably you and I didn't pay it much heed, until the Budget was announced last week, and we hit the queues in Sainsbury's.

I've got two kids and I have to work full time so that we can have a decent living. And already we are going to have to cut down on luxuries. (You know the kind that they have at the palace and 10 Downing St., chocky bickies, fruit, and Comfort on your clothes).

Bread is now approaching 30p, so is sugar, and butter is nearly 40p. That means that you can just about buy three essentials for £1.

Unlike Mrs T or ER I can't afford to stock my cupboards. I can't even afford to fill the shopping trolley.

Her election con was that we would all get tax cuts—great—then they put VAT up. So that meant

that all the money I got back in tax (now was it 75p or 80p) went straight out the window again on VAT.

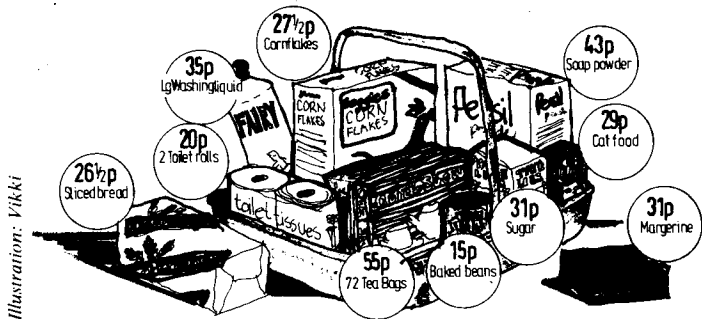
I don't smoke but, unfortunately for me, I happen to have this terrible habit called eating, living in a house, wearing clothes, riding on buses and (just imagine) having the cheek to need gas and electricity. Thank god we haven't got central heating, because we wouldn't be able to afford to use it with the present price of fuel.

But there she goes again. Conning to the left and to the right, because there is no fuel shortage at all. But if you can create a shortage it means you get to be really sneaky and put the price up.

But why oh why do we keep falling for it. First there was the sugar shortage—then coffee—then tea—now its oil.

Form a queue please—the next shortage is due to arrive at 08.00 hours.

Next time we should remember VAT and Vote Against the Tories! Chris Fellowes.



PRICES are on the increase. Everyone who ever has to wheel a basket around a supermarket will know just how bad it is. Every month Womens Voice will keep a check on the prices of ten different grocery items. These prices were collected from the Spa Grocery in

Warrington, Lancashire, on Saturday 9 June, by Sadie Blood.

'Two days later some of them had already gone up' she told us! We have left out items that may vary in price in different parts of the country or vary from season to season. They are pre-budget!

STUDENTS ORGANISE AGAINST RAPE ATTACKS

AFTER one rape and several assaults, women students at Trent Park College, part of the Middlesex Polytechnic, have organised to fight back.

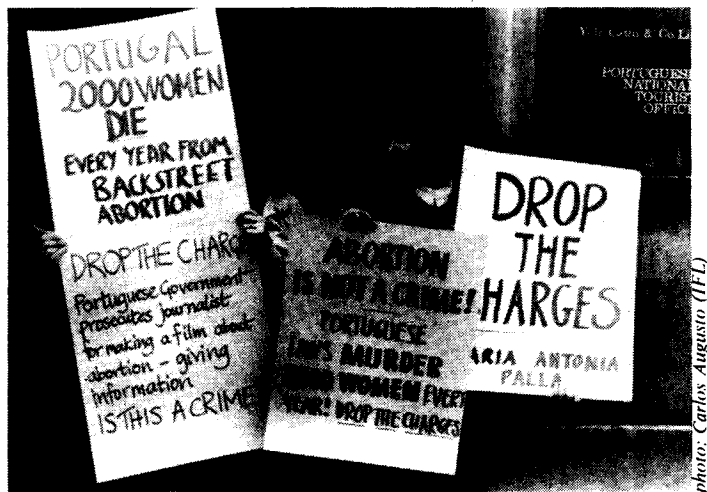
On Thursday June 7th the college Women's Action Group led a torchlight march through Oakwood and Cockfosters, and on the next day the students' union staged a boycott of all lectures.

The college is situated in a remote spot in the middle of an extensive park. Students are forced to use Snakes Lane, running from Oakwood tube station to the main

college buildings, and it is in Snakes lane that the attacks took place.

The women are demanding that there should be an improved minibus service every fifteen minutes instead of the present unreliable and spasmodic service. Also that there should be better lighting in Snakes Lane, where lights are often left unrepared. They are also demanding a six-foot high wire fence along both sides of the lane. The polytechnic authorities are refusing to grant this last demand on the grounds of cost.

This is an important issue. Similar attacks have occurred on other campuses around the country, and in women's halls of residence. College authorities must be forced to provide adequate transport, lighting and fencing to stop would-be rapists before any other women are attacked.



ABORTION

ALL abortions are banned in Portugal. But it's estimated that 180,000 abortions are performed illegally each year, and that 2000 women a year die from them.

Now, a Portuguese journalist, Antonia Palla is on trial accused of incitement to crime for her part in a television film about illegal abortion.

The film 'Abortion is not a Crime' was screened three years ago and, not surprisingly, upset both Catholic bishops and conservative politicians.

Antonia Palla could face up to eight years in prison if she is found guilty.

ABORTIONS were made legally

possible in Italy, a year ago. Unfortunately 70% of doctors have taken advantage of a conscience clause which says that a doctor conscientiously opposed to abortion cannot be made to perform one. In Tuscany 'only' 60% of the doctors refuse to perform abortions. As a result hundreds of women come from different provinces to Tuscany, a suburb of Florence. Yet, the public hospital to which these women go, has only 20 beds in the maternity ward!

The hospital could not cope with the rush of women and had to close its gates. They posted a notice which explained that no abortions could be carried out for a week. Needless to say women in Florence are campaigning for a day-care abortion clinic.

GRANADA UNION SLAMS WOMEN

WOMEN working for Granada Television in Manchester decided to form a women's group within their union, the Association of Cinematograph Television and Allied Technicians. They wanted to press their special claims for maternity and nursery allowances. They were hoping Granada TV, a very wealthy company, could be persuaded to come up with a nursery agreement in Manchester to match the one the union negotiated in its Granada, London, shop.

So what was the response from the women's union rep? We reproduce below the amazing hysterical letter he issued on hearing about their women's caucus.

'The Shop Committee has asked me to point out that any contact with the Company through the so-called "GTV Womens Group" is contrary to the provisions of Clause 15 of the National Agreement.

The Union fully supports the Company's refusal to open any dialogue with this unauthorised pseudo collective representation.

Any member of the LIVE shop who infringes the above clause, or indeed any other agreement or regulation, will be answerable to the Shop Committee. The Union has a

positive attitude to equal opportunities and all members of the shop are in a position to take an active, and constructive, part in the administration through shop and committee meetings'.

M. Foster, Shop Steward

•Did you know that in 1978, the Big Three chocolate and sweet makers, Cadbury, Rowntree and Mars spent over £32 million just on TV adverts.

The drug companies spend more on advertising each year than the total amount spent on educating doctors.

•Did you know that over half of all women with children go out to work—but there are only enough nursery places for 1 per cent of them.

•Did you know that when the Thatcher government announced that nobody can now get a job in the public sector, it wiped out 45,000 jobs for school leavers at a stroke. There will be 800,000 school leavers looking for work this summer.

•Did you know that 2000 spastic babies are born in Britain every year. Over a third of these could be prevented by better ante-natal care.

The Tory government is going to try and change the pattern of health care in this country towards a half and half private-public system.

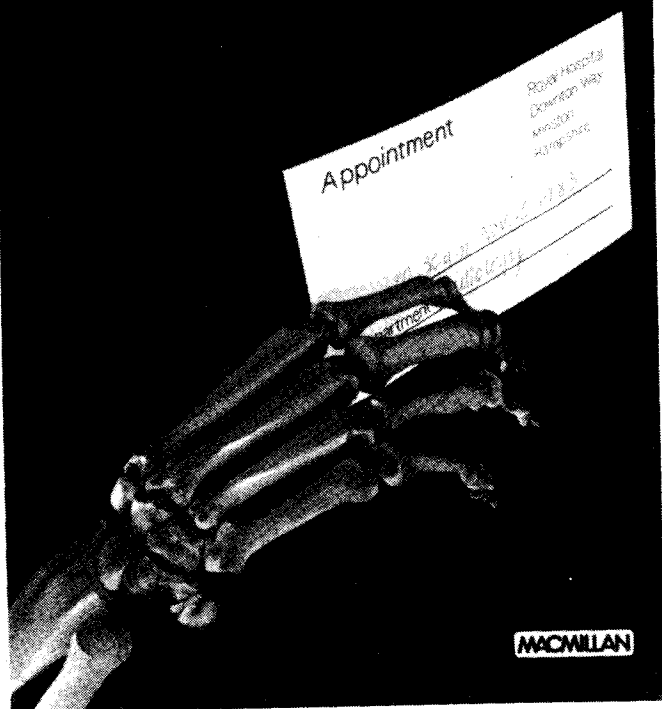
Will it improve health care? What happened to working class men and women before there was a National Health Service?

PRIVATE WEALTH-PUBLIC ILL HEALTH

Health in Danger

The crisis in the National Health Service

David Widgery



The NHS in Britain was not set up because the rich and powerful suddenly went soft at heart. Nor was it only set up because working women and men agitated powerfully for it, although this is part of the reason.

In the 1920's there was a bit of a health service—a wage earner could go 'on the panel' of the local GP because a certain sum was being deducted every week from the worker's wages to pay for it. The wage earner could also get free medicines and sick pay. Employers had to contribute to this fund, which was similar to the National Insurance today. The scheme was set up because of the huge number of men who were being found unfit for military service.

But this scheme did not cover non-wage earners. Women and children and the unemployed could still only get treatment if they could afford it. If you became so ill that you had to go to hospital you were still in terrible trouble. Up to 1928 you had no choice but to go to the workhouse. Illness that went on so long that it made the person destitute was still

regarded as a form of 'pauperism'.

Long term sickness was regarded as malingering—or at least the bosses were so scared that if good care was taken of the long term sick, people would take advantage of it. So until 1929, if you had to go to a 'Workhouse Infirmary' you had your vote taken away from you.

Of course there were the big flashy charity-run 'Voluntary Hospitals' mostly in London, like St. Thomases and Barts. A poor person who lived nearby might get into one of these and even be treated by one of the foremost doctors of the day, out of the goodness of his heart and the fact that he needed teaching and practicing material to try things out on before charging money to give new treatments to the rich.

Your disease would have to be an 'interesting' one, a comparatively rare one for a poor person, one that rich people were likely to get too. Please don't bother the doctor with mere TB or bronchitis or miner's lung.

The result of all this was pretty disastrous for the health of the general population. A study of 1638 children in 1937 found that only 12 out of every hundred of these kids did not have rickets. In another

survey, 40 per cent of the women were found to have deformations of the hip-bones, which would put them in great danger when bearing children. This was due to bone diseases brought about by malnutrition. The maternal death rate (of women in childbirth) was actually rising at this time.

Another result of having only a minority of the population covered by health insurance was that many doctors still had problems in making ends meet. There was all the difference in the world between the rich consultant with a post at a Voluntary hospital and a wealthy set of private patients and the country GP, or the local doctor in an industrial community.

The bad state of the population's health worried a government faced by the 'total war' of the 40s. In the emergency conditions of wartime, the objections of the richer doctors could be set aside, and an 'emergency medical service' was set up, a centralised, state-funded, nationwide health service. Doctors from London found themselves shunted off to the provinces where they found they had to practice in shocking conditions. They protested. Many doctors also found that being a salaried employee of the government rather than clinging to their precious independence was not such a terrible situation. Being able to give all patients treatment according to what illness they had was a far better experience for younger doctors, as it gave them the chance to carry out complicated and long-term forms of treatment. Every patient could now have X-rays and blood tests rather than just those who could dig a little deeper in their pockets when a test was needed.

It may be hard for us to imagine how modern day medicine, with its brain scanners, total body scanners and other enormously expensive machinery, could possibly work according to this sort of system. Of course, the answer is that it can only offer private patients these forms of treatment if the basic machinery and the training required are funded from taxes, taxes paid by all of us.

In the USA, to this day, you get your medical bill with every test and X-ray added up on it like a supermarket list. People still risk common infectious diseases in the poorer areas because the immunisation costs more than parents can afford. And, since there is no insurance that can pay for long term illness such as those which strike in old age, the elderly and disabled are shunted from grottier to grottier places as their money runs out.

Some of the description of medicine before the War may still sound familiar to some people today. This is because even the amount of private practice we still

have is enough to cast a blight on the health service as a whole. The diseases of the elderly, industrial diseases, some women's diseases, for example, are given very little priority because rich people do not get them. Far more money is spent on heart transplant surgery than on discovering ways of preventing heart disease, a disease that kills far more workers than managers every year. How can we ever expect preventive medicine to advance when the most powerful people in medicine are those who charge money for treating illnesses. The most criminal thing of all is that the top doctors and surgeons, who are organised into the exclusive Royal Colleges, actually stop 3 out of every 4 qualified applicants every year from getting into medical school to train as doctors. Only if there are queues is anyone willing to pay to jump them! That anyone is allowed to regard illness as something to make money out of is a danger to health. But a surgeon today can earn £20,000 a year for one day's work a week in the private sector and only half that for four days' work a week for the NHS.

As well as private medicine being on the increase, the idea of charitable funding to make sure that some of the less well off get decent treatment is growing fast. Many kind and misguided people may have thought that this was the answer for 'special' services such as that which the Elizabeth Garrett Hospital provides for women. But health being a charitable gift is the very opposite of health being a right—I don't know which I hate more, the idea that health is up for sale or that it should be something we have to grovel for.

Mel Bartley

Over 150 people turned out for the lunchtime mass picket of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital for Women, Euston, London on 20 June to protest at the Tory con-trick proposals to 'save' the hospital.

The Tory promise means that beds at the EGA will be cut from 137 to 40 and jobs will go: these 40 gynaecological beds will not be open for 3 years! They say any other services will have to be funded by charity; all non-gynaecological services are to permanently close, and the Camden & Islington Area Health Authority have leapt in and voted to carry this out immediately. The Save the EGA Campaign and Camden & Islington Area Joint Stewards Committee ask for the following support: Build now for a mass picket at the EGA on Wednesday 11 July, 1.00pm. Support the picket to protect the hospital. Send your phone number so you can be contacted in an emergency. Invite a speaker from the EGA. Contact Pam Jones 387 2501.

NEWS



Photo: Andrew Ward (Report)

ON MONDAY 23rd April, in a quiet residential street in Southall, Blair Peach was battered to death by the Special Patrol Group. Seven weeks later, on 13th June, thousands of people gathered under a grey, rain-filled sky, to mourn for their dead brother and to walk with him on his final journey through the East End of London.

The funeral procession assembled at Phoenix school, the place where Blair had taught for 10 years. Many of his pupils were there to pay tribute to their much loved teacher.

The popular press, cameras clicking at every movement and every tear, made much of the famous MPs who were

there. But more important were the thousands of trades unionists who had left their work places in the middle of the week, to show how they felt at the death of a brother and friend.

The procession moved slowly off down Bow Road, led by the two black cars filled with flowers. Two large wreaths bearing the symbols of the Anti Nazi League and the Socialist Workers Party, were carried by comrades. These were not just floral tributes, they symbolised everything he stood for.

When the procession reached East London cemetery, the thousands of mourners stood in silence, many weeping, to listen to the last tributes to Blair from

his friends and comrades. As Tony Cliff said, 'We must not build monuments of stone and brass, he would be insulted. We must mourn, but also organize and mobilize.'

As the red carnations that we all held fell like a thousand red flags into his grave, one thing was certain—We will never forget him and we must carry on his fight because that's the way he would have wanted it.

Anna Sullivan

Friends of Blair Peach Committee—your help is needed now

COLLECT MONEY

The Blair Peach Memorial Fund: Donations will go towards help-

ing Blair's dependants and will fund anti-racist work. Write to Langdon Park School, Byron Street, London E14 for collection sheets.

The Southall Defence Fund—This fund is to pay for the costs of all those arrested on 23 April and will help to pay for the independent enquiry set up by the Southall community and the NCCL. Send all donations to PO Box 151, London WC2. Collection sheets are available.

SELL THE FACT SHEET

The fact sheet is sponsored by the East London Teachers Association of the NUT and published by the Anti Nazi League. Orders 50 for £1 to PO Box 151, London WC2.

PLESSEY WOMEN FALL FOUL OF PRODUCTIVITY

WOMEN workers at the Plessey Semi-Conductors factory in Swindon have been on strike for 3 weeks. It was the first time that there had been a complete stoppage at the factory. Womens Voice spoke to Rosa Tran who has been working at Plessey's since 1958. She is an AUEW (Engineering Union) shop steward.

'We went on strike for more money. Years ago Semi-Conductors was one of the best paid firms in Swindon, but over the years our pay has fallen behind, especially since the Government pay freezes and norms were introduced. Now we are paid less than any other Plessey factory in Swindon, even though our work is more com-

plicated; we make silicon chips.

'Management were offering us a £55 minimum wage, but we wanted £60. We started a work-to-rule and a ban on overtime.

'When one of our machines breaks down we are supposed to call a technician. The trouble is that they often take 10 minutes to come over. So, the girls mend the machines themselves. Of course, when we started the work-to-rule we stopped mending the machines. The management wouldn't accept this and started suspending us. I think they wanted to teach us a good lesson. They suspended 20 women, so we came out on strike. 'We organised a 24-hour picket, including weekends and the Bank

holiday. We had to stop management smuggling the silicon chips out in their staff cars. We had to try and close the factory completely.

'At the beginning each shift arranged its own picket, so the day shift picketed during the day, and so on. This wasn't really fair on the night-shift, who only had 40 workers instead of the the day-shift's 140. In the end the day-shift workers supported the night picket.

'On the 29 May we had a meeting in the canteen to discuss a new offer. Nothing had been added to the basic offer of £55 but the productivity bonus had been raised from £2.40 to £3.50 per week. But, of course, to get the bigger bonus we would have to produce even more

than management had previously asked for. The bonus was to be paid monthly, if the targets were met, but only until the end of August, when it would stop.

'Unfortunately, because a lot of day-work women had taken a day's holiday, and because the offer seemed more attractive to the women on the twilight shift, the vote went against us, and the offer was accepted.

'I think chaos will break out at the end of August when the £3.50 bonus will stop. As long as there are managers with company cars, annual pay reviews, and separate canteens and toilets, we will go on fighting.'

POLITICS COLUMN

THERE's a new badge which says 'Nuclear Family—No Thanks'. It makes a lot of people cringe.

What is it about the family that we're afraid of losing? It's love, I think, because if the family doesn't mean happiness and loving relationships then surely it's not worth very much.

Our society destroys love by teaching little girls that all we really want is a husband to look after and look up to. Nothing is equal. Without equality you don't have love, you have worship.

When we're growing up, the boys scorn the girls and the girls compete against each other for the boys. We're taught that when we have sexual, loving feelings for other girls we're warped.

If we find the 'right man', low wages, unemployment and bad housing crush our love very quickly.

Just when you need time to sort things out, get to know each other properly, the only place you can talk in private is the bedroom. Then the kids come along and all you get is a lousy 'unlettable' council flat that nobody else would take. Councils are still putting young families in tower blocks, and with the Tories selling up all the houses with gardens, they'll be stuck there for ever.

Against all the odds we go on trying, because life is pretty depressing, and because some sort of love to come home to goes a long way. The final irony is, once that love is utterly squashed and you just want to get out—you can't leave!

If your man has been battering you the council *may* rehouse you, but more likely, they'll offer you bed and breakfast or a Reception Centre. We go back to our lousy relationships because at least there we have some sort of home and our belongings around us.

The romantic ideal, till-death-us-do-part, is a sick joke. It's a con because it's restricting, it's limiting and because it **doesn't** make us happy. On the whole we marry young, divorce young, or reconcile-ourselves-to-it young.

Could there ever be a better way?

Think first of all about the difference that good housing would make. Space to be alone when we want to be. Different kinds of housing for different numbers of people living together. Add to that vision the idea of having enough money. Not depending on a man to provide, but all of us working at things we enjoy, and having our own incomes. Add nurseries and playgrounds where our children could be really well cared for by other people when we wanted them to be.

Add to that, and this is the really difficult bit to imagine, a society where we've been brought up proud to be women.

It's hard even to imagine what we would want. We would want to live in different ways; some in pairs, some singly, some in groups. We'd want different things at different times of our lives. Some of us (many more than dare face the difficulties at the moment) would live with other women.

In a society like that we could love, and we could be loved. The very idea that before socialism and before women's liberation we could have lived in the love-less way that we do now, will seem the most ridiculous idea on earth.

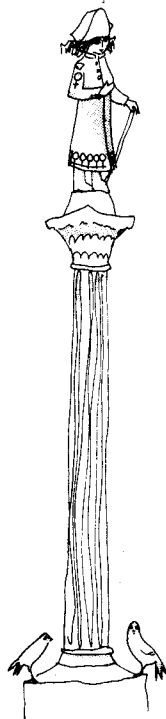


Illustration: Yikki

SPAIN

One thing we know for sure has life-women

'I am from a family of five sisters. The other four have all had abortions—although none of them knows about any of the others. They have all come to me and sworn me to secrecy. They have come to me because I am a feminist. They feel terribly guilty. They feel so ashamed. Not even their husbands know it'.



photo: Jenny Jackson

'This is why so many women die—they say nothing until they are dying because they will not admit to it before. You can be put in jail from 6 months to 6 years for having an abortion; up to 20 years for making an abortion.

Isabel Villena is a member of the Women's Health Group in Barcelona, Spain. It was the first group to take up the issue of abortion there. She spoke to Jenny Jackson of Women's Voice.

'Now you don't go to jail for using contraceptives, but most doctors don't want to give them. Only from a few private gynaecologists, and only the pill. Most doctors say the coil is an abortive and won't prescribe it.

'There is no information about the sheath. And there is a

big taboo against it—it is the thing men use when they go with prostitutes. The cap and spermicides are nearly impossible to buy in Spain. I have been buying dozens and dozens—that's my London shopping. If I am stopped at customs, I shall just say I have a very active sex life!

'Contraception has been legalised because of pressure from the drug companies. That's why only the pill is for sale!'

'We have made a study on abortion. Many women have had abortions but would not say so even under torture

because to them it is a crime. We estimate there are one million abortions a year (out of a population of 35 million). Most of them are back street abortions. Most women don't have the money, or time, or bravery to go to have a safe abortion outside the country.

'There are two ways to get an abortion. One is the butchers. They just do it to take money. A D and C (a scraping of the womb), without any anaesthetic or drugs, on a dining table.

'But most women do it themselves. Either by sticking substances in themselves—diluted sulphuric acid or vinegar, or abrasive soap with an enema into the uterus. Or drinking hot beer or wine and then taking aspirin which gives haemorrhages. This makes the foetus go, but in most of the cases the women go with it too.

'3000 women die a year from these attempted abortions. It is one of the most usual hospital emergencies.'

'Abortion is used as a kind of contraception. Many women have 8 to 10 abortions in their lives. They know nothing about contraception, or if they do, they can't get them.

'Things are a bit better since Franco died, because of the movement's pressure. The government have started plans for 30 family planning centres. But to get the pill you have to be married, have three children, have 'good conduct' and can pass a test to prove you are 'mentally normal'. You have to pay for the pill, of course.

'Feminists in Spain have been struggling to get ourselves accepted. Some people said that we were dividing the working class movement. That we were sexist. But we were fighting against sexist laws. Women who committed adultery were sent to jail—not the men.

'We fought for an amnesty for women in jail—they were 'guilty' of prostitution, female homosexuality, having an abortion, adultery or leaving their husband's home. We said that they were our political prisoners, and they should be included in the political amnesty, when prisoners were released after Franco's death.

'We don't have any idea how many women were released.

'In 1976 mostly left-wing young women came to us. But

little by little the voice was heard.

'A hundred women a week come to us now. We would like to do more with other aspects of women's health, like natural childbirth, but as soon as women hear we can do something about abortions, we are flooded with requests.'

'It's impossible to get a safe abortion in Spain. We try to send women to Britain. 10,000 Spanish women had abortions in Britain in 1978.

'The main help you can give us is to keep the abortion law here. Fighting for yourselves, you are fighting for us as well.

'If the British law changes we are wrecked.

'Our first aim is to bring the subject into the open—to get all women to say that they have had abortions and not hide the fact.

'For us the right to abortion is the basis to all other feminist work because you cannot get equal pay, equal work, if you cannot control your own fertility.

'Just one example—a 24-year-old woman came to us. She had had eight children. She was worn out, a wreck. What can equal pay mean to her?

'It's the working class women who speak most openly about being oppressed sexually. They

realise it, but don't tell their husbands. If the man is present the woman doesn't speak. We have learned a lot. We thought we would liberate them, but they are teaching us.

'A woman who has come to us to get the pill has come back in three months to ask for a letter to say she cannot take it any longer for health reasons. Naturally we were surprised and asked why? She couldn't refuse her husband sex any more and she hated it. She wants an excuse again. This shocked us.

'Another thing was the taboo of not making love when menstruating. The women asked us not to tell their husbands that it was alright to do so because it gave them up to eight days off. We started to wonder if some of the sexual taboos are not created by the women for their own protection. Trying to liberate sexual life is nothing if you don't change the act of love itself.

'Single mothers get no social security. Life is very difficult for them—sometimes too difficult. Here is a recent example.

'A single mother had a job as a waitress and was made to work on Sundays. Her family would not look after the child because they were ashamed of her. She had managed to get a nursery place during the week, but it was not open on Sundays. She pleaded and begged the personnel manager not to make her work on Sunday. He did, and she went mad. She drowned her four-month-old baby girl.

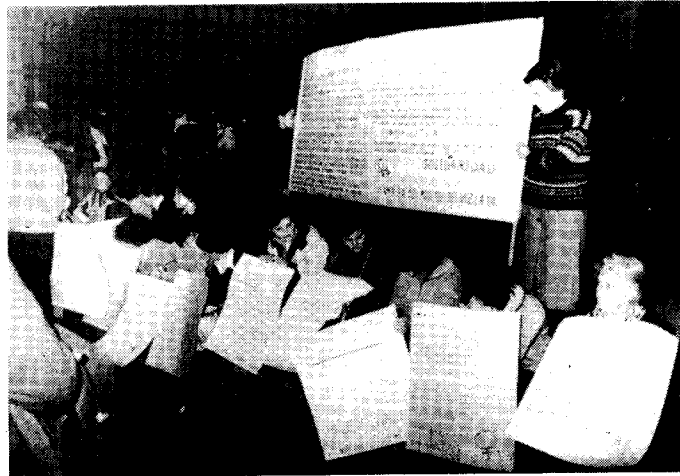
'The other women at the hotel went on strike during her trial and denounced the personnel manager, accused him of incitement to murder.

'Many women want the child but had to have an abortion because of their economic situation or social pressure.

'We want to find a new way of contraception without having to worry all the time from the time we are 13 to 60. So international contact is very important for us. We can go a long way further by learning from other sisters.

•We would be very interested to write to any women's health groups. Or if anyone is coming to Spain for a holiday, come and see us—with your 'London shopping'.

DAIA, Coordinadora Feminista
C/Caspe 78, 1º 2a
BARCELONA, Spain
Telephone 225 8124, afternoon and evening.



'We have debated on radio programmes with anti-abortionists. When they accuse us of killing the foetus we say this. One thing we know for sure has life. Women. And 3000 women a year die because of unsafe abortions. What do you say about that, you life defenders?'



Around the groups

Around the groups is a regular spot for reports of your Womens Voice meetings and activities.

Please try and keep your reports brief and please try to send us photos, black and white print. If you haven't got anybody in your group who is a dab hand with a camera let us know about your activity and we'll try and send someone along.

Falkirk

On Monday 21 May we arranged a public meeting on Workplace Nurseries and the Nalگو Maternity Rights Campaign. We invited speakers from Edinburgh Womens Voice.

The town had been leafleted and other shops in smaller villages were also given posters. 150 leaflets were given out in a local factory.

Unfortunately, not everything went to plan! One speaker couldn't come, and no

members of the public came either! There were only about 12 of us there, that had organised it in the first place, all members or supporters of the SWP, and one of the Womens Voice speakers from Edinburgh.

However, we remained undaunted, despite that slight setback. Lyn Turner told us that in Edinburgh it took quite a while to

get organised, so we remain hopeful.
Frances

* We don't often publicise our less successful events but we thought this letter from Falkirk could get some discussion going on this page about the best way to organise meetings. Your ideas please.

Wolverhampton

The Wolverhampton Womens Voice group really began back in January 1976 when two SWP women members began estate sales with Womens Voice magazine. They also started collecting signatures for a pro-abortion petition. By early summer that year they felt able to arrange a public house meeting, with a speaker and a play about abortion, and the group came into being.

We decided to hold fortnightly meetings, on Sunday afternoons at a member's house, with children welcome. This arrangement seems to work well, and now between 10 and 15 women meet regularly, with other activities, a monthly factory bulletin, estate sales, abortion petitions, taking place in between.

Being a Midlands group in the centre of a region infamous for the difficulty women have in obtaining NHS abortions much of our work is on this issue.

At present we are running a petition for the improvement of women's health care in general, especially abortion and contraception facilities. We have found that people who start by being very anti-abortion tend to change their attitude after talking to us and understanding our point of view. Although approaching people in the street with a petition is difficult it does seem to be worthwhile.

We have also met a surprisingly large number of women who have had abortions, usually secretly, and are relieved to have a

chance to talk about their experiences. The group has built up some case studies of women and their difficulties in obtaining abortion, and this is now available in exhibition form.

For a year the group has been producing a regular factory bulletin for the employees of Ever Ready. The factory employs a lot of women.

Although starting knowing no-one, contacts have been made so that recently, with all the workers facing the threat of redundancy, the convener contacted the WV group and met to discuss the bulletin.

Another sign of the impact the bulletin has made is that someone thought it worth their while to produce a fake bulletin calling people to a non-existent meeting—and six women turned up!

Fundraising is mainly done through jumble sales, although some plays or films can bring in money. The Counteract play 'She Asked for It' was financially successful.

We helped prepare the Women Against the Nazis pamphlet and distributed this in areas of Wolverhampton where the National Front is active. A Reclaim the Night march was arranged with the Polytechnic Womens Group.

On a more relaxed note—but very much in keeping with the group's desire to involve their families, there have been two successful Womens Voice camping holidays. The 1978 one was arranged to coincide with the Anti Nazi League carnival in Manchester. Some members child-minded at the camp site while others went to the carnival.

Sue Wall

Merseyside

Merseyside Womens Voice group has recently held meetings on prostitution, advertising and pornography. Our next two meetings are on being a woman in trade unions and fat is a feminist issue.

At the moment we're involved in the Merseyside abortion campaign which has been revived to put pressure on the Area Health Authority to open a long promised abortion day centre. We're planning a lobby, occupation, and a street event in the city centre.

We've also organised a day school for Womens Voice groups in the North West in late July with a national speaker, films, workshops and a social in the evening. Please contact Alison (051 727 4057) if you're interested in coming.
Alison Wilson

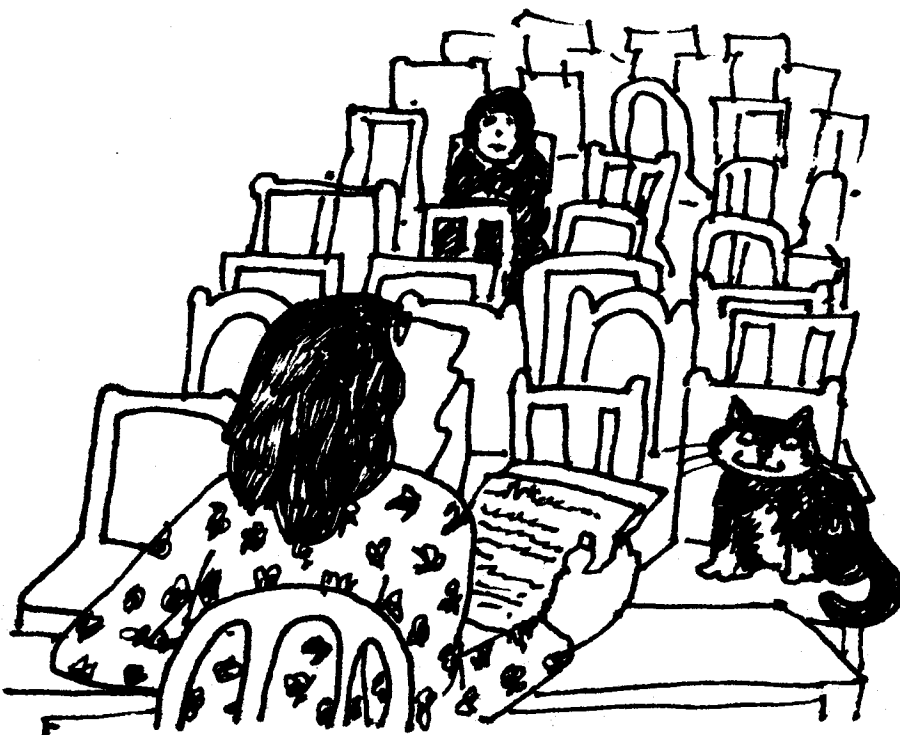


Illustration: Maureen

Our homes; the most squalid and unhealthy imaginable

Maria, Dawn and Linda live in the most squalid and unhealthy surroundings imaginable. Their landlord is the biggest landlord in London—the Greater London Council.

The GLC have been in the news a lot recently because the Tories have taken control once again and intend to sell off as many council properties as possible.

They even wrote to the women on the Prestons Road Estate in East London and asked them if they would like to buy a house.

'I told the Estate Officer to stuff the offer in his face,' said Linda. 'The Public Health Inspector condemned this flat seven months ago and I'm still here. What I want is another flat.'

'The GLC sent a workman round recently. He was disgusted. But he couldn't put anything in writing for me. I do have a doctor's letter. It says this is 1979, not 1879. People shouldn't have to live like this.'

Linda is 19. She has two children, the two year old, Jamey, now lives with Linda's mother because his bronchitis is so bad in the damp flat. Mark is one year. Her husband has left.

Her flat is completely covered in black mould. It's not just in one corner, but on every wall in every room. The bathroom looks as if it is decorated with black marble the mould is so bad.

'I've got a spare bed here. I challenge anyone from the Council to come and stay here for a week-end and see how they feel when they wake up in the morning.'

'I've lived here for three years now. These were 'one offer only' flats that they were offering to young couples to keep them in the borough!'

Dawn was homeless and pregnant so she couldn't refuse an offer to move into one of the flats on the estate.

'I've always suffered from my nerves but living here is making me ill. My hair fell out when I was young, but when I became pregnant it began to grow again. Can you imagine how happy I was? I was really chuffed. Now it's all fallen out again.'

Dawn is 21. 'I haven't paid my rent for five months now. My mother is holding it in a bank account. And I won't pay until something

is done.

'I've got toadstools in my toilet. The window in my son's room never shuts. He's only nine months old.'

'If I had any money I would buy a place just to get away from here. But I don't have any. There's not much left out of £29 social security when you have to pay £9 rent for a dump like this.'

Illness and disease spread through the estate. The sewers leak into the courtyard. Dirty water from one bath comes up in the bath of the flat below.

Maria's face is swollen and numb from a poisoned ear. She can't close her right eye to sleep.

The children are ill, the mothers are ill, a lot of the husbands have upped and gone.

But still the women from Prestons Road Estate have not been beaten. They write letters, organise demonstrations, they even slept a night outside Number 10 Downing Street in the hope that Britain's first woman Prime Minister might do something to help.

'Her milk arrives at two in the morning, her bread at four, her papers at five, and the groceries at six. Can't be bad, can it,' said Linda. 'But nothing happened. Next we're going to sleep outside Michael Heseltine's office, the Department of the Environment.'

If the GLC wanted to it could rehouse everyone from Prestons Road tomorrow. It doesn't because looking after the needy is not the top priority. In fact it is no priority at all.



NOT FOR SALE

Six reasons why Womens Voice is against the sale of council houses

Waiting lists for council housing will get longer and longer

There are 1,075,000 people on council waiting lists in England and Wales. There are thousands more who don't waste their time registering because there's no chance of housing—single people, couples without children. Everyone knows what the waiting lists mean now—you wait and wait and wait. The only people who get housed are those the councils *have* to house by law, like homeless families, and households involved in slum clearance. The numbers of people being housed from the waiting lists is negligible. Even before the Tory government was elected, Islington council in North London was estimating that in 1982 only 913 people would be housed from the waiting list, compared to nearly 2,500 this year. Imagine what will happen when the council stock is much smaller. Waiting lists will be a *total* farce. There'll be nothing to wait for.

flats and tower blocks, not on the housing that will be sold. Council rents are far too high already. Around two-thirds of what we pay goes in interest payments to the rich financiers who lend the councils the money to build. Selling council houses will only make more profits for the financiers, as the demand for mortgages increases. The Councils will still pay just as much to financiers as the money has been borrowed on the newer houses, not the old. Along with the axeing of council housing goes the scrapping of the council's building workers—the direct labour. In come more and more private contractors, the rip-off merchants, ignoring safety regulations, skimping work, fiddling taxes and breaking the building workers' unions. Repairs and decoration will take longer to do. The standard of housing will go down again.

Council housing will be poor housing

Council housing will be poor housing...

Transfers into better housing will become almost impossible

Families with children in high-rise blocks and flats without gardens, old people who can't cope with the stairs any more, tenants in damp, grotty flats—everyone wants transfers. When the selling starts there will be nowhere to transfer to. The places which will be sold will be the better property—the houses with gardens and flats in solidly built, converted houses. The only transfer will be to another tower block, another slum.

In Glasgow there are 127,000 council houses. 56,000 tenants are on the transfer list because the conditions are so bad. In Islington, again, the situation is desperate. The Council now transfers 750 households a year, but there are 970 people in urgent medical need or 'grossly overcrowded' currently waiting. No-one else is being considered. As the number of houses available goes down transfers will become impossible.

Council rents will go up

The loss of rent from the older, better houses which are sold will inevitably force up the rent for the rest. Council housing works by pooling costs. Instead of rents and subsidies being fixed on the basis of the cost of individual houses, the cost of building and maintaining all the council's houses are shared between all the tenants. So the rent from the older properties keeps down the rent on the newer properties. The cost of building a new house is astronomical—that cost would have to be recovered by enormous rents.

The Direct Works departments will be run down

Rents will also go up because the cost of repairs will be higher—the bulk of spending on repairs and maintenance goes on the shoddier

Council housing will be poor housing only, the same idea as the old workhouses were based on. New building will either be push places for sale, or the cheapest, smallest possible flats for the 'feckless' and the 'shirkers' that the Tories want to crush. That means us, the single parent, the low paid, the badly housed, the battered woman, the homeless.

Will you be able to pay?

Mortgages come more expensive than many people realise, and there's also the cost of repairs and maintenance which becomes your responsibility, not the council's. Many people every year have to take out *second* mortgages to cover the costs of the big jobs, like roof repairs. One in six families default on their mortgage repayments in the first six months. More people become homeless through not being able to keep up the mortgage payments than through rent arrears. When unemployment strikes you get threatening letters from the building society instead of a rent rebate from the council.

Many people think that selling council houses will be cheaper for everyone, that council tenants get vast subsidies from the taxpayers pockets. But at the same time one of the biggest arguments for home ownership is that you get a lot of tax relief. See the contradiction? In fact, all housing is subsidised, no matter how wealthy the housebuyer.

womens VOICE

Pin up this poster where you live or work. Extra copies, this size and leaflet size, can be ordered from Womens Voice, Box 82 London E2. Telephone 01 986 6222.



The old and the new

On the left the Kingsmead Estate, run down, decrepit, on the right the estate built to rehouse its tenants. Bright, cheerful. Now the Greater London Council proposes to sell off the houses on the new estate, leaving families trapped in homes they are desperate to move out of.

Pauline Alden interviewed Cathy, who lives on the Kingsmead Estate and works at the Day Centre in the local Hackney Hospital.

'We moved into Kingsmead on Christmas Eve 1977. The flat was filled with rubbish that the Council had promised to clear. It was a depressing Christmas for us. We hadn't wanted to move there but we had no choice. The estate looks so grey in winter. The flats get broken into, and the bus service is virtually non-existent and it's just not safe for young girls or women to go out at night. Since we've been there, the rent has gone up four times.

It's hard to get to know anyone. There's

no sense of community. The only time the women seem to talk to each other is in the summer when they come out and sit on the steps

The flats were modernised a while back. We got back from holiday to discover that they were coming the next day at 8.30. We got a £10 disturbance allowance. It took about a month to finish ceiling paint is starting to flake already.

The tiling round the sink and the bathroom was badly done. I don't blame the workers. Its the council who give them so little time to do it.

'There are some really nice houses opposite that the Council have just finished. Many people from Kingsmead had hoped for a transfer there. But now they are going to be sold.

We got a leaflet through the post advertising the sale of council housing. It's a sick joke on Kingsmead. I think it's disgusting. Apart from the fact that no-one would ever want to buy a place here, I doubt very much if the people on Kingsmead would ever be able to afford to buy anyway.

'It makes it much harder for people to move once they start selling council property. They will only get offered the housing of those who have moved to buy houses. It will mean delays in people being rehoused and the choice will be awful. It means those with money get the priority.'

A right to a home

The proposed massive sale of council houses is an attempt by the Tory government to turn back the clock 60 years. It has been because of council houses that millions of working class families have had the chance of a decent home.

The building of council houses came about not because of the benevolence of the ruling class, but was won by workers fighting for a decent standard of living.

In 1915, in protest against the housing shortage and high rents, women in Glasgow organised a rent strike. With massive trade union support, they forced the government to introduce an act restricting rents, the first ever.

The response by the rich was an investment strike. They saw no point in building new houses if they couldn't make a profit by charging high rents. In 1919 the housing shortage became so acute the government was forced to act. It introduced a law enabling local authorities to build houses for those in need. Public Housing was born.

Something else had also happened to force the government's hand. In 1918 the war had come to an end. Workers in Russia had seized power. The spark of socialism had become a flame across Europe. In Germany, Austria and Hungary, workers and soldiers had risen up in revolt. British soldiers coming back from the war were promised 'Homes fit for Heroes'. Instead they found high unemployment, high food prices and a massive housing shortage.

Although the 1919 and 1923 Acts led to a large number of new houses being built, the problems still existed. Housing in our society is seen not as a basic human right. It's like the clothes we buy, food, cars, they are all produced for profit and not to meet our needs.

Today, 60 years, 25 Acts of Parliament, numerous Royal Commissions and government white papers later, one million families are on Council waiting lists. 700,000 occupied houses are classed as unfit for human habitation, 950,000 families live in houses without

hot water, bath or inside toilet, and in 1978 50,000 families became homeless.

The massive sale of council houses can only make things worse. Government cuts don't just mean hospital closures and higher unemployment. In 1978, public house building had declined from 180,000 in 1970 to 107,000. Over the last five years, government expenditure on housing has been cut by 18 per cent.

We will have to organise and fight to keep up the standard and supply of council housing. Past campaigns can teach us a few lessons.

The campaign against the Tory Fair Rents Act in 1972/3 was defeated. Too much was left to those Labour Councils who promised to fight it for us. One by one the councils caved in leaving Clay Cross councillors to be victimised and finally stabbed in the back by their own party when Labour came back into power.

In 1959 St. Pancras was governed by a Tory Council. When they tried to bring in a rent scheme which increased the rents, a United Tenants Association was formed. They organised a rent strike, invaded council meetings and organised demonstrations. One demonstration of 6,000 people was attacked by the police outside Kings Cross. In January 1960 there were 2,000 families on partial rent strikes—they paid the old rent but not the new. There were strikes in support by workers in the area.

Evictions were threatened and took place. It took 800 police to attack a block of flats to evict one man.

The strike was finally broken. Local Labour Party figures were amongst the first to cross the picket lines to pay their rent. The strikers had elected a Labour council to replace the Tory one because they thought Labour would stand by them. It didn't.

From Glasgow 1915 to St Pancras 1960 we can learn the need to build trade union support for our actions. We need to fight and organise alongside rank and file trade unionists. We have to take the arguments on to estates, into factories, offices and schools.

We can't stand back and see our children's chance of a decent home sold down the river by any government, Labour or Tory.

Campaign tips

- *Find out about Council housing in your locality. Ask at the Housing Action
- *Produce a local leaflet with your information, and leaflet door to door on a Council estate.
- *Follow up with sales of this issue of Womens Voice. Remember, keep a note of everyone who buys.
- *Womens Voice will be running a regular feature on housing so plan your sales over the coming months.
- *Send us articles about what you do, what you discover about local Council housing, about repairs, rehousing, transfers.

About one in every two hundred people suffers from epilepsy and yet the disease is rarely talked about.

What is epilepsy? It is a disorder of the brain function, a sudden abnormal electrical discharge in the brain causing temporary disturbance in consciousness.

In the majority of cases the cause is unknown, but heredity plays a part and the fits start before the age of twenty. In some cases the fits are a symptom of other diseases: Brain tumours, brain injuries, meningitis.

The medical profession divide epileptic fits into four groups:

1. Major grand mal: rigidity, twitching, loss of consciousness.
2. Petit Mal: Often passes unnoticed as the loss of consciousness is very slight.
3. Jacksonian attack: A focal onset, which may remain localised or may spread.
4. Temporal lobe epilepsy: Here the consciousness alters, and a person may set out to do a purposeful act, for instance, to go somewhere and then not remember.

It is important that the epileptic leads as

WOMENS HEALTH

Epilepsy: Nothing to do with madness

normal a life as possible so that they and others don't see epileptics as odd or different. This is possible with anti-epilepsy drugs, as they control epilepsy very well. However they all have some side effects and

much more research is needed so that the epileptic does not have to choose between fits or the bad effects of the drugs.

The Anti convulsant drugs are:

Phenobarbitone: This is used less often now as, like all barbiturates, it is addictive and can make you very tired.

Phenytoin, Epilim, Epilim, Ospolot: These are much 'safer' drugs, but they all have some side effects ranging from gastric distress, weight loss, nervousness to nausea, headaches, feelings of unsteadiness. Also *they may prevent oral contraception working* so different forms of contraception have to be used.

For women too, they have another bad side effect. They should not be taken during pregnancy. So epileptic women are faced with the prospect of having fits during what is already a difficult time physically, when they are pregnant. It is easy to see why some women are tempted to 'risk it' and carry on taking them! This area especially is one where I'd like to see much more research being done.

Jean Lewis



I started having epileptic fits when I was twenty after a bad knock on my head. It has taken six years to be able to push it to the back of my mind and feel that it isn't the most important aspect of my life.

I would never tell an employer that I'm an epileptic, though on every medical assessment form there is a section asking if you have ever had fits. In times of high unemployment, especially for women, any excuse to knock out your application will be used. I lost one job because I was epileptic, and felt very bitter and demoralised afterwards.

My present employers, having discovered I was epileptic, tried to impose restrictions about uncertified sick leave. With pressure from my union branch they were forced to withdraw and admit no reason for treating me as a special case.

The drugs you take are another problem.

They make you feel tired and doped up, however small the dosage. Doctors tell me that people take far more than the amount I've been prescribed daily. But how do they manage?

Most research done on epilepsy is on new forms of drug therapy. The British Epilepsy Association donates money to drug companies for this purpose. But drug companies spend many times more on advertising than they do on research.

If someone is prone to epilepsy they are going to have fits when subject to stress or strain. Treatment with drugs (ACT) is aimed at the symptoms—that is the fits—not at the root causes of tension or distress. Sympathetic medical treatment and discussion of an individual's problems is not easy to get, but we must fight for it. Otherwise we face the prospect of living our whole lives with a heavy dosage of drugs.

Most people simply don't understand about epilepsy. They are afraid of dealing with a fit, perhaps because epilepsy has always been linked to mental disorders, although there is no evidence that it is anything other than a physical disorder.

I think I must have been in almost every hospital casualty, in London due to panic on somebody's part. If a sufferer is left alone they won't harm themselves or others.

Epileptic is a word that should describe fits, and not the people that have them. Otherwise the 'known epileptic', a label commonly used, can get picked out and discriminated against.

I would be interested to hear from other women about their experience and how they have overcome their difficulties, because at times it has seemed overwhelming to me.

Pauline Alden You can contact Pauline by writing to *Womens Voice*.

AIRPORT 79

'Asian women are the worst off of all British workers. They are easy victims to unscrupulous employers. They don't know the language. They don't know their rights. They can be paid poverty-line wages. They are black so they need not even be treated like women, but more like animals.'

In her excellent book 'Finding A Voice' Amrit Wilson tells the horror stories of the lives of Asian women, the horror at work, the viciousness of immigration controls, the humiliation of physical examinations, the traumas of family life, the barbarism of the arranged marriage. The suffering and vulnerability of Asian women is rooted in their history: 'Morality and religion open the door to oppression but in focussing so sharply on the woman's role, they make her the central symbol of the culture. She is the link between economic survival and the meaning of life, between economic security and emotional security. Her role is at the heart of the civilisation. That is why she is kept in her place, if necessary by the most brutal oppression. If she rebels, the society itself may be overthrown.' There are others whose anger is making them find their voice, Karim Sandu is one of these.

A FREE TICKET TO A DIRTY JOB



'I've worked in the British Airways canteen for 10 years. I've been a shop steward in the Transport and General Workers Union for about three years. I represent about 70 women. The canteen is for the men who work in the hangers and for the clerical staff. I'm a cafeteria attendant.

When I started here we had the union but the man didn't manage it properly. We didn't know what our rights were. Slowly we found out. Workers need someone to sort out small things as well as big things. Ladies doing hard work need someone to say 'She's not a machine.'

I sort out the ladies' problems. Holidays, things like that. We get four weeks off with pay every year. We get one free flight a year, after five years' working. It used to be two, but they just cut it. Up to five years you get a flight every year for 10 per cent of the normal fare.

That's why so many Asian women work here. It's a dirty job you know, but people don't mind, they get the air ticket.

Once we needed more staff. They told us we were getting four new staff. We said that wasn't enough. We called a mass meeting and we banned overtime. They said if we didn't stop the overtime ban, they would cancel all our flights.

I don't mind if they take away my flight. I'm not talking about my problems, I want to sort out my people's problems. But they were afraid they would lose their flights home.

Tears came to my eyes. The ladies went back to overtime. Another time they had two new waitresses. I said, 'How come these two start as waitresses, this cannot be.'

Workers here want to be waitresses, it's an easier, cleaner job, decent work. I was fighting for promotion by seniority, not promotion for blue eyes.

I suggested someone to the supervisor. She said, 'she can't read and write well enough'. They wanted her to take a test, but new girls have never had to take a test. I had an argument with the supervisor. She told me off. I told her off. She produced a letter saying I had bad behaviour, and it would be in my personal file.

Next day in the dinner hour everybody said they'd go on strike unless the letter was taken out of my file. They took the letter out.

They don't take on too many Indian ladies here any more, mostly English people. After this union struggle they see us all getting together.

The women who work in the airport are all quite modern because they are meeting a lot of people. But some Asian ladies are so backward. I don't believe in religion anymore. I don't like all this 'you can't eat meat, you can't drink or smoke.'

I drink almost every weekend. We go to the pub, we have parties. My sister and brother have parties. I don't like the husband going to the pub and the wife staying at home. Lots of ladies can't go out, don't go anywhere. When we have a party at work, say someone's leaving, a typical Indian man or woman says 'you are drinking, you are a bad woman.'

'Last month I went to Birmingham. In Birmingham they don't wear much lipstick, or cut their hair. All these ladies were sitting there with no men. A hundred ladies and all these children! My sister and I said, 'No, sorry! This is no way to spend a weekend, with a hundred ladies and children.'

'We spent two hours there, and kept quiet. I had gone there to find a boy for my niece to marry. When I saw those people I thought, I don't want to make any marriage with these people. Those ladies don't know what Britain is. They haven't been sorted out. They don't know what people are doing outside. They have to stay in and look after the children. They have lots of children. It's the only job they've got.

'The husbands really love their wives, but they want to be superior. I used to have problems with my husband, he was always right. But I said, no, this is my way and it's the right way. Or you can tell me why it's not right, and I'll do it your way. Now it's alright, we agree.

'Asian women aren't so fussy about the work they do. We want to earn money and we don't mind dirty jobs. We have to send money back home. But modern people, my daughter's generation, they want to see what job they really like. My eldest daughter is doing a pharmacy course.

The second wants to do law, she's doing her 'A' levels now, and my youngest, she wants to be an airline pilot.'

Amrit Wilson notes an employer as saying: 'Asian ladies are so well behaved, but lately these ladies seem to be rather odd, they can be rude. It is unusual for Asian ladies to be chatterboxes.'

Asian ladies are finding their voice; translate chatterbox, and you have someone who speaks up for her rights. Translate odd, and you have brave, translate rude and you have right.





AIRPORT 19

You go to Heathrow airport and if you are lucky you can afford to fly somewhere. You sit in the subdued luxury of the departure lounge waiting to be politely requested to go to gate X, to fly off into the sunset.

Meanwhile, an Asian lady dressed in a sari sweeps round your feet. She empties the ashtray, dusts the table. Her face is expressionless.

I spoke to two Asian women who work in the ladies toilets in Terminal two, the Queen's Building. They were friendly, if cautious. They work for the Reliance Cleaning Company. They earn £50 for a 48 hour week. One had been there four years and said she was in the union.

They have half an hours unpaid lunchbreak. Overtime is paid at the same hourly rate. They work shifts. She was on 7am to 3pm.

In Terminal one, the cleaners are employed by Acme Cleaners.

I spoke to a woman who works in the main ladies toilets. When I promised not to print her name she said: 'It's about time someone printed something about this place. I've been here about six months and I

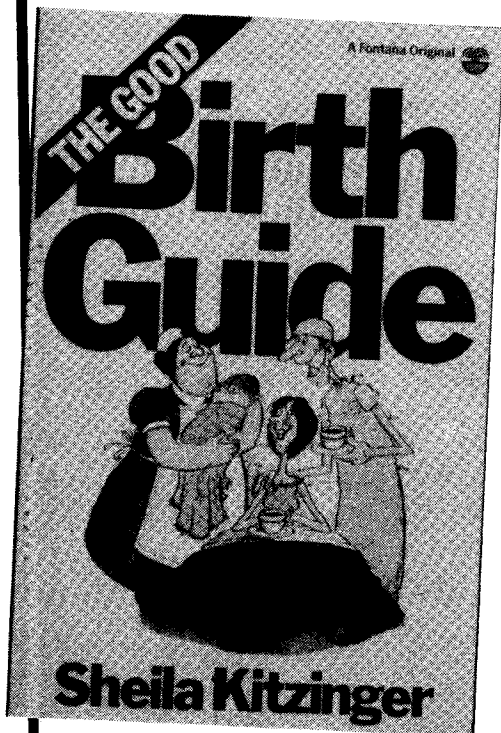
earn £40 for a 48 hour week. There's no special rate for overtime, there's no contract, they can sack you anytime they like. It costs me £5.80 a week in travelling expenses. I couldn't get any other job.

'There's an asian lady who's been working here for 12 years. She gets the same wages as me, but she works seven days a week, and doesn't even get time and a half— of course, the women employed by the cleaning contractors don't get the flights home. Heathrow airport handles £6 billion worth of cargo every year, and 20 million passengers pass through. They employ 55,000 people, 11,000 of them Asian.

Heathrow quickly recognised the profitability of employing the Asians who came to live in Southall. The airport is like a pyramid. At the bottom are the Asian workers, many of them women. Then there are the supervisors and whitecollar workers, who are nearly all white, then there is management, white and male. It gets whiter and more male the higher up you go.

• Photographs by Kim Longinotto. Interviews by Melanie Mcfadyean.

REVIEWS



The Good Birth Guide
Sheila Kitzinger
 Fontana £1.95.

Sheila Kitzinger's book is intended to assist pregnant/about to be pregnant women make decisions about where to have their baby. It is divided into four sections, the major being a list, description (based on women's experiences) and assessment of hundreds of hospitals throughout the U.K. It is not an assessment of medical standards, but rather of 'friendship, information and freedom to choose'. It discusses each hospital's attitude towards many aspects of care, including the presence of fathers/friends, the frequency of inductions, breast feeding etc. Another section classifies a long list of terms, some of which most pregnant women need enlightenment about e.g. amniocentesis, urinary oestriol test.

An interesting, useful reference book. My major reservation—it fails to emphasize sufficiently how experiences of the same hospital can vary widely. On the day much depends on who is on duty. If you book a bed on the basis that this book says that hospital is terrific, and then run into an authoritarian midwife—watch out! As a guide line this book is good, but not to be taken as gospel.
 Nadine Carner

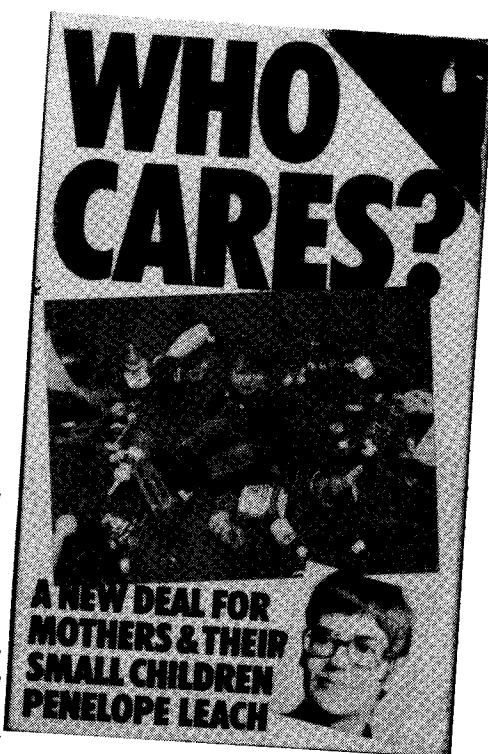
WHO CARES?
Penelope Leach
 Penguin 75p

Penelope Leach's book calls for 'a new ideal for mothers and their small children' in many areas of social life—in terms of

attitude, finance, architecture, playgroup provision etc... She claims that parenthood is, and should be recognised as a highly skilled and time consuming activity; that children are, as well as being exhausting, a joy, a thrill. She's bored (so am I) with an ideology which only sees kids in negative terms—loss of independence, drudgery etc. She argues that for most women childcare is more exciting, fulfilling work than they might otherwise do working on an assembly line or cleaning offices.

She goes on to argue, on the basis of these perceptions, that women should stay at home to look after their small children and provide them with 'calm motherhood' and (!) 'constant conversation'. She sets the Women's Liberation Movement up as an anti-motherhood paper tiger—failing to glimmer the complex struggle that has raged inside the movement over how we 'should' be mothers. Her prescription is based on the ideas which seem to her obvious and natural and demonstrate a sad lack of attention to the expressed needs and wants of many women, and a serious understanding of our determination to define ourselves the way we want to be mothers.

Nadine Carner.



OUT NOW:

Non Sexist Picture Books. This is a catalogue produced by CISSY, the Campaign to Impede Sexual Stereotyping in the Young. It is a useful guide to all those interested in non-sexist children's books and can be obtained from 177 Gleneldon Road SW 16. It costs 40p plus 15p p and p.

Ring My Bell
Anita Ward (TK)

This song bewitches me. Anita Ward's voice is as heady and sweet as a bottle of Devon Violets, without ever cloying, and she sings with such seductive skill it takes my breath away. I'm drunk on the aphrodisiac, the chorus of heavenly sighs, the irresistible tune which shot the record straight into the charts.

I only wish I could fight back against this magic spell, because this sort of song rampantly encourages men to think we're all readily available to them. 'You can ring my bell' indeed! You can't bloody well ring mine, mate, so don't try it on! This song could be the sound track for the latest ad for Aristoc tights—the one with a woman grinning down the telephone, her legs splayed in a carefree manner—which has of course attracted a barrage of degrading graffiti.

Why does she have to be so passive—if she's more than a number in his little red book, why doesn't she tell him she's going to ring his bell or something instead? Her sexuality is obviously alive and kicking, that's not what I'm complaining about—it's just that so long as we see sex as something we allow men to do to us, rather than as a pleasurable exchange, men have got an excuse to press unwanted sexual advances on us. If women are expected to be passive sexually, men can pretend to interpret the most unequivocal refusal as coy encouragement. They can whistle and kerbcrawl and try and chat us up, ultimately they might rape us, because even if we are ignoring them as we go about our business, ads for Aristoc and songs like 'Ring my bell' are telling them all the time that 'underneath we're all lovable', we're all there for the taking. The grins on our faces as we appear in these ads show we like it really, so why should they believe us when we say no go?

We've got to try and drum it into these men's heads that—
However we dress
Wherever we go
Yes means yes
And no means NO!
 —but songs like 'You can ring my bell' don't make it any easier!
 Lucy Toothpaste



AURORA

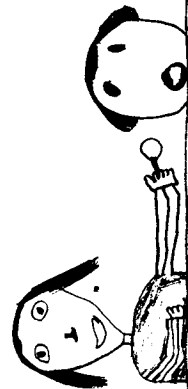
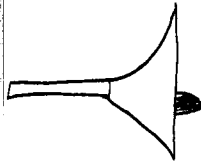
This book is about a little girl called Aurora who lives in a New Tenth floor flat.

Aurora learns to look after her new baby brother while mummy goes out to work.

and Aurora finds some new friends. her father helps her to look after the baby.

it is nice because that most books say after the mummy looks after the baby.

it is never boring and it reminds me of some people.



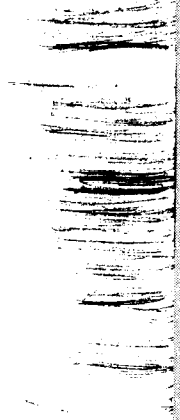
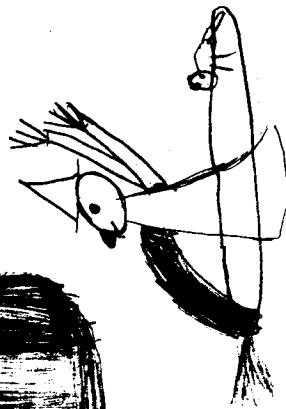
Aurora feeding the baby

The worst witch

The worst witch is about a school that teaches little girls to be witches and when class six have with all the other classes one of the girls in class 6 gets into a lot of trouble.

I think it is good because I think it is kind of mysterious and it is very exciting and when I read the book I never thought it was boring at all.

One of the girls flying in the sky.

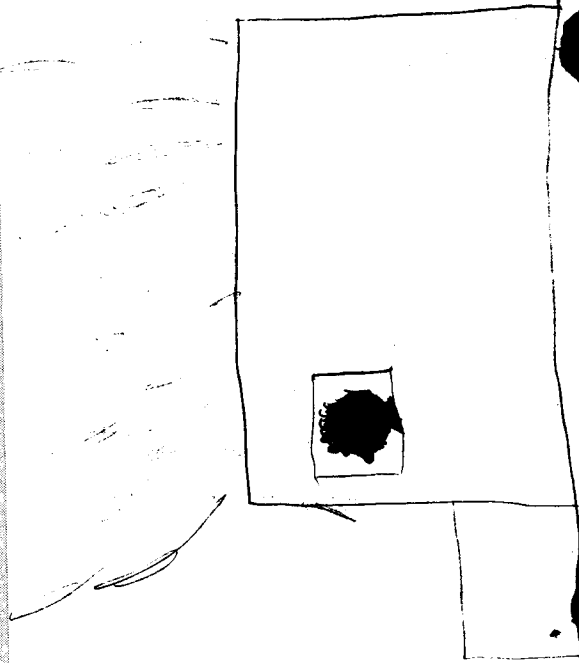


Lucy

Lucy is a little girl who gets into a big chase with some things in a little green van. and gets into a very exciting adventures an a very sunny day.

I think it is good because it is quite funny and very exciting. and a very good book as well.

and I think a lot of other children would like it.



Lucy in the green van.

LETTERS

Unfair to Maggie?

Dear Womens Voice.

Your unequivocal attack on Margaret Thatcher and her achievement has shocked and saddened me, so I felt that I had to write in and speak my mind.

OK so she is the leader of a right-wing party. But she is also a woman. Your attack on her seems to be all the more venomous for that reason alone. OK so that's understandable, she should know better because she's a woman.

However, your criticisms of her are wholly negative. I, too, read about her saying she doesn't like strident women. But I acted over this positively. I took the trouble to write to her and demonstrate the folly of her statement.

I pointed out that the suffragettes were 'strident' women and she wouldn't be where she is now if it weren't for them. I also told her why feminists attack the fact that society discourages and excludes women, which means half the talents of the country are going down the kitchen sink.

Of course, being a right-wing leader and being a woman, she poses a dilemma for left-wing feminists like me. When I was little, guess what my ambition was? To be Prime Minister. Everyone thought I was mad. Margaret Thatcher shows it can be done.

She's made it to the top by identifying solely with the upper classes. This, from my point of view, is tragic. But, tell me, how else can a woman make it to the top in our society?

Your editorial claimed the Tories are committed to trimming away the EOC. Pure speculation. The facts to date,

are that the vice-chairman of the EOC resigned because her husband is in the Tory Cabinet (nice irony that), and that Margaret Thatcher was one of the few Tory MPs to vote for the Sex Discrimination Act. She's supported the EGA hospital—why? Because she's a woman. Also she is not adamantly against abortion as your article implies—both times the issues has been raised in the House of Commons she has abstained. And why? Because she's a woman, that's why!

Finally I feel pity and sympathy rather than blind hate for Margaret Thatcher because 1) Even though she made history, it is her husband's surname she has made famous not her own, and 2) If she had lost the election, unlike her smug rival Callaghan, she would not have been given another chance. Again, because she's a woman.

In spite of all the intelligent arguments against her politics my gut feeling is (pathetic) joy that we have a woman prime minister. My daughters won't have to question their sanity when they dream of their futures—a woman prime-minister is now a reality.

For all those reasons, given that the Tories were looking for a right-wing leader anyway, I'm glad that they chose Margaret Thatcher rather than, say, Keith Joseph. Is there no other feminist that thinks as I do?

In solidarity and struggle
Pauline Maniscalco

Ed replies

...Wonder if she replied to your letter?

You ask how else can women get to the top in our society, the answer is the same for women and men... by climbing over their fellows, that's how our society works. Of course she owes a debt to the suffragettes.

She also owes a debt to all the workers who create the wealth she is busy disposing of. There is no reason to suppose,

however, that she intends to pay her debt. And what will you say when people finally ditch her at the next election, as hopefully they will. Won't it be harder for women in future? And what about Sally Oppenheim and Jill Knight, both women but both virulent anti-abortionists? No we think your sympathetic heart has run away with you, Pauline.

Quickie idea of the month

Sent by a reader.

Take unsold Womens Voices to dentist's waiting rooms or Family Planning waiting rooms and leave them there.

In future we shall include quickie ideas on the 'Round the Groups' page. Please send inspired ideas ...quick ...before you forget them.

Mongolism: The risks

Dear Womens Voice

I must point out that Jane Foster in Your Questions Answered last month, about having children when you're over thirty, had her facts terribly wrong about the incidence of Downs Syndrome (Mongolism).

I have taken my facts from 'Mental Subnormality' by Alan Heaton-Ward, a book most of the nurses in this field use.

The average of live births with Downs Syndrome is 1:600. This however varies from 1:2,000 in women in their early child-bearing years to only 1:50 in women over 40 or towards the menopause, and not 1:600 as you said.

I am not trying to frighten women into having their children early but I feel that the correct facts should be given. Apart from this point I found it an interesting and enlightening article.

Jill Moorman
Student Nurse
Essex

From my Guy

Dear Womens Voice

This story was in 'My Guy' teenage magazine last month.

Ann has a big sister who comes home from university converted to women's liberation. So young sister listens and learns, and decides to change her attitudes to her boyfriend, one Simon. 'Why do we always have to go where you want to go,' I complained. 'Why can't we do what I want for a change?' He looked shocked. 'Well, you've never complained before so I thought you always agreed. Okay, then, where do you want to go?'

'Well, er,' I stuttered, frantically trying to think of somewhere to go, 'there's a disco on in town, let's go there.'

So we went to the disco ...and it was dreadful! I really wished that we'd gone to the pictures. And so did Simon.'

So the story goes on. She offers to pay for his meal, then wishes she hadn't. She even offers to walk him home.

When he turns up for their next date, she opens the door in her jeans.

'Aren't you ready', he asked.

'Yes of course I am,' I said calmly.

'But you haven't got any make-up on, and why the old jeans and rugby shirt?'

'You're not the only one who can dress casually you know', I

snapped.

Her temper is obviously getting as frayed as her clothes. In the pub she asks for a pint of bitter. It's the last straw.

'I'm no chauvinist Ann, but going out with you recently has been like going out with a fella. I don't like you being all butch. When you're ready to act and look like a girl again let me know!' Ann arrives home in a flood of tears.

'So much for a women's lib', I sobbed to Moira. 'Now I haven't even got a boyfriend!' 'But you shouldn't be dependent on men,' she started. 'Oh shut up!' I shouted and ran upstairs to my room.

You see, I realised that I'm not the sort of girl who wants to be fiercely independent. Simon had never really bossed me around—and I'd just taken the Whole Women's Lib thing too far.

And deep down it's not really me. I want to feel feminine, protected sometimes, and most of all, I want Simon back ...'

My guy is designed for young teenage girls. Talk about poison.

Monie Hadfield.

Women singers

Dear Womens Voice

I was interested in what Lucy Toothpaste had to say in April's issue about 'popular' songs sung by women artists. She pointed out that Gloria Gaynor's 'I will survive' is an exhilarating song but that some of the other songs on the LP 'Love Tracks' aren't in the same liberated vein.

I was stimulated to write to you about an album of Joan Armatrading's I bought recently, called 'To the Limit'. I find this album particularly inspiring because all the tracks on it seem to exude a certain strength and independence. I identify strongly with Ms Armatrading in what she tries to say in her songs and I'm sure if Lucy Toothpaste were to listen to the album she wouldn't feel 'betrayed' as she does with Gloria Gaynor's 'Love Tracks'.

Unfortunately Joan Armatrading doesn't get nearly so much publicity on the radio as she deserves. Perhaps if all the D.J.s weren't men ...?

*Karen Grainger
Reading*

• Lyrics from Joan Armatrading's 'To the Limit' LP.

Barefoot and Pregnant
You gave me babies, to you that proves your love.

You tie my hands with jewels.
Barefoot and pregnant you kept me
You sought to hide me from the truth

But your lady's gone and brought some shoes
And she's steppin' out on the town.
Your lady took herself in hand
And she's spreadin' herself around.

Groups down south

Dear Womens Voice

From now on the new Bournemouth Women's Voice group will be meeting weekly on Wednesdays. We've noticed in previous issues letters from sisters in Portsmouth and

Farnborough. We'd be glad to hear from any readers who live in the area, also we'd like to get together with other groups in the South, Bristol, Bath, Portsmouth, Exeter, etc.... to discuss how we can expand Women's Voice in this corner of the country.

We've also contacted the Wessex Gay Women's Organisation which has small local groups, and offered them our assistance. Their chairperson will in future be attending our Women's Voice meetings with a view to closer liaison between gays and straights in the Womens movement.

*Lomond Handley
Poole
Dorset*

Party folly

Dear Womens Voice,

I did not want to go to the queens party in Hyde Park because the queen is a 'scrounger' and if we didn't have a queen we could have lots of new hospitals and schools instead of closing them like they are in Hackney. The queens children weren't there, because they go to posh schools, not like us.

*lots of Love
Lousie Stimson
Age 8*



Write to
W V

Union officials are almost all men, and full-timers are often out of touch with the feelings of the members. Union branch meetings are held at times when women with family responsibilities can't attend. So issues of importance to women get ignored.

Health and safety issues are one example. Women are invisible on union safety handouts. The only time we do stand out is when our biology is used to exclude us from jobs where the foetus might be harmed if we were pregnant. Yet research shows that men too have their reproductive capacity interfered with under certain industrial conditions, and they too can pass on defects to their children.

The answer clearly is to raise safety standards for *all* workers, but still women may need special consideration where

pregnancy and some other women's health issues are concerned.

The Health and Safety at Work Act has raised a lot of interest in safety issues and many union members are finding themselves on safety committees for the first time. But many workers are still oblivious to the hazards that face them. You don't have to work in a dangerous chemical factory to be at danger. What

about the women who handle concentrated cleaning fluids, for example, not realising that a straight-forward cleaning job can be full of hazards?

Now some of us have got together to form the Women and Work Hazards Group. We're determined that women should be invisible no longer. The group is part of the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science, a group of scientists and trade

unionists who work together to provide information on specific hazards and how to organise against them. We have produced broadsheets on specific hazards, for example those facing office workers.

Write to us at the address below for a speaker for your Women's Voice group, or your safety reps' meeting. Let us know if you have any success organising on safety issues or if you need any assistance or advice.

We are preparing an article for Women's Voice on the subject of shift-work. If you have any experience of shift work we'd be pleased to hear from you about how it affected your life and your health. You can also send for our Womens Health and Safety Pack, price 40p (including post and package) Write to Women and Work Hazards Group, BSSRS, 9, Poland Street, London W.1.

OPEN DOOR HAZARDS AT WORK

NICE LEGS - SHAME ABOUT THE FACE

I am a middle distance runner racing over distances from 800 metres to 3000 metres on the track. I can say that now, for at one time I was only a jogger, and before I started jogging I smoked roll-ups and was a stone heavier!

I started running when I was 28. My husband, Bob, ran cross country races for the Fire Brigade. His favourite conversation was running. He was addicted to it. Because of his fitness, during the cold winter months he was always hot and I was always cold. He joined the local athletics club so I decided to go too and tried running the 100 metres, always coming last. I had been good at school, but school was 14 years away.

Bob suggested I should do cross country. I entered the first cross country race of the season at Haywards Heath, a 2½ mile course. I could barely run a mile. I ran the race without stopping and didn't come last. I was related.

That was the beginning. I too became addicted. I began to put my mileage up from 2 miles to 3 or 4 miles. It wasn't until the summer that I found what I really do. The fourth 1500 metres I did was in 4 minutes 46

seconds, beating Bob's 1500 metre time (oh dear).

Athletics is hard work when you want to be successful. For girls and women it means putting up with sexist comments - 'look at her tits wobbling' 'nice legs, shame about her face'. Its mostly the youths and boys, but girls can also be cruel. I don't care about the silly comments. If they go too far and I feel irritated I just turn and chase them!

The training is hard. Top female athletes train between 50 to 80 miles a week, and every day. Other athletes once, twice, three times a week.

It's a sport that is dominated by men, just like football. There are virtually *no* top female coaches, and for women there is a pattern of dependence on their male coaches. Some girls have been known to break

down abroad because their coaches aren't there to watch them. Or they don't seem able to make decisions on their own. Athletics is a very individual sport. If you do something wrong you only have yourself to blame.

A lot of events are still not open to women. Middle distance for women has only just been accepted in the Olympics, as has the 400 metre hurdles. In track events in this country there are no 5000 metres, 10,000 metres or steeple chase for women, and in field events there is no pole vault, triple jump or hammer.

Tessa Sanderson is our most outstanding woman athlete. Second in the world, she throws the javelin and is in the United Kingdom rankings for many other events. She is a very

dedicated athlete but never gets the praise she deserves. When she won the silver medal in the European championships the British newspapers hardly gave it a mention, preferring some behind the scenes stories about the disqualification of another athlete.

The Daily Express Sports Personality poll in 1978 voted her fifth, below Donna Hartley and Sonia Lannaman. So much for the mass media. They can still only accept women as sprinters and anything else is masculine. Donna Hartley gets a lot of publicity for example and its not because she's better than anyone else. Perhaps she poses more of a sex symbol, with bleached hair and a lovely tan. Listening to some commentators on female athletes they are more inclined to talk about their looks than their athletic performance.

If you enjoy athletics and you want to find a skill you can be good at, go along to your local athletics club. They are always short of female athletes.

To find out more about women's athletics in your area write to the Women's Amateur Athletics Association, 70 Brompton Road, London SW3. Liz Sloan.

SPORT

Tales we tell our sisters

Rape-hatred and contempt for women

I have a friend who was raped. This is the story as she told it:

'I was attacked by three men in a park at night. I didn't try to get away because I had no confidence in my own strength. I tried to talk my way out of it.

'At first it wasn't like sex. It was so violent. They were trying to humiliate me. They were talking to each other, keeping each other going. They called me names, they said 'We're going to kill you, baby'. One had his knee on my throat, the other ripped my jeans off. One had a black hood over his face. They stuck a bottle up me, and one of them put his prick in my mouth and tried to strangle me.

'Suddenly they got off me and started kicking me really hard in the head, in the eyes...they'd seen three people coming. They ran away.

'I was stunned. It's weird though, your mind splits off—I was trying to run and I was thinking how silly I must look trying to pull my jeans on. I banged on people's doors, nobody answered. I was terrified. I phoned the police. It took them 25 minutes to arrive.

'I told the police they could probably catch them if they went to the heath. They weren't interested. They were more interested in what I'd been doing and in being derogatory to me.

'I asked for a police woman. She was very contemptuous, treated me as if I had done something wrong. They took me to a police doctor who took a smear from my vagina. It hurt. I was all torn. They took a bit of the tampon I had to wear and some pubic hair. They put them in jars and I had to carry them and all the police could see what I was carrying. At one point I misunderstood something the policewoman said and I asked her if she'd ever been raped. She said, 'of course I haven't!'

'I had nightmares about being in a tube train and meeting the three guys again. I went to a psychiatrist, but she assumed that I'd encouraged the rapists.

'I think men rape women for different reasons. For them I think it was a real hatred and contempt for all women, but contempt stems from fear and it was like a real fear of women as well. It was as if they were trying to get their own back on me.

'Women can't fight back, and men exploit their relative weakness, they trade on physical inequality. The experience has made me aware of the basic need for survival. When it was happening, one part of my mind was almost detached, your mind has ways of protecting you. I searched desperately for things to say to them. But it was the horrible realisation that I was so totally alone.

'It's crucially important to learn to defend yourself. There's something about knowing you can fight that makes you equal to them—I was just passive and yelling and telling them to stop. I'll never get rid of what

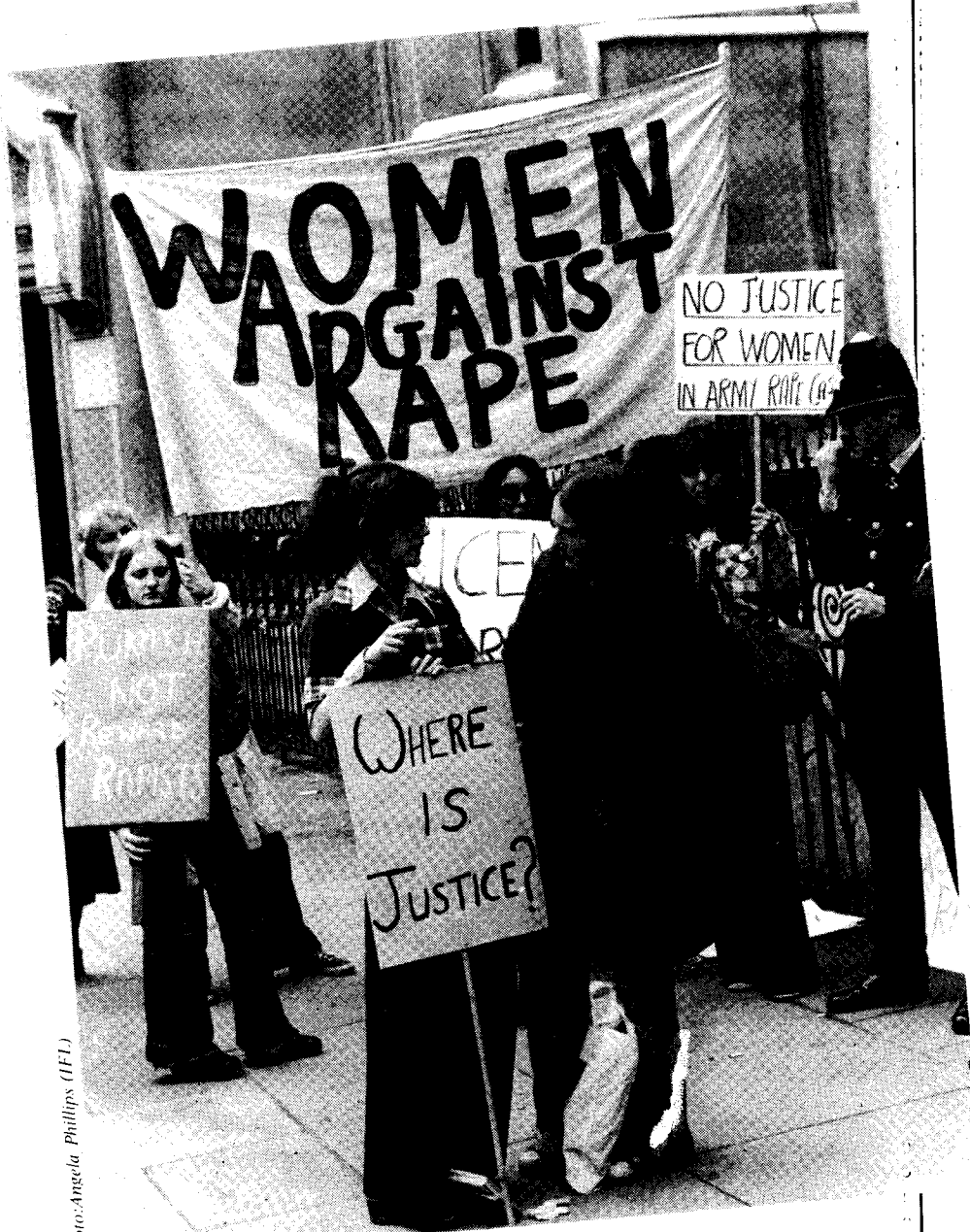


photo: Angela Phillips (FL)

happened to me but it'll be better when I know how to defend myself.

'I started learning Kung Fu. It's very male. I'm not interested in being aggressive, and I resent that I have to learn to be aggressive. But I have to do it.

'There's no easy answer to dealing with rapists in our society. Prison is punishment which reinforces violence, people come out and do the same things again.'

About a year after this, my friend and I were walking on the heath. It was a dull February afternoon. Three men were coming up the hill towards us. Instinctively I took her arm.

As they came level one leaned over and said to her, 'Hey baby, baby, baby, baby,' and then walked on. They stood on the brow

of the hill, and they were very threatening. She was very tense, 'It's them' she said.

I have never experienced such confusion and turmoil. I wanted to kill them to run into the open space of the heath and yell to everyone there that they should help me lynch these men. I didn't want to let go of her. I flashed through my mind that they'd attack us again, and that nobody would help us.

We stood rooted, watched the men disappear. The only revenge we had was to be free of them to be as far away as possible.

Is self defence the only answer for women? Here and now it may be, but rape could only happen in a world where strength means violent, negative, aggressive superiority, where our lives are rooted in inequality.

What is going on? Events

• **South West London Womens Voice Day School**
Sunday 8 July, 10.30am to 5pm. The Balham Family Centre, 91 Bedford Hill, Balham, London SW12.

Programme includes: The German Womens Movement. Film: Union Maids. Workshops on women in trade unions, violence and women, new technology, women and pornography. Final session: Womens Voice and the way forward for womens liberation. **Registration fee:** £1 including lunch. Registration forms and more information from Debbie Carrington, 9a Dalebury Road, London SW17, 01 767 2400. Creche facilities on request.

• **WOMENS VOICE SWEATSHIRTS AND T-SHIRTS**

'Womens Voice fights for womens rights'. Sweatshirts in dark blue or red. £2.50p (reduced from £3.50p) plus 25p post. T-shirts in red, pale blue, black or white. £1.50p plus 15p post. Small or medium sizes. Cheques to Kentish Town Womens Voice group, c/o 175a Kentish Town Road, London NW1.
• **Hackney Womens Voice Little Helpers**, a show by Counteract about women and the Health Service plus

discussion. Tuesday July 10. All Nations Club, 4 Martello Street, F8. Admission £1. 60p if not working. Nearest tube, Bethnal Green. British Rail. London Fields.

• **Lea Valley Womens Voice Jumble and Womens Health Event**. Saturday July 7. 2pm. Piverton Community Centre, Piverton Road. Jumble bargains, refreshments, films on womens health, discussion, bookstall and creche facilities.

• **Hornsey Womens Voice Women in the Media**. Wednesday July 18. 8.00pm Hornsey Junior Library, Haringey Park, N8.

Next Readers meeting on June issue is July 4. 8.00pm at 7 Park Avenue North, N8. Further information childcare from Alison 348 0356

• **Southwark Womens Voice 'A Particular Kind of Job'** Film by Delyse Hawkins and Jackie Garstin about prostitution told by prostitutes plus speaker. Fitzmaurice Hall, Rotherhithe Civic Centre. Tuesday July 10. 8pm. For more information ring Janey 639 7996 or Amore 299 0677.

WV groups

• **Aberdeen Womens Voice** for more information telephone Liz 51059

• **Acton and Harlesden** ring Carrie 993 0356 or Pete 969 9812

• **Birmingham Womens Voice** meets regularly at the Holloway pub, Holloway Road, City Centre. For details and babysitters phone Jenny - 440 5794.

• **Bury Womens Voice meets every other Wednesday**. Ring Lynn 061 764 6659 for details.

• **Black Country Sundays** fortnightly, 2.30, 27 Glen Court, Compton Road. For information phone Wolverhampton 23233. Children welcome.

• **Bristol Womens Voice** meets fortnightly, at 7.30pm, Inkworths Community Centre, 22 Hephurn Road, St Pauls, off Brigstocke Road. Ring Bristol 553 740 or 669 198.

• **Canterbury Womens Voice** meets every other Tuesday at Jolly Sailor Northgate. Phone Barbara (Lyninge 862742).

• **Chelmsford Womens Voice**. For details of local activities, see Womens Voice sellers.

• **Coventry Womens Voice** meets every other Wednesday, 8.00pm, at the Hertford Tavern, off Queens Road (near the Butts) Coventry 618956

• **Croydon Womens Voice** meets alternate Tuesdays. Phone Maureen 660 0989 or Yvonne 664 3768.

• **Faling Womens Voice** meets regularly. Phone Maureen 567 7083 or Jane 930 0986 for details.

• **Feelys and Irlam Womens Voice** meets fortnightly at the AEU Social Club, Mather Road, Eccles. For information ring Jennie 707 2557.

• **Edinburgh Womens Voice** meets fortnightly on Sunday evenings. Phone Penny 557 0731 for details.

• **Falkirk Womens Voice**. Anyone interested in building a Womens Voice Group in Falkirk area please contact: Frances, 1 Main Street, Shieldhill, Falkirk.

• **Finchley and Barnet Womens Voice** meets fortnightly, for information contact Anita 883 4968 or Glenis 346 7627.

• **Fleet Street Womens Voice** meets every other Wednesday at the Hoop and Grapes, Farringdon St, lunchtime from 1 to 2. Ring Maggie 822 37780 (work).

• **Glasgow Womens Voice**. For information ring Clare 959 8041 or Dorte 423 1185.

• **Glossop, Derbyshire Womens Voice** meets first and third Tuesdays of every month at 110 Victoria St, Glossop. Phone Glossop 61873 or Claire, Glossop 64735.

• **Hackney Womens Voice**, phone Pauline (985 13086) or Chris (806 6198) for information and babysitters.

• **Halifax Womens Voice** details from WV and SW sellers every Saturday 12.30 - 2.30. Co-op arcade on the Precinct.

• **Harlow Womens Voice** meets fortnightly on Wednesday at 8pm. Ring Pat, Harlow 28022.

• **Highbury Womens Voice**. For details ring Flana 439 3764 (days).

• **Hornsey Womens Voice** meets fortnightly. Ring Jane 348 6712 or Maggie 341 1182 for information and babysitters.

• **Islington Womens Voice** meets regularly. Phone Sandy at 802 6145 for details.

• **Kentish Town Womens Voice** meets weekly. Ring Gail 485 0954 or Vera Di 267 5059 for information and details.

• **Lampeter Womens Voice** meets Tuesday evenings. Details from WV sellers or write c/o SDUC Lampeter, Dyfed, Wales.

• **Lea Valley Womens Voice** meets regularly. Phone Mary (802 9563) for information and babysitters.

• **Liverpool Womens Voice** meets on alternate Tuesdays at 8pm in the County Hotel. For further information phone Alison at 727 4057 or 709 1844.

• **Luton Womens Voice is being set up**. If you are interested please contact Jane, 421 266.

• **Manchester University Womens Voice** meets each week at 5pm in the students union.

• **South Manchester Womens Voice** Group meets every other week. For details phone Kate, 434 2343

• **SE Manchester** meets at the Albert, Rusholme, 8pm, every other Wednesday.

• **Medway Womens Voice** meets regularly. Telephone Helen, Medway 270 684, or Marge 251 362 for details.

• **Newham Womens Voice** meets Tuesdays and Thursdays fortnightly. Phone Wendy 790 2373. Babysitters available.

• **Newcastle Womens Voice** meets second Tuesday of every month, Bridge Hotel, Newcastle at 8.00pm (Nr High Levelbridge). Telephone Newcastle 813877.

• **Nottingham Womens Voice** Group meets 2nd and 4th Wednesdays in every month at 8pm, 118 Mansfield Road. For further information or babysitters ring Jane 866522 ext 219 or Gill, Nottingham 625499

• **Norwich Womens Voice** meets every other Tuesday, 8.30pm, Black Boys pub, Colegate. For information phone Norwich 29963.

• **Poole Womens Voice** meets every Wednesday 8.00pm at Seaview Hotel, Parkstone. For details ring Lomond, Parkstone 745 494.

• **Preston Womens Voice** meets every other Tuesday at the Windsor Castle, Egan St (near Meadow St) at 8pm. For more information phone Mary, Preston 55739 and for babysitters.

• **Reading Womens Voice** meets regularly. For information phone Kathy on 660 800.

• **Stoke on Trent Womens Voice** meets at Knotty Action, Mollart Street, Hanley. Next meeting: Monday 4 June and then fortnightly. Ring Sandra 814094

• **Sheffield Womens Voice** meets fortnightly at the Prince of Wales, Division Street, 8.00pm. Next meeting Monday July 9 and fortnightly after. For details ring Sue, 613739.

• **Southwark Womens Voice** meets every other Tuesday evening. Contact Jenny 697 7996 for more information.

• **Shrewsbury Womens Voice** meets the first Wednesday of every month. Other meetings too so phone 58830 for details.

• **Slough Womens Voice** meets on the first Tuesday of every month at Slough library. Ring Mary, Slough 24093.

• **South London Womens Voice** meets fortnightly on Tuesdays, Tate Library, Brixton, Oval. All welcome.

• **S West London Womens Voice** meets alternate Tuesdays, 91 Bedford Hill, Balham. All welcome. More info, babysitters contact Marion 673 1329.

• **Sheffield Womens Voice** meets fortnightly, at the Prince of Wales pub, Division St at 7.30pm.

• **Stockport Womens Voice**. For details phone 061 431 7564.

• **Stoke on Trent Womens Voice** would anyone interested in organising with us in the Stoke on Trent area contact, Sandra 814094.

• **Tower Hamlets Womens Voice** meets on alternate Mondays. Babysitters available phone Heather 739 6668.

• **Waltham Forest Womens Voice** meets fortnightly on Tuesdays or Thursdays at 8pm. For details ring Jeanne (531 8340) or Pauline (521 4768).

• **Walsall Womens Voice** meets regularly. Phone Fna at Walsall 644205 for details. Children welcome.

• **Watford Womens Voice** is being formed. Anyone interested in coming to meetings please contact Davina or Ros, Watford 28500 ext. 659.

• **York Womens Voice** meets every third Saturday in the month at the Royal Oak, Goodramgate. Full creche facilities. Food on sale - do drop in!

• **Tessa (writer, 24) and Andy (teacher, 25) and Leon (9 months) seek single parent (pref. socialist feminist) plus child (Or pregnant?) to share short-life house, childcare, etc., Apply: 84, Brougham Rd., E8.**

Your nearest WV group meets:



This song, written and performed by Mike Carver is available on an EP record with 3 other tracks. (The SPG Song/Urban Decay/Nobody Loves You When You're Unemployed.)

All proceeds will go to the Blair Peach Memorial Fund so send at least £1.10 (inc. p&p) to: SW Recordings, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE.

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Where to buy books

Wedge Co-operative

13 High St., Coventry CU1 5RE.
0203 25634
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Wide selection of feminist books. Mail order for all left books (add 10% min 25p)
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The Other Bookshop

328 Upper St London N1 Tel: 01 226 2877
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First of May

45, Niddry Street, off High Street,
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Grass Roots Bookshop

1 Newton Street, Piccadilly,
Manchester and 109 Oxford Road,
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40491. Monday to Saturday 10
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Bbokmarx chain

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Books, 224 Deritend High Street,
Birmingham 12. 10am to 6pm
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Hull: Socialist Books, 238
Springbank 10am to 5.30pm,
Monday to Saturday.

Southampton: October Books, 4
Onslow Road.

London: Bookmarks, 265 Seven
Sisters Road, London, N4 01-802
6145 10am to 6pm, Monday to
Saturday.

Advertise your bookshop 50p an
entry. Small ads 5p a word. Rate
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request to: **Womens Voice, Box
82, London, E2.**

Dillons Cambridge Bookshop

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0223 55589. 9.30 to 5pm, Monday
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pamphlets, books, magazines.

Trade Union Bookservice

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Sisters Road, London N4.**

Join Womens Voice...

WOMENS VOICE fights for womens rights. We want equal pay with the highest paid; maternity leave without restriction; the right to a job; nursery places for all children so that mothers can chose to work; and an end to discrimination in education, training, jobs and benefits; the right to abortion on demand.

To fight for these changes is only a beginning. Womens Liberation means we have to free ourselves from the grip of the rich and powerful whose oppressive rules and ideas are fostered on us from our earliest years. This means we have to fight for socialism too, to free us from a society divided between those who have and those who have not.

To fight we have to be organised: Womens Voice is a sister organisation of the Socialist Workers Party.

Fight with Womens Voice for Womens Liberation and Socialism.

join the fight!

Womens Voice Groups

Scotland
London
Leeds
Central Glasgow
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Wales
Aberystwyth
Cardiff

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Birmingham
Bristol
Bristol University

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Canterbury
Coventry
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Gravesend
Grimsby
Lancaster University
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Leicester
Liverpool
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Norwich
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