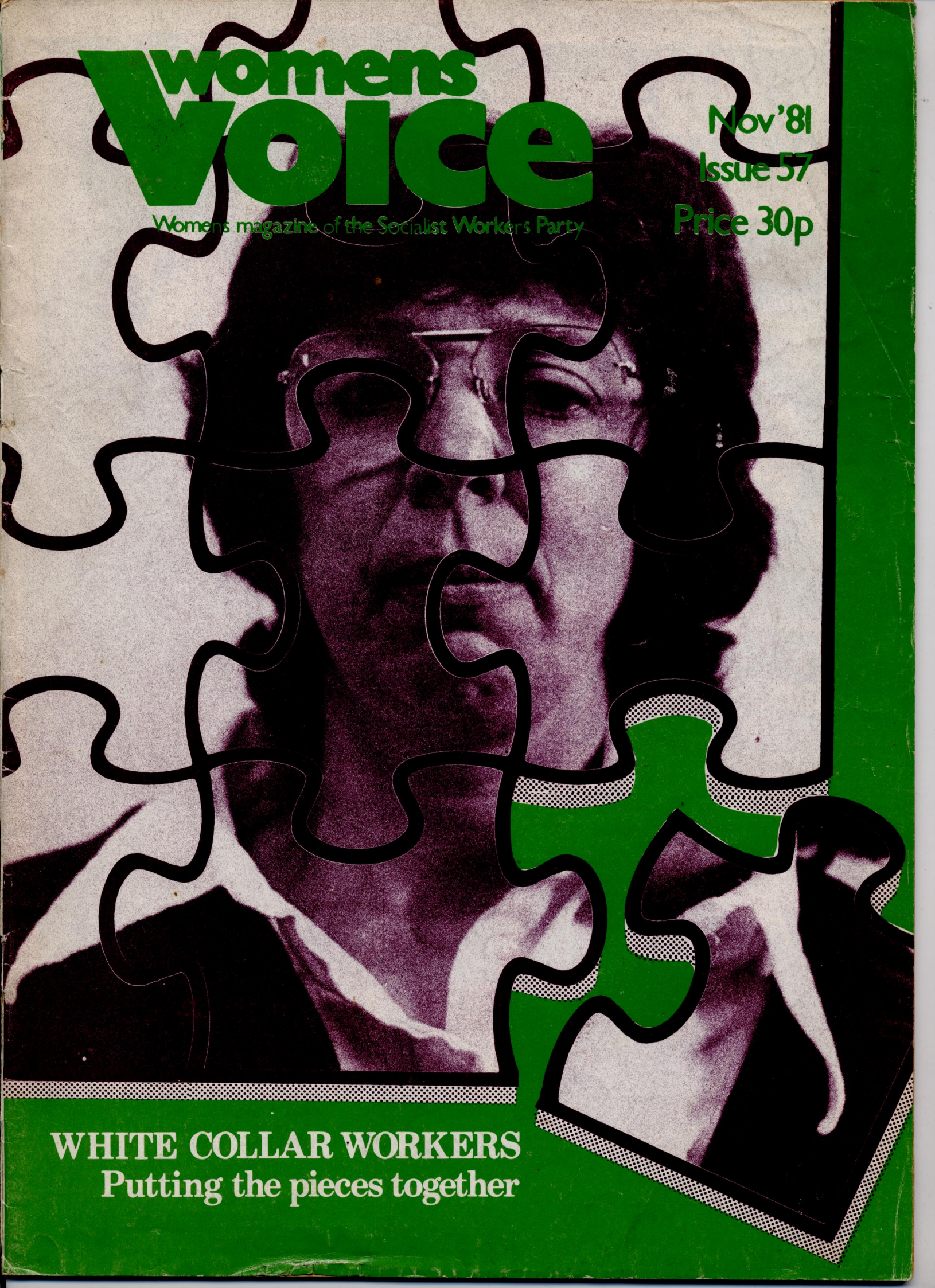


womens VOICE

Womens magazine of the Socialist Workers Party

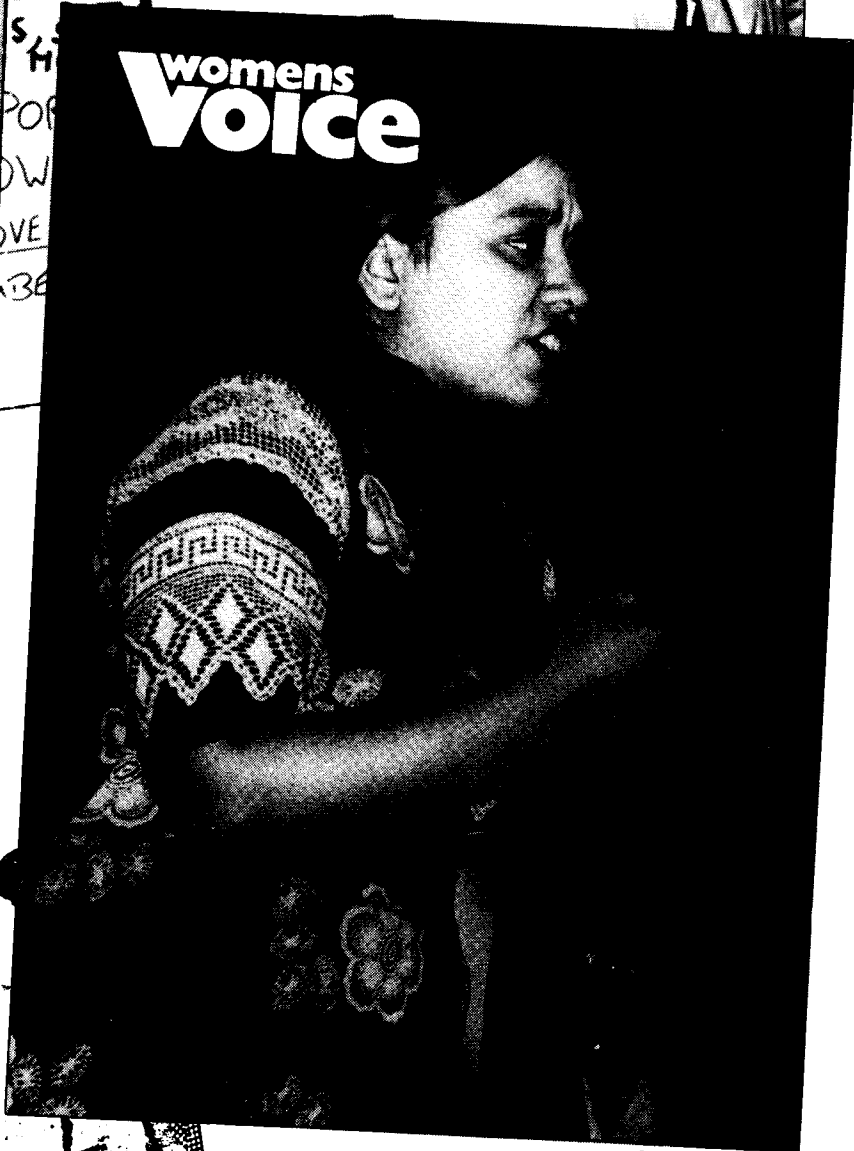
Nov '81
Issue 57

Price 30p



WHITE COLLAR WORKERS
Putting the pieces together

Fighting Women



Sweep aside slushy Ideas of women this Christmas with Womens Voice 'Fighting women' cards.

Featuring Anna Walentynowicz, The Chix Strikers, Anwar Ditta and the Liverpool Typists.

£1.00 for the four Inclusive of postage.

Rush orders to: Womens Voice cards, PO Box 82, London E2.

(Cheques/POs made out to 'Womens Voice' please)

Their lives made hell

AN ASIAN woman in her thirties killed her 60-year-old husband by hitting him with an iron bar. He had threatened to kill two of her children. She pleaded guilty to murder and was sent to prison, for life.

That's all the detail *The Times* gave. But how could it be? Surely, if her children were threatened, she had some defence? All lawyers know, and she must have had a lawyer, that, according to English law there is only one prison sentence for murder—life.

We can only guess, that she was ill-advised to plead guilty by a lawyer who didn't care what happened to her or couldn't communicate with her because he shared no common language. (But he will still have received his fat fee.)

Do people have to be able to speak English before they can be treated like normal human beings? According to the Department of Health and Social Security the answer is yes.

Mrs Varachia came to Britain when she was widowed in 1979. She lives with her son and daughter-in-law, and was entitled, as anyone else in her position would be, to receive supplementary benefit. That is, until the DHSS put a stop to it. Their decision has just been upheld by an appeals tribunal.

Why did they stop her benefit? Because she couldn't speak English. And not being able to speak English, they have decided,

means that she was hindering her chances of finding work. (No, no mention of the three million other people who also can't find jobs.)

These two stories made the newspapers. But how many stories go unreported? How many Asian women find their lives made hell and are humiliated by officials, lawyers, doctors, whose arrogance allows them to treat like animals anyone who can't speak their 'Queen's English'.

If these women find it hard now, think how much harder life for them is going to become. The Tory 'wets' may well be saying that black people have rights (what they mean is that black people are also voters and the Tories ought to do a bit of vote catching for fear of losing the next election). But Thatcher is making no concessions. As the economy slides into a worse mess the economic screws will be turned ever tighter. The racists in the Tory party who bay at the conference 'send 'em back' will be kept satisfied, just, by racist concessions of every sort.

Institutional racism—in the health service, the social services, among immigration officers and lawyers—will grow. But it will grow hand in hand with increased attacks on the black community. We have to fight both.

At every turn of the screw we will have to redouble our efforts to fight for the rights of black workers.

CONTENTS

FEATURES

White collar unions:
picking up the pieces
pages 14 & 15

Girls, Wives, Factory
lives—extracts from a
new book pages 16 & 17

Why we are against the
bomb page 13

Single-sex schools—
good or bad? page 18

NEWS pages 4 to 12

REGULARS

Health—Infertility page
19

Reviews pages 20 & 21
Letters and Dirty Linen
pages 22 & 23

Sandra and TV page 23
Why I became a socialist
page 25

Do-it-yourself—speaking
at meetings page 27

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John Sturrock (Network)

LIVERPOOL TYPISTS THE DOMINO EFFECT

THE TYPISTS, secretaries and machine operators at Liverpool city council have discovered in the 17 weeks of their strike action that their fight is no longer just over their claim for regrading nor just a fight to defend their union organisation, but has now become a dispute of national significance.

Trevor Jones, the Liberal leader of the council, sees himself as a champion of local authorities throughout the country. He said on local television, 'If the typists crack it here, the rest of the country will fall like dominoes.'

In recent weeks there have been many developments in the dispute. A militant lobby of NALGO headquarters in London on 1 October forced the reluctant NALGO executive to increase strike pay to 55 per cent of the women's earnings, and these payments were to be extended to

'Striking is new for us women and I think many have become more aware of our importance in the workforce. Women have had it drummed into them that we're only earning pin money, but this isn't true any more. Many of us are the family breadwinners.'

Judith Garner.

other NALGO members brought out in the course of the dispute.

Since then Trevor Jones has escalated the dispute even further by suspending nearly 300 NALGO members for refusing to do the typists' work.

Just before *Womens Voice* went to press the Labour councillors made moves in the city council to force Jones to negotiate or go to arbitration. At a protracted council meeting, lobbied by 700 NALGO members, the Tories moved a motion to sack the strikers, and the Liberals merely played for time.

It's clear that the typists can't wait for Trevor Jones to set the wheels in motion for a settlement. Only an escalation in industrial action will put the pressure on Jones to take the typists' case seriously. What is now needed is a campaign from below, and positive arguments for all-out action.

Yolanda Bystrom
Isobel Hesketh

If you want to invite a speaker from the Liverpool typists' strike to your union meeting, phone 051-236 1944. Collection sheets are available from the Right to Work Campaign, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4, or phone 01-986 5491.

STAFFA STAYS OK!

We spoke to Maria Georgiou on the picket line. She is 19 years old and has been working at Staffa as a secretary for 2½ years. 'It's my first job and I've enjoyed it. I've not known hardship and I don't want to. That's why the longer we stick this out the better.'

Maria used to think her boss was all right, but 'since we've seen the documents' (which proved that the sole motivation of the company's multinational owners was sheer greed) she says 'it just shows you can't trust any of the managers. They've tried to divide us and intimidate us by ringing us up at home.' Maria has received one such call from her boss—'I told him where to go! It's just been diabolical the way we've been treated—they've taken our jobs away and they're still treading all over us.'

'I was against the occupation at first. I didn't want to go on strike—I didn't know the ins and outs of it then—I've never ever been involved in anything like this. After it all started I was well into it. I think the company was surprised—they thought the workers were a soft touch. So far it hasn't been as hard as we thought—not as boring. We come down here and have a laugh. You learn something every day from this—where we stand and how we've been hoodwinked.'

Morale is very high. Maria's first experience of public speaking was when she addressed our Womens Voice meeting on 'The Right to Work' and took a collection of over £20. She was a bit nervous beforehand, but is now keen to go out on more delegations.

What do her family and friends think about her being on strike? 'They've given me full support—my mum kicked me out of bed at 8.30 the other morning and told me to get out and fight for my job! My friends have been down to visit me on the picket line. They think I'm a bit silly, but that's because they don't know the ins and outs of it—if it was their job I'm sure they'd do the same.'

On their chance of success she says, 'I reckon we'll win—already they're screaming out for those drums. They need everything here, but they ain't going to get it!'

Hackney Womens Voice

On September 29 workers at Staffa Products, East London, which makes hydraulic motors, occupied the factory to save their jobs. Management want to close the factory and move to Plymouth, where they'll be able to pick up £4 million of government grants, 'prune' the workforce by 100 and pay lower rates for the same work. Three unions are involved: the AUEW and ETU (the engineers) and ASTMS (the 'staff'). Injunctions for repossession were served on those occupying and the occupying workers were evicted. They are continuing to picket from the outside.



Neil Martinson

The picture shows women workers in occupation at Staffa Products in the east end of London. They are sitting in the Board Room—the shape of things to come?

JULIE GREEN, wife of Staffa Convenor Dave Green was interviewed by Julie Leadbetter

JULIE GREEN and her nine month old son, Mark, were on the delegation from Staffa Products at the Right to Work demonstration in Blackpool. Julie was there to support her husband and the other workers at Staffa.

The first redundancies took place last November. 'First of all I didn't understand what was going on. Dave didn't explain to me what was happening and I didn't ask. It really didn't affect me. Dave was going to a lot of union meetings. I didn't mind him going, but I wasn't that interested.

'Then in June Dave came home and said they might be moving the factory to Plymouth and that he would be made redundant. I couldn't believe it would happen, you never think it could happen to you. I was mostly worried about the bills—Dave was worried too, he also thought I'd blame him if he lost his job.

'After that people kept coming around the flat, blokes from the union and that. I started to listen and try to find out exactly what was going on. Not long before the occupation, I remember Dave coming home after one mass meeting. There had been a vote against fighting management and for negotiating redundancy payments.

'A lot of the blokes voted for redundancy. I thought they should have stuck together to fight for their jobs. If people keep giving in to the management and this government what sort of future is Mark going to have? That is why when I first went down to the factory after the occupation I was really surprised and really pleased to see that they were all sticking together. Everybody was so committed and so united, you could see it in their faces.

'The first thing I knew about the occupation was a note through the door. One of the SWP members from the next block of flats had been round. The note said that they were in occupation and Dave wouldn't be home. I was really surprised. It had happened so quickly.

'The SWP people have been really good, especially down the factory and also making sure I haven't been on my own by having me to stay and things.

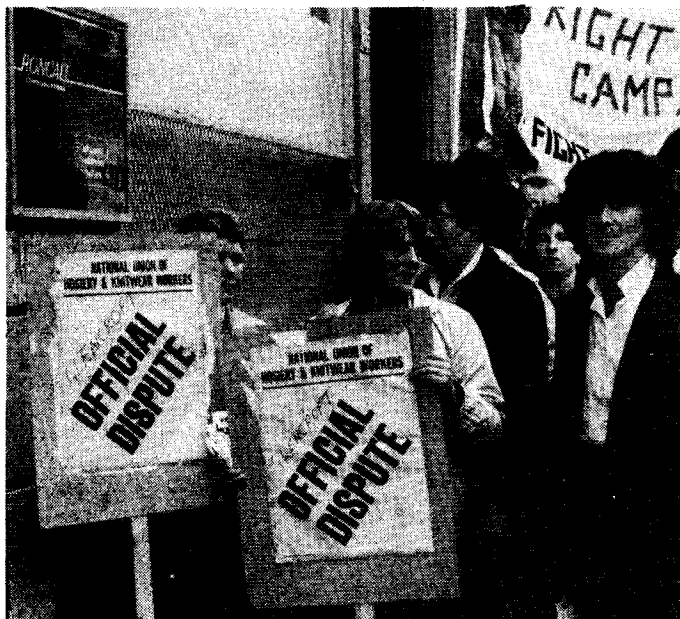
'I've had a few arguments. My parents and some friends think Dave should have taken the redundancy money. I used to, I must admit, but now I know he's done the right thing and I stick up for him if people start saying that.

'That doesn't mean I still don't worry about the bills. The social security have been useless they just keep sending forms to fill out. We already owe £100 in rent. I haven't been able to do any evening work with my mother to get some money (silver service waiting). Doing that work made me realise what management are all about. They don't care about you just about themselves.

'I'm really glad that I'm more involved now and that I'm going on the march today. I think it's a real pity that the other wives haven't come too, I mean we're all in the same boat aren't we? Being involved means I understand it better, I might not say a lot but I'm listening.'

Going home that evening I asked Julie what she thought of the day. Her answer was, 'Great'

Blacking the wool!



'The day we went on strike one lassie was chucked out of her house, but she's staying at her sisters now. On the whole our mums have been great, and giving us all the support that we need. There's a lot of the women married with kids and they're probably feeling the pinch a bit more. But we're all equally determined to stick it out—and win'.

These are the words of Glencroft striker Marion Ross who along with 14 other women have stood on a picket line in central Glasgow since August in the fight to win their jobs back and get union recognition. And it's not only their mums who are supporting them! The women have visited, and got support from, most of the big factories in their area. Yarrow's shipyard have promised the women £50 a week while they are on strike, and they have received collections from workers in the TGWU, AUEW, SOGAT and the FBU ... to mention a few.

The women walked out in August in support of a sacked supervisor, but have ended up defending their jobs and their right to join a trade union. The 15 women who stayed out have joined the National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers. There are over 40 scabs crossing the picket line daily. Before the strike the women were earning £47 a week for producing jumpers which can cost as much as £46 each! Their boss, Freedman, is at pains not to even recognise that there is a picket line on his front doorstep. Rosemary Tombs explains 'The police told us that Freedman had informed them that we didn't work there and asked them to remove us for obstruction. We caused a stink about that—so the police had an internal inquiry into it and they've now given us an official apology!' This isn't the only dirty trick that Freedman has tried on the strikers—he's now recruiting young women straight from the dole, with no job security rights, to do the strikers work. But he's not the only one that can play games, Freedman is now arriving to work in a taxi. He may like sugar in his tea, but it certainly didn't agree with his petrol tank! He's not a very sweet person anyway.

The problem the women have now is winning—and they're half way there. Most of the knitwear that Glencroft produce is for export and leaves the country through the airports. The TGWU are now officially blacking them at Glasgow Airport, the step now should be approaching workers in other airports and asking them to follow their example and to start blacking now. The women have stopped all the goods getting into the factory, the drivers who are members of the TGWU have refused to cross their picket line, apart from one scab driver who isn't a member of any union. They have also started picketing shops in Glasgow's city centre that sell Glencroft Knitwear.

What the women need is people on their picket line. There are

mass pickets every Tuesday but because of the threat of prosecution under the Employment Act for secondary picketing the Glasgow Trades Council have refused to officially back the pickets. As Rosemary says 'I think if we could get the support there in the morning it would help us win. If there were a lot of us the police couldn't pick on individuals—with a big picket they're too frightened. I think the law is going to have to be broken—we need the support to win the strike.'

What you can do:

- Don't buy Glencroft knitwear
 - Join the mass picket in Ingram Street every Tuesday morning at 7.15
 - Collect money for the strikers and take it along to their picket line or send it to Glencroft Strikers, NUHKW, 44 Kelvingrove Street, Glasgow.
- Julie Waterson

Curtains for Commonwealth

140 MAINLY women workers are occupying the Commonwealth Curtains plant in Kirby, Merseyside. Seven months ago the company brought in their hatchet man, Mr Holmel, as a director. He promised no redundancies. 'Just three months later' said GMWU convenor Josie Hart 'we were on a three day week, after another five weeks he made 55 people redundant'.

Not only that but the union subs went into the bosses' pocket. And when the workers stood up to the company's job cutting plans management decided to close the factory. That was four weeks ago. Since then the women have been sitting-in 24 hours a day in the fight to save their jobs. Merseyside Right to Work Campaign is now arranging factory visiting to draw in the cash to keep the fight going.

The battle at Commonwealth

Curtains is against a company of staggering greed. Commonwealth is viable and has full order books. Yet the workers have had no wages, no week in hand and no redundancy or severance pay.

Yolanda Bystram

What You Can Do:

- Organise collections in your workplace and invite workers from the occupation to put their case to your union branch, shop stewards committee and Trades Council.
- Visit the occupation, and send messages of support and donations to: Commonwealth Curtain Occupation, Admin Gate, Kirby, Merseyside. Or phone the factory on 051 548 9360.

Collection sheets are available from the RTWC, 265a Seven Sisters Road, London N4 or by phoning 986 5491.



STAFFA workers on the Right to Work March meet workers from the Commonwealth Curtain occupation in Liverpool.

Picture: JOHN STURROCK (Network)

Fight this film

WE ARE horrified to hear that there is to be a film made about Peter Sutcliffe—the so-called Yorkshire Ripper. It is to be made by an American company, as yet un-named. Their UK agent is one Michael Ryan, an ex SAS bodyguard. He claims that location shots have taken place in northern towns and that close associates of Sutcliffe, including his wife, are helping with the film and that Robert de Niro has been asked to star (the significance of that being that it implies the film is going to be big.)

We must assume that this film, like the many others, will degrade women and show them as weak, vulnerable and unable to fight back. It is an insensitive move and one that proposes to make as much money from the fear that women feel and the public outcry at the viciousness of the attacks on women.

This film must be opposed. If it is made we must ensure that we protest against it.

It's a victory

LAST MONTH Womens Voice told you about Louise Trewavas's fight for equal pay in a non-unionised factory in Wokingham, Berkshire. This month we are pleased to report that there has been an equal pay victory—Louise has won!

As a result of her application to an Industrial Tribunal under the Equal Pay Act of 1970, Tectonic Electronics, who employed Louise as a lab assistant, have been forced to settle her claim and pay her £194 in back pay.

'I have won my case' said Louise 'but there are many women at Tectonic who are paid low wages, they really need a union to make sure their rights are observed'.

OUT, BUT NOT OUT FOR 6.52

HACKNEY'S Labour Council, an equal opportunity employer, showed its 'concern' for working women recently during a 12 day strike by the Social Services Department, the majority of whose clerks, nursery nurses, social workers and residential workers are women. *And Hackney Council didn't care.*

They refused to admit that the social services management had breached the staff disciplinary code when they suspended two welfare attendant drivers who ferry old and handicapped people round the borough.

The other drivers, mostly in NALGO, came out on strike in defence of their colleagues, and ten days later almost the whole department (about 500 workers) came out in support. Many had never been particularly involved in the union, never mind being out on strike! But once out, most joined in enthusiastically. Pickets were mounted on residential homes, nurseries, the area social services offices, and also on council buildings like the town hall, so we could inform the public and other council workers of the council's behaviour.

'Women were the backbone of the strike on the picket lines,' was how one clerk described it, undertaking 24 hour picketing of children's homes in isolated streets. Toddlers were frequent visitors to the picket lines and to the daily meetings, as the picketing affected the workers' childcare too! Resolve for the strike grew daily

NALGO made the strike official, but withdrew this status (although the issue hadn't changed) when the rest of the branch refused to support us in strike action, after 12 days of picketing, leafleting and arguing. The strike was held together by the daily lunchtime meetings, where reports were given on negotiations and arguments gone over again and again, and by open meetings each afternoon for stewards and anyone else to plan the next moves, publicity and picketing.

The strike headquarters

phone was open 24 hours a day, and we got loads of calls, meant for the council, from women asking what was happening at the nurseries and what they could do. One woman who talked to pickets at the town hall said she thought mothers whose jobs were threatened because no one could look after their kids should get together and present their problem to the council.

In an inner city borough, with housing problems, many single parents and high unemployment, Hackney Council keeps its social services department permanently understaffed, against which the union operates a fairly successful no cover policy on vacant posts. Any attacks on the workforce results in worse services, of most benefit to the women in the borough, and worse conditions for the workers, mostly women.

We need strong union organisation to fight such attempts to weaken us, and we could do with more women stewards especially for the clerical and

admin grades, and for specialised workers like nursery nurses, to make sure we are properly represented in the branch and in any future action, as at the moment the most prominent stewards are male social workers.

Eventually, we went back to work, due to lack of support from the branch, the council having put the matter (the defrauding of £6.52!) in the hands of the police, and oblivious to the suffering caused by the withdrawal of services, for which they have ultimate responsibility.

But, as one social worker said, looking around us we could be proud—so many women fighting side by side and with the men for a principle we believe in—and we would never be the same again, because although we didn't get the drivers reinstated, we know we have the potential to organise ourselves when necessary, because you can feel the solidarity.

Two clerks and two social workers in Hackney.



HER ONLY CRIME... SHE IS BLACK

Shirley Graham, from Forest Gate in east London, lives in fear of being deported at any time. Shirley is a Jamaican by birth and has lived in this country since 1974. She has left and entered the UK on several occasions with no trouble and has been given 'indefinite leave to enter'. To add to this Shirley is at present convalescing after a major abdominal operation.

In August this year after a short trip abroad, Shirley was detained without warning at the airport and held for five days. She was only released after the intervention of a law centre. It would appear that the Home Office couldn't decide whether Shirley was staying in Britain 'illegally' or not, so they decided to detain her 'just in case'. While in detention, Shirley's diabetes and blood pressure deteriorated due to the interrogation by Immigration Officials and the delay in giving her proper medical attention. She has done nothing wrong—but she is being treated like a criminal. She is having to defend her right to remain in Britain, where she has made her home and worked as a nurse for many years. All of her family are here. *She has a right to stay.*

In the seven years that she has lived here she has maintained contact with the Home Office, informing them of any changes in her circumstances. Now, for no apparent reason, her whole life has been disrupted.

Shirley's only crime is that she is black. She is one of the growing number of black and Asian women who are being threatened with deportation over the smallest technicalities, and whose status and rights are suddenly removed because of their colour and their sex.

Both Labour and Tory governments use racist and sexist immigration laws to harass black and Asian people and to make them the scapegoat for the present economic crisis. They are now being subjected to a disguised policy of forced repatriation. This is a disgusting policy—black people are not to blame for the crisis. It is the greed of the rich and the bosses that are to blame, not the workers whom they recruited from other countries to make their profits for them. It is those self-same workers who have the power to chuck out this vile law, and that is by organising against it.

Shirley's case, like the cases of Cynthia Gordon, Nasira Begum and Anwar Ditta, must be fought—for it has been proved they can win. The attack on the rights of people to stay in this country will get fiercer as the third reading of the Nationality Bill approaches. And the counterpart to racist legislation is racist activity on the streets. We must fight for the rights of every person who wants to stay in this country to stay. We must build resistance to the Tories' racist laws and use every campaign to combat the racist ideas which destroy peoples lives and divide black workers from white workers.

This was compiled by reports from The Shirley Graham Defence Committee and Miriam Scharf.

What you can do:

- * Take up Shirley's case within your union.
- * Take a petition into your workplace.
- * Invite a speaker from the Defence Campaign to your trade union branch or organisation.
- * Write to the Home Secretary: The Rt Hon William Whitelaw MP, Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1 asking that the decision to deport Shirley be reversed and that she be given indefinite leave to remain in the UK.
- * Send donations to: Shirley Graham Defence Campaign, c/o 285 Romford Road, Forest Gate, London E7 01-555 3331. Petitions and speakers are available at the above address.



Above are some photographs from Queen Mary's nursery, taken during the summer with the threat of closure hanging over it.

LABOUR LEADERS NAPPIES IN A TWIST

THE LABOUR leaders of Tower Hamlets council, in east London, have had a worrying time over the past few months. And it serves them right. At the same time as they were trying to close a local nursery, the nursery workers for the first time ever, started to organise against the council for higher pay.

The council 'announced' more than six months ago that they intended to close Queen Mary's nursery and then open a new nursery employing *less* staff and taking in *fewer* kids. Actually it was more of a rumour than an announcement, and that's what the council wanted. They refused to meet with the unions and denied *everything!* Eventually they were forced to say that it was the Tory cuts that were to blame for the closure, but nobody took that for an answer. After months of organisation against the closure and a magnificent picket by the parents and staff of a meeting of the council, they were forced *not* to close the nursery.

But the nursery workers' pay dispute has yet to be settled—no doubt the council will try to keep them at bay for as long as they can. But they're finding it harder to ignore them as the industrial action in support of their claim is stepped up.

The claim was nationally agreed and all other London boroughs have paid their workers. But as has been shown, the council can be forced to back down, through action, and the nursery workers seem to be going about it in the right way!

Liz Baltesz



NEWS

RACISM DIVIDING AND RULING US

FOR white people it is hard to imagine what it would be like to be black. We are not on the receiving end of the Immigration and SUS laws, National Front violence, the highest rate of unemployment or day-to-day racist abuse.

Black people are a small percentage of Britain's population. Less than two million out of a total population of 55 million, yet they are accused of being responsible for most of our social problems. Simple arith-

Britain from Pakistan ten years go.

Racism is a way of dividing and ruling us. Bringing misery to the black population does not solve anyone's problems; it does not give us jobs or housing. When the black community is attacked, the white community also suffers because once again the real enemy goes free.

If we cannot be effective in fighting the real causes of our problems—that is, mass redundancies, wage restraints and

The riots, though, united sections of the black community, as they united whites with blacks. Although they did not solve the problem which caused them, for a short period they did put the Tory government on the defensive. There were too many of them, in too many parts of the country and we could all see that white people were involved as well as black for the usual scapegoats to carry much weight. For once, it was the police, unemployment

and the cuts which were to blame, not the blacks, communists or copy cats.

'The riots gave confidence to black people,' said Marianne. 'It was like being told that you were right all along, that the problems of this country are not our fault—unemployment, bad housing and cuts—they are problems created by this government. Not only do we suffer from them but we usually get blamed for them as well.'

Mary Williams



metic should tell us better. Unemployment is currently around 3 million people, a larger number than there are black people in the country—so how can they be taking white people's jobs? With the government cutting back on all housing fronts it is not a case of black people taking white people's housing because no one is getting housed. Even government statistics show that black people live in more overcrowded conditions, take less from social security and use education facilities less than whites.

'White people have created a phantom called black people and they use us to escape seeing the cause of their own problems,' said Marianne Ray who came to

cuts in services—the way is open for Nazi violence. It also allows people like Enoch Powell to talk of 'civil war' and repatriation. 'They forget that the British welcomed black people when they needed labour only 20 years ago. Now there is unemployment, they want us to leave. We can't, because we live here, for most of us our homes are no longer abroad,' said Marianne.

Even though racism is directed against the black community, all black people do not share the same circumstances. Some are skilled, others unskilled, some better off than others. 'Margaret Thatcher knows this only too well. After the summer riots she made a personal visit to Southall to protect her Tory vote.'

'SECURITY RISK' ARRESTED

Patricia Giambi, an Italian who lives in Brixton, is serving a 28 day prison sentence in Holloway after being found guilty of threatening behaviour during the April riot in Brixton. At the end of her sentence, she will be deported.

Patricia was arrested on 11 April. During her trial, the police produced 'evidence' to show that she was a 'security risk'—photographs of a bookshelf in her flat, which included

books on anarchism, and a poster from her wall with the slogan 'Bread, love and struggle.'

Patricia's case is being used by the police to imply that the riots over recent months are the result of 'foreign agitation', rather than the outcome of high unemployment and police harassment.

Friends of Patricia Giambi, Flat 4, 387 Coldharbour Lane, London SW9.

■ RTWC 81'

'Everyone's got the right to a job, and we've got to fight for it'

Over 600 women and men left Liverpool in early October to march on the Tory party conference in protest at unemployment. Ten days later as they reached Blackpool their numbers had swelled to nearly 1,000.

Ten days of sleeping on floors, eating porridge and marching up to 20 miles, didn't diminish the enthusiasm. The final day of the march, October 16, we joined with the People's March, which had crossed the Pennines from Sheffield, and thousands of trades unionists from around the country, to lobby the Tory party conference.

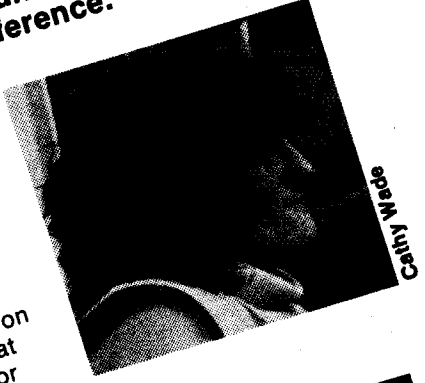
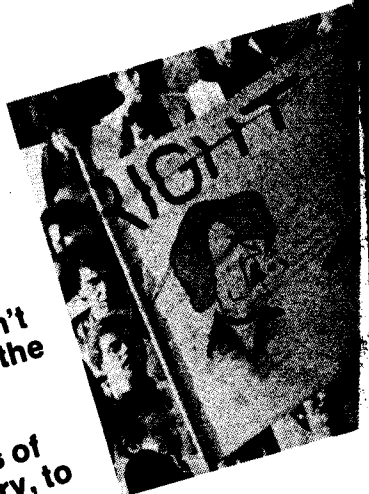
Cathy Wade, one of the striking Liverpool typists, was on the Right to Work march. 'I went on the march because someone's got to do something to protest.

Unemployment is disgusting. People sometimes come up to us on the picket line and say that we should be ashamed for striking for more money when there's three million unemployed. That's exactly the sort of attitude that the Tories want—the politics of fear.

'Everyone's got the right to a job, and we've got to fight for it. Our strike is about the right to work, because if we're defeated then the way is open for the council to make redundancies because the union organisation will be smashed. Our strike is about the right to work, and the right to decent wages and conditions in work.

'I've joined the SWP because I know that the Labour Party is ineffective, and the SWP is fighting for the interests of workers—of people like me in struggle.'

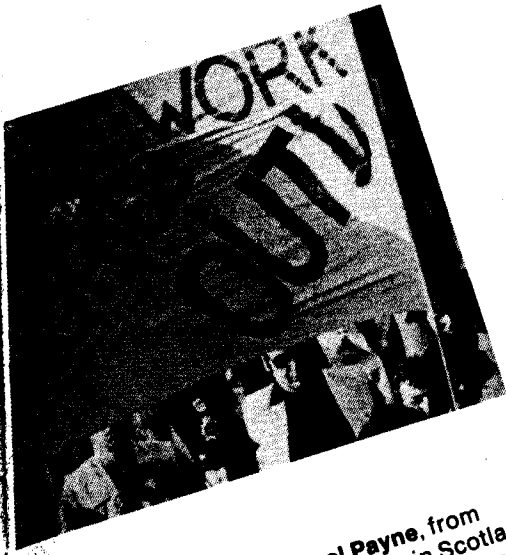
Mary Guinan met a woman from the Right to Work Campaign outside her local unemployment office in North London, who asked her to go on the march. 'I'm glad that I came now.' She's 44 and has left two kids at home. 'We had arguments at home over who was to come but I couldn't leave my little girl alone, so I left my other daughter with her. I'll come again next year.'



Cathy Wade

RIGHT TO WORK CAMPAIGN 81'

RIGHT TO WORK CAMPAIGN



Carol Payne, from Johnstone in Scotland, is 20 and has been unemployed for eight months. Two days into the march, Carol was elected as the march committee delegate from the West of Scotland contingent.



Carol Payne

'Thatcher's dead smug about everything. She's got everything going her own way. One thing I know we've got to get her out'

Catherine Sloane, from Blackpool, is employed on a Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) scheme. The day the Right to Work march came to Blackpool to picket the Tory Party conference, Catherine and two of her workmates asked their supervisor if they could join the protest.

'Because I'm female I thought that all these Scottish lads would be difficult to handle. But they were really great, and respected me as the elected steward for the group.'

Catherine Sloane

pictures by John Sturrock (Network)

'We said we wanted to go on the march, and he said that if we did we'd get our wages stopped. We just walked out, there and then. It's not right to dock our wages for wanting to go on the Right to Work march. We want decent jobs ourselves, and YOP schemes are just slave labour. I get £23.50 for a full working week, and I have to pay my bus fares and everything else out of that. I want a proper job with proper wages, and I'm going to fight for it.'

'I hate being out of work, but the march has been really different. While you're on the march you don't feel you've got to sort out your problems on your own.'

'When I go back to Johnstone I'm going to look for a job, but I'm also going to get involved in political activity. I'm going to start fighting.'

'I was 16 when I started on the YOP schemes, and now I'm 19 and I've still not got a proper job. YOPs should be done away with.'

'Thatcher's dead smug about everything. She's got everything going her own way. One thing I know, we've got to get her out.'



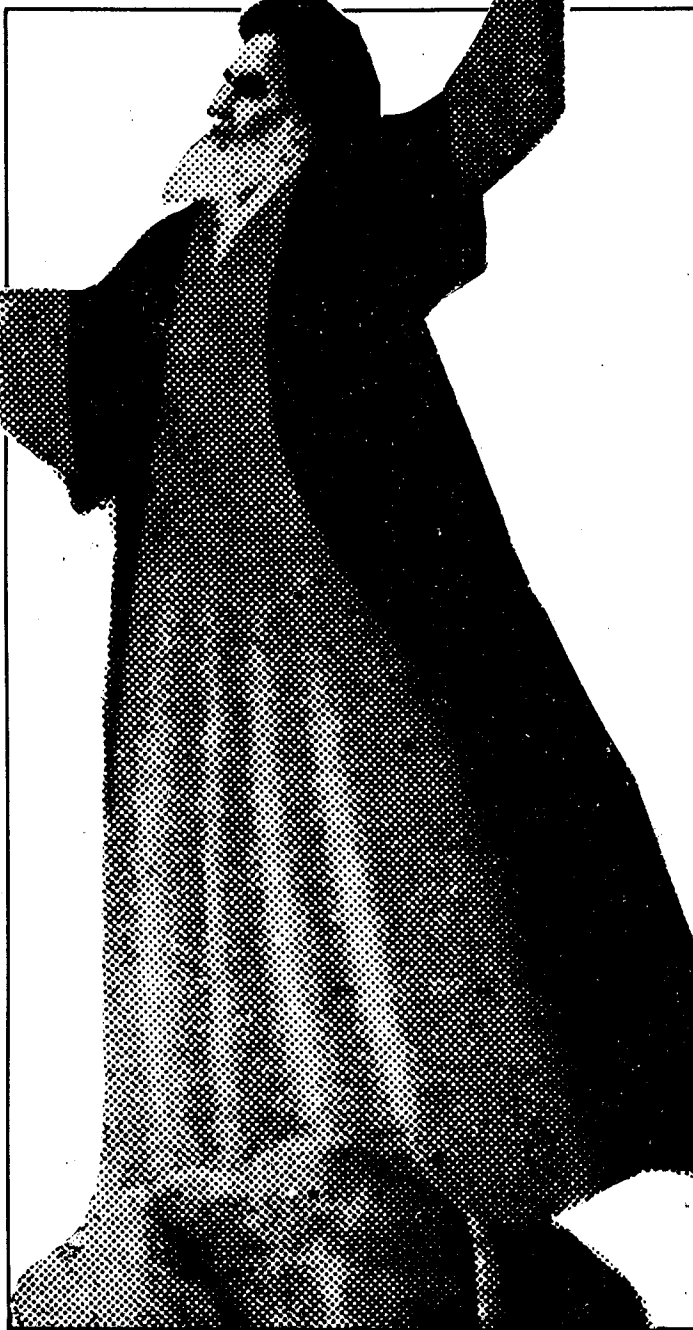
Women are often thought to be religious, conservative and reluctant to change. For example many sisters, including Iranians who have been in this country for some time, still believe that Iranian women who in their thousands took part in the so-called Islamic revolution did so because they were superstitiously religious and wanted to bring about an Islamic order of society. But this is far from the whole truth.

For many people in Iran, it seemed logical that any government which succeeded that of the late Shah, would be democratic and that Khomeini's main aim would be to bring about an improvement in economic conditions for working people. To some extent women were interested in aspects of Islam but what they had in mind was very different to what Khomeini and his provisional government intended, and many women feel that they have been cheated by his policies.

To our sisters in Iran, at that time (though not any longer) an end to poverty, starvation and homelessness seemed in sight. Most important of all, an end to the torture of their sisters and brothers in the Shah's prisons seemed certain.

Steadily, as women realised that Khomeini's regime was not going to bring about any significant changes, they joined their brothers and have now started a vicious and bloody campaign against his rule. Amongst the hundreds that have been executed in recent days are many women who were and are either supporters of the Islamic organisation 'Mojahedin' or other opposition groups, or are simply fighting at the risk of their lives against wearing the compulsory veil. On 9 August, 1981, it is reported in the Iranian daily paper that in Oroomiyeh, north west of Iran, two women were arrested and sentenced to 30 lashes for the crime of wearing no veil and distributing leaflets against the requirement to wear the veil. In September the same paper reports the arrest of 60 women, some of

VICTIMS OF ANCIENT IDEAS



whom were sent to the firing squad.

To reinforce the point I am trying to make I reprint extracts from a letter sent to the only women's magazine currently published in Iran, 'Zan-e-Rooz'. The magazine observes the press censorship, so the letter has almost certainly been edited substantially.

The anonymous writer is a 17 year old woman, who is clearly still awaiting the revolution. She lives in one of the many remote and far-flung villages of Khozestan. Perhaps her remoteness from the capital and the rapid historical changes that take place in industrial cities could explain why she has not yet lost hope in the present rulers of Iran. She wants them to open their eyes and see her oppressive position in her village and put an end to the 'non-revolutionary' conditions in which she and her women friends are living. To her mind Islamic Government should act in a revolutionary way and that seems to bring about a drastic change in the position of women in society.

'I am a 17 year old girl who lives in one of the very hot parts of Khozestan. My aim in writing this letter is to acquaint you with our customs and rites and I beg you to publish it.

'In our clan still it is the custom that girls do not have the right to choose their own husbands. We girls have to marry men within our family circles and freedom in this most natural right of ours is denied to us. And worse there are still very many families that think education is not suitable for girls and stop their daughters from going to school, and do not like the idea of us women going to work. Why is this so? For how much longer are these ancient rites and customs that belong to barbarian times going to remain untouched.

'I, as one of many individuals in my society who are victims of these ancient ideas, put my hand towards you for help and in case you are still living in a dream-world to awaken you, and remind you of your responsibility to respond to the needs of your society.'

Behjat Rezaei

JOBS NOT BOMBS JOBS NOT BOMBS

Sadie Blood, St Helens

Back in the community, that's where all that money now wasted on bombs could be spent. At present there are kids working on Youth Opportunity Programmes doing jobs which are really useful, being paid next to nothing for doing it. They're being taught skills which they could go on and use for all our benefit, if only they could be paid a decent wage.

Up here, in the St Helens Workshop, they're making toys for handicapped kids. Big toys that the children wouldn't be able to have otherwise. And they send the kids out to paint things that otherwise wouldn't get painted—hospitals and schools.

If I want someone to mind my Phillip (he's disabled) for a week while I'm at work, they'll send down two or three kids to look after him. They shop and do the gardens for the old people. They help out in the hospitals and the old folks home.

They're all jobs for which the government says there is no money but which are really useful, and are obviously needed. I'd like to see it extended so that they got a proper wage, and could perhaps help out at nights and weekends. Their skills wouldn't be wasted then, and nor would the skills of the people hired to teach them.

It's so simple and so obvious that that's what we should be doing.

■ ■
Hilary Burke, Rochdale

We had a battle up here which shows just how wrong the Government's priorities are, from spending billions on the bomb to cutting local services.

It's not surprising with that sort of stupidity going on that our Council Workers against the Missiles is going so well! Rochdale itself spends very little on civil defence and in fact the council has declared Rochdale a nuclear free

Nuclear war is more likely now than ever. And the campaign against it is growing. Fear makes a lot of women join the campaign—fear for their children's future, their own lives, the appalling misery and pain caused by war, the unknown aftermath. There are practical arguments too—the sheer waste of resources, the mistaken priorities. *Womens Voice* asked three women active in their local CND campaigns what arguments they use when people say

Well what would you do?

zone. Lots of councils have done it. It's very easy to do.

So we suggested that as the council had taken such a strong position on the issue perhaps they could produce

some anti-bomb literature. And perhaps they could let us meet in the town hall for free. But they won't let us. It's such a little issue, and it would cost them next to

Just in case you aren't yet convinced that the Americans would fight a nuclear war in Europe:

'I could see where you could have the exchange of tactical (nuclear) weapons against troops in the field without it bringing either one of the major powers (America and Russia) to pushing the button.'
President Reagan.

But remember. Although a war might start in Europe the super powers won't be able to contain it there. In every computer attempt to calculate the outcome of a 'limited' nuclear war, that war has escalated into a major nuclear catastrophe.

Together we can stop the bomb. The membership of CND is growing by the day and there are CND groups in most towns and cities. If you haven't joined in the fight against the bomb—why not write off to CND today to get details of your nearest group. They can be contacted at: 11 Goodwin Street, London N4 01-263 4954.

nothing. But any decision to let us have a room would have to go through a council meeting and they don't want to do that because they fear the publicity.

One interesting little fact we did find out. There's a place in the nuclear bunker for our director of social services—but not his family. We're the caring services, you know.

■ ■
Ann Smith, Portsmouth
If you live in Portsmouth you cannot escape the Navy, the Naval Dockyards and the fact that so many people work in them.

When we organised a midnight vigil on Hiroshima day a lot of drunken sailors came round shouting that they were here to defend us. Most of them wouldn't listen to our arguments, but one young sailor did. He was worried because his job was to dump radioactive waste in the Atlantic. He knew he was vulnerable if there was an accident, and he disapproved because of the danger to the environment. But he also knew he couldn't live, and keep his wife and two kids, if he didn't have a job.

As well as the Navy and the Dockyards there are lots of people, men and women, who are reservists. It's a very attractive proposition. They can use the bars and the sporting facilities, there's a great social life, and they get paid, not much, but something, for the evening exercises they have to do.

Then there are exercises to calculate the extent of the fall out in a nuclear war. So many bombs, so much wind. Run it for 24 hours and hey presto—you've got nothing left!

It's a game, like playing chess for money. That's why the people who do it don't see the contradictions of what they're doing. But occasionally they do, and they leave. That's what matters. To keep the arguments going until they do see they are literally wiping themselves off the face of the earth.

JOBS NOT BOMBS JOBS NOT BOMBS

White collar union Picking up the pieces

'TRADE union or tea club?' read a placard of the striking Liverpool typists as they lobbied the headquarters of their union, NALGO, for increased strike pay. The sentiment expressed on the placard sums up the changing attitudes of a new generation of white collar workers.

White collar unions started out in life mostly as associations to protect the interests of higher grade office workers. They firmly rejected any suggestions of similarity to manual workers' unions; they were a cut above blue collar workers and the idea of collective action. For example, it took NALGO 15 years from its foundation to certify as a trade union—and that was after intense agonising within the membership.

Similarly the unions whose members talk in this article about workplace organisation have consistently rejected affiliation to the Labour Party on the grounds that trade unions should confine themselves to 'trade union' activity, and not get mixed up in 'politics'.

White collar unions have traditionally behaved like professional associations, afraid of strike action, dominated by the high grade members (who are often the bosses of the rank and file), encouraging members to cross other unions' picket lines (and, sometimes, even their own), hanging on to national negotiations and settlements so that the rank and file are never really involved in fighting, and fearful of any action that could be construed as 'political'.

But these unions are changing. During the last decade white collar unionism has exploded. Membership has grown and grown—mostly women workers entering the public sector as typists, clerks and machine operators. Teachers, social workers, civil servants, bank clerks have all struck over a variety of issues. As we went to press, workers in the social services department at Hackney council had struck over the sacking of two drivers, south London teachers were in dispute with their union leadership over unofficial action, and members of NALGO's Liverpool branch had, for the first time in the union's history, taken strike action in support of another

group of workers—the 350 typists.

The impetus behind white collar unionism cannot be separated from the changing nature of the jobs of the bulk of the membership. Clerical and typing work has become increasingly mechanised and routine. Typing pools and machine rooms have got bigger and bigger—often with more than 100 women in them. The minor privileges which white collar workers once had are on the way out—clocking in is common, and the increase in machinery makes 'natural breaks' less likely. The wages of low-grade white collar workers are often lower than those of manual workers. White collar workers have been thrown together in large workplaces, subjected to bad conditions, and this has led towards better organisation at 'shop-floor' level.

Friction

One of the barriers to strong organisation within white collar unions is the insistence on national negotiations. High grade and management members can co-exist without too much friction with the bulk of the union's membership while someone else, somewhere else is negotiating on pay and conditions. But local negotiations may result in a local fight, and in a union such as NALGO that means that management members will be 'inconvenienced' by the actions of other members. So when the Liverpool typists struck over a local claim, most of the chief officers and the senior staff resigned from the union within a few weeks (although recruit amongst the lower grade workers shot up).

But it's at a local level that strong organisation is built. If union members fight over day-to-day issues, then strength and confidence will be built to fight on wider or national issues. If the workplace organisation is weak, the support for a national dispute will be less, and disillusionment with the union is far more likely. This is what has happened in the civil service unions, after their long campaign over pay was finally defeated. In the offices where the union meant something on the ground, the organisation still exists despite the failure of the national leadership. In the offices where local organisation was weak, demoralisation is high because the union equals the national leadership who sold out the strike.

The real essence of the change in white collar unions lies in that local organisation, and also in the attacks that the public sector unions especially have faced. The threat—and reality—of massive redundancies and

We often talk about the explosion in white collar unionism. Are white collar workers developing trade union organisation?

The picture is patchy and in some ways 'white collar worker' covers such a multitude of jobs and grades. But one thing is clear: the large number of disputes which continue to occur have had an effect on the number of women militants about recent disputes.

effective cuts in wages have forced white collar union activists into trade union consciousness, and into recognising that only all-out, united industrial action, plus solidarity from other workers, can resist the onslaughts of the Tory government.

That recognition and consciousness has yet to make itself shown in action—but a start has been made by the Liverpool typists in particular, and other small disputes up and down the country. If that action is to be successful, links will have to be built with manual workers and the rank and file of other white collar unions. Likewise, links will have to be broken with some members of the workers' own unions—the management members—who will act on the side of the employers. When that happens, the real fights will begin.



Katrina Tully, Inland Revenue Staff Federation (IRSF), Bristol.

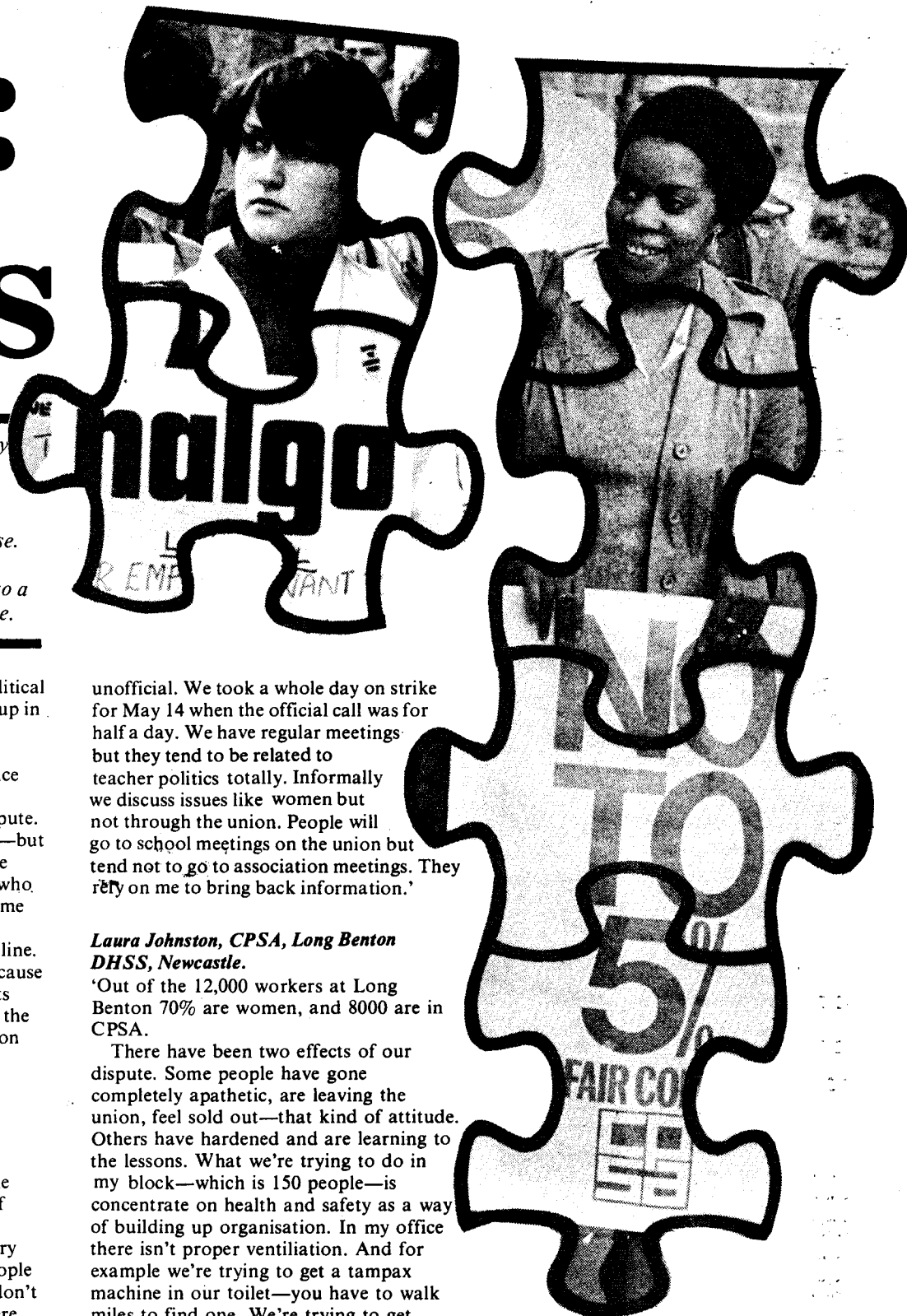
'It's been pretty depressing since the dispute. All the activists feel the union isn't representative of them and it's a hard job to keep people active. It's a pyramid union so the higher grades are happy with their increases but for the lower grades it's pathetic. The IRSF is 60% women and they're mostly in the bottom two grades. Our office meets once a month—or sometimes every two months—where we



ions: pieces

ollar unionism, but how far has it really
g trade union traditions and workplace

contradictory. The term 'white collar
grades that it is impossible to generalise.
disputes involving white collar workers
workplace organisation. We talked to a
disputes, and the effect on their workplace.



take up health and safety and wider political issues. Civil service procedure ties you up in knots which makes a lot of action very difficult.

'It's definitely changed incredibly since the dispute—which is a mixture of the effects of Tory government and the dispute. The women moved more than the men—but the men tend to be management. People became much more militant—one girl who had always refused to join the union came and joined about two weeks before the strike, and she was active on the picket line.

'There's an awful lot of bitterness because our union voted for all out strike, but its difficult to turn that bitterness towards the executive. We're going to have to start on the ground and build rank and file organisation.'

Bron Charlton NUT Harlow

'At our school we're fighting against closure. We're going for a half day strike but people are saying, what will we do if the union nationally don't support us? People will act together, but they are very fed up with the national union. New people aren't being taken on which means we don't get the new blood in the union. And there are less women to involve—really because of the cuts. Where they do get involved they have much more stamina. At my school there are 56 staff—only 15 are women. I don't know if it's changed, in the nine years I've been teaching. In Harlow we had a big breakthrough over refusing to cross NUPE picket lines. But I taught in East London much of that time—there was much more unofficial action, much more involvement'.

Anny Northcote NUT Tower Hamlets

'My school don't have a lot of time for the NUT executive and their inactivity over the cuts but they need someone to inject energy into their activity. We've taken action on a number of occasions—November 28 two years ago, Blair Peach's funeral and May 14 last year—some of it unofficial or half

unofficial. We took a whole day on strike for May 14 when the official call was for half a day. We have regular meetings but they tend to be related to teacher politics totally. Informally we discuss issues like women but not through the union. People will go to school meetings on the union but tend not to go to association meetings. They rely on me to bring back information.'

Laura Johnston, CPSA, Long Benton DHSS, Newcastle.

'Out of the 12,000 workers at Long Benton 70% are women, and 8000 are in CPSA.

There have been two effects of our dispute. Some people have gone completely apathetic, are leaving the union, feel sold out—that kind of attitude. Others have hardened and are learning to the lessons. What we're trying to do in my block—which is 150 people—is concentrate on health and safety as a way of building up organisation. In my office there isn't proper ventilation. And for example we're trying to get a tampax machine in our toilet—you have to walk miles to find one. We're trying to get organised round things like that.

During the pay campaign things did change. Not long after we had trouble with the heating. This time we got the whole block out, because of the pay campaign. But on specifically womens issues, we're not getting anywhere with the creche campaign, and we used to have a womens' advisory committee but it's been wound up. It was said it wasn't working but there was no effort to encourage people to attend. I got the Right to Work through it for example, but it was totally ignored.'

Sue Caldwell CPSA Waltham Forest and Newham DHSS

'The dispute affected us in a couple of ways. A lot of people are threatening to resign but

in my office people are determined to stay in the union and fight at rank and file level. In other areas where the union wasn't well organised people were very pissed off. Talking to people who've worked there for years, at first they didn't realise there was a union. Now they think it's even more important to be in one—because of unemployment.

Since the strike its a lot of easier to get people involved. When you're doing normal boring things like fighting over sick leave or worksharing, it makes union organisation stronger. When a strike happens and you get sold out you don't blame the union as such but the fulltimers. Where organisation was strong we've come out stronger—where it was weak we've come out weaker.'

WORKING WOMEN

Girls, Wives, Factory Lives is a study of women workers in a tobacco factory in Bristol. The book's author, Anna Pollert, spent several months with the women in 1972, recording their conversations and their lives as factory workers. Below are extracts reprinted from the book.

KATE: I grin and bear it. If you want money, you have to work.

JENNY: If I wanted to leave I can—'cos I mean a load of girls come up to me and say, 'Oh I wish they'd burn this place down.' But I says, why don't they leave and they says, 'It's only the money that keeps us here.' That's all we're here for really.

The women at Churchmans, as in factories all over the world, were producing commodities. They happened to be handling tobacco—but life would have been much the same had they been making chocolate mints, cardboard boxes, or silicon chips. For work was essentially unskilled, boring, repetitive, alienated—something to be endured for the sake of the wage packet at the end. And to this extent meaningless work, work for profit, feels the same whether it is done by a man or a woman.

EDY: Let's face it, you can't live on one man's wage now. A woman's got to work if you want anything decent.

PEARL: If you want anything we have to work for it.

The phrase 'pin money' was about as meaningful to them as an account at Harrods:

ANNA: Why do you work?

IDA: You need the money. Most men's wages aren't enough.

BRENDA: It's the same, to decorate this house we've got. With the three children, it's a bit difficult on one man's wage.

VAL: For the money! What else?

EMY: Wages is all right here—we can't grumble. We could have more, though—with higher rents and coal.

STELLA: Well, with this pay claim, I think the money might just cover the prices going up. But if we can't get another rise for another twelve months, it'll be swallowed up.

SANDRA: You know I thought it was good wages in here. Well it is, I suppose, except for the price of flats and food and bus fares.

At the same time, they were class-conscious inasmuch as they had a clear conception of the unequal distribution of wealth in society, and their position in it:

ANNA: What's this factory for?

IDA: Well it's for the bosses, the shareholders.

ANNA: Who gets the best deal?

RENE: Well like, we're all at the low end of the ladder, we're just working class.

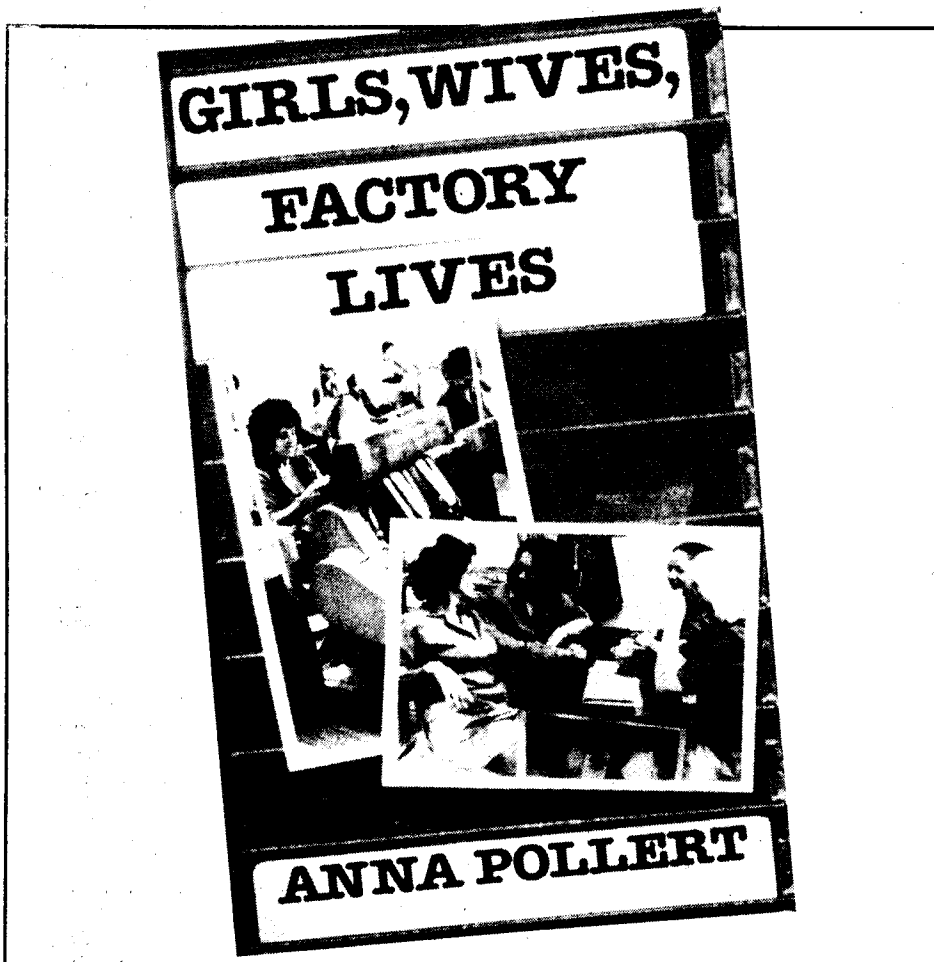
ANNA: Could they pay more?

RENE: Yeah, I reckon they could, but it's their profits, that's why they won't.

Churchmans, like any other factory, imposed discipline at several levels. There was the tight hold over the labour process, as described in job evaluation, grading and work study. Then there was personal supervision in the presence of chargehands, foremen and supervisors. And there were rules—the written rules of the rule book, and visual reminders stuck up on notices.

There was rule 7, against moving between departments and 'loitering on the staircases, in the corridors, at the entrance doors or in the lavatories'. There was rule 18: 'No employee is allowed to enter any lavatory or cloakroom except the one provided for his or her use'. And because of the unique value of tobacco to the Exchequer, there were more rules. Like rule 15, the 'right of search': 'Every employee is liable to be searched at any time.' And rule 9: 'SMOKING is NOT allowed on the Factory premises except in the dining rooms at times prescribed by the Management. To enter or leave the Factory with a lighted pipe, cigar or cigarette is prohibited.' It was even a crime to *posses* the *wrong* tobacco!

Nearly all the workers at Churchmans (90 per cent) belonged to the tobacco section of the TGWU. This was something of an anomaly in the area where most Wills workers belonged to the TWU, a large industrial union based on the original amalgamation of several craft unions, with over 3,000 members in Bristol in 1970. Churchman's affiliation with a general union dated back to its closeness to the riverside wharves, when dockers unloading tobacco organised the factory workers in the 1880s into their own union, the Dock, Wharf and Riverside Labourers' Union, a predecessor of the TGWU. For the women there was the problem that they were represented by men. There was a consensus among the men in the factory—workers, stewards, foremen, managers—that women were different from men. They were not like other workers: they were primarily housewives, their place in the home, their wages 'pin-money'. The



Girls, Wives, Factory Lives by Anna Pollert, is published by MacMillan Press, price £3.95 in paperback.

stewards frankly thought that the women were not too bothered about money:

MIKE: You ask any of the girls in here if they know anything about this pay claim, and I'll lay a pound to a penny they don't know what it's about. Mm? Do they? Some were actually antagonistic to the women; others simply did not understand them. They did different jobs—not 'women's work' on the production line. And they were not women.

ANNA: What about your union? What do you think of it?

JACKIE and JENNY (in chorus): *Nothing.*

ANNA: Are you going to stay in it?

JACKIE and JENNY: Yes!

These sharp exclamations expressed very simply an attitude held by most of the Churchmans' women. They were deeply embittered by their immediate experience of trade unionism, yet not to the extent to throw in their cards.

Basically, women were not 'anti-union'. They regarded trade unionism in general as a necessary, basic defence of their rights:

JACKIE: Well—it's to protect you: give you higher wages and that.

IDA: Well, they've cut down the hours over the years. They've also given us a good wage.

STELLA: It's a safeguard, isn't it? You've got something to fight for, if something goes wrong. Well—they're *supposed* to—but whether they do or not, I don't know.

Yet while not broadly anti-union, they expressed many of the inconsistencies of sectionalism, peppered with the prejudices of an anti-union, right-wing press. For the other side of their dissatisfaction with their own union was hostility and resentment towards those who were better organised (notably car workes and, in 1972, the dockers). Suddenly the image of the 'militant union' 'holding the country to ransom' reared its ugly head, and 'professional agitators' and 'greedy workers' appeared.

The older women were more concrete about their criticisms. They were more experienced, and being more committed to a life of full-time work say that what the 'union men' did mattered. They still saw 'the union' as 'them'; but this did not distinguish them from the majority of workers, men and women—for to all intents and purposes, where there was little shop-floor control, the union *was* 'them', the leaders, not 'us', the union of rank-and-file workers. Husbands and wives had this as a common bond. So, with the railwaymen's ballot on their pay claim in 1972:

PEARL: My husband can't do nothing about the agreement, he says. It's up to the union. We don't know. If they accept this present offer, we've had it.

The older women watched the news and read the papers; most were married and talked about work with their husbands. They compared their factory with the world outside in a way few girls felt able to do. And while many held contradictory ideas about their own problems, and the 'greedy

workers' 'out there', they also made more links. They recognised their weakness as a question of factory solidarity and shop-floor representation:

STELLA: Well, you hear the car industry, they go in leaps and bounds, don't they? I mean, their money is ridiculous compared with ours.

ANNA: Why do you think that is?

STELLA: Ah well, I suppose it's their union. I dunno. Got good backing, I suppose. They all stick together. Dunno.

ANNA: What about your union?

STELLA: Nobody backs it, do they? Transport we've got.

ANNA: Why do you think that is?

STELLA: Backs it? Well, I think myself, what does the fellow that comes in here know about tobacco work? Nothing. He doesn't even walk about the factory and see what's going on. I've never seen him in the factory. I've seen him in the office, I've seen him with the management, but I've never seen him walk to this room and look around the room and see what we're doing. So how does *he* know what's going on?



Opinions about shop stewards varied. A number were quite fond of Mike in the BUR: as a man he was 'as good as gold', and as a steward—well, there wasn't much happening anyway. Other stewards, notably those with the least tact and sympathy with women, were despised:

AILEEN: I don't think much of the union men in here. John Clark—our shop steward—he don't talk to you. When he came in the stripping room for election he said 'Will you vote for me? Thank you'—and went out without waiting for an answer. He's never around when you want him. A good shop steward would be there. Some had experienced actual betrayal: IVY: Time and again this union has sold us right down the river. You might as well not belong to any union if they don't back you up: And the stewards—well—they're all with management. They won't fight for you. Don't come down to the spinning room—it's a slave camp!

The one-day strike was over the 1972 national wage claim. It was a simple issue of demanding £3.50 across the board, against the company's maximum offer of £2.40 with differentials which would have brought the minimum male basic wage to £25 for a forty-hour week (for men aged 21 and over), and the minimum women's basic to £23.55 per week (for women aged 18 and over). The main spur behind the claim was the men, who felt the company's pay, previously 'second to none', was slipping behind other industries.

Nothing was done to involve the girls.

Proceedings fell in line with the Tory Industrial Relations Act and could not have been more orderly, constitutional—and dull. If passions ever existed, there were plenty of delays ('cooling-off periods' in the current jargon) in which they would die; it took twenty-one days before the claim was actually declared a 'dispute' by the union; seven days' notice of an overtime ban; a ballot on strike action; and finally, when negotiations broke down, and things were becoming 'dramatic', a week's notice of one-day stoppage. The union followed the rule book to the last of the small print—good 'industrial relations'. But apart from putting a cross on a piece of paper, the workers were left out.

When it came to preparations for the actual strike, there was the same lack of communication between shop stewards and the workers as we noticed before. Nobody knew what was going on. The girls in the hand-packing department were informed on Friday afternoon that they were to strike on the Monday. There were no posters explaining the matter, only small typed notices lost among the welter of yellowing minutes of union meetings. Nobody thought about picketing, and there were no instructions to do so.

STELLA: I mean, with this rise now, they say, 'Oh, we ought to take it.' But I don't think we ought to take it. I think it's a damned cheek. If we're having a rise, everybody should get a rise, not the people who are better off getting more. If they want incentive money, well make that another case altogether. But let us all have a rise together. We've all got to live.

But she was drowned by the others: the offer was good enough for a woman—a married woman. It was, in fact, some of the youngest girls, whose refrain had so often been 'we don't bother', who now came forward. They bothered to turn up in the morning for the union meeting at Transport House. It was partly because those aged under 18 would get the rawest deal from a differential pay rise; but also, they were curious. The meeting might be interesting; it might be a laugh. And there were not only BUR girls there: girls from flake hand-packing, some from the testing room, one from dispatch, about a dozen all told, turned up. Then there were ten men from the cutting room—the department which had lost a whole 'crew' of five cutters (a third of the department), while maintaining previous productivity levels, in the 1971 round of redundancies.

For the girls it was not only their first strike but also their first ever union meeting: a small group in smart coats, isolated, new and bit awkward in the great meeting-hall of Transport Hall. There were other women—about a hundred—but all from Wills; otherwise it was a man's world. And if, to a well-seasoned shop steward, the meeting procedure followed a well-worn groove, to them it was all novelty, a 'taste of life'. Their ears were all for the hard-sounding resolutions and rounds of applause; they did not see that a great deal of platform rhetoric took the place of concrete plans of action, as resolution after resolution from the floor was swept aside.

DIVIDE AND RULE

CLOSURES and amalgamations of secondary schools, now under way in many areas, will not just mean worsening standards. A higher proportion of children will go to church schools and to single sex schools. In one London borough alone, Hackney, well over half of all pupils will be in single sex schools. Is this a good or a bad thing? Chanie Rosenberg, a Hackney teacher, gives her views.

Even though the other side of girls' schools is boys' schools, there is a different attitude to each. Girls' schools are heavily subscribed to. Parents attitudes tend to include the belief that there is less violence and roughness and a generally quieter atmosphere and there is no male diversion from the girls' studies. The result of these two factors is a more studious atmosphere, and the schools are considered 'good' schools.

Many women teachers, including some who consider themselves feminists, see advantages in girls' schools in many spheres. Subjects, like maths and sciences, which are avoided by girls in co-ed schools, are encouraged and indeed taken up more confidently by more girls; in extra curricular activities more girls get more 'leadership' and related experience; women staff get a better chance to fill 'top' posts and serve as 'successful' examples to the girls.

DISADVANTAGES

Among the girls, too, the single sex girls' school has its adherents. The shy prefer it for the first two reasons that their parents do. The unshy notice a greater confidence gained, probably, through inability to play up to the boys in a stereotyped—and inferior—sex role.

If these presumed benefits are entirely the results of girls belonging to the 'oppressed' sex, it follows that boys' schools must suffer from as many disadvantages. The male dominance of the outside world is strongly reinforced inside the school, through authority being

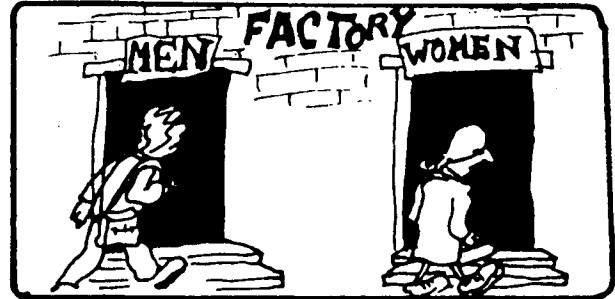
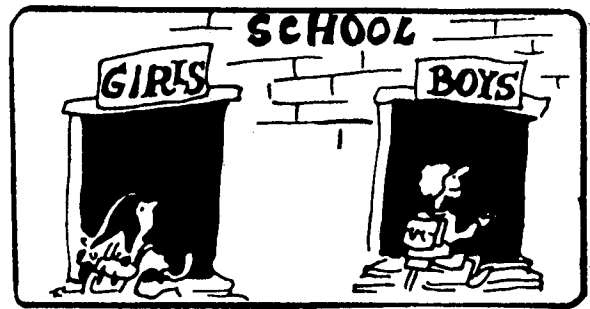
unquestionably male, with the minority of women teachers largely at the bottom end of the power pyramid. Much of the authority is of the strong arm type, whose ultimate sanction is the cane—still widely used in boys' schools, but not in girls'.

SEXISM

This sort of authority encourages aggressive and violent behaviour which is then usually punished in like ways. Sexism is the natural attitude of the boys. Verbal abuse—sexist and otherwise—of the women teachers is widespread, and fantasised sexual assaults of girl 'friends' are very common, widely illustrated in discussions, drawings and jokes.

It is not that teachers wish it so. Some go out of their way to try and educate the boys to a more sensitive understanding of sex. It is the single sex institution in a male dominated world which overrides their efforts.

My own attitude is against single sex schools, even though I understand and sympathise with the rationale behind the popularity of the girls



school. I think it is unnatural to sharply separate the sexes at 11, putting work and social life into separate compartments. This has no observable effects on the work (at least for boys) but retards social life for the youngsters, directing it into 'boy crazy' and 'girl crazy' channels with their attendant ills. For boys, single sex schools have no redeeming features. In addition single sex schools discriminate against their pupils in lacking facilities for skills other than those traditionally stereotyped as male or female.

MEETINGS

To counteract undesirable tendencies in boys' schools, womens groups have been set up in some. We have such a group in my school. After some initial raillery when we marched out to our lunchtime meetings we are now well established, with many of the male staff encouraging our efforts. We

discussed the difficulties of women in a boys' school. Collectively we sought solutions to the problems within the strictures of the single sex set up which we came out against. To help the male staff understand our situation, we gave them a version of our discussion.

PROPOSALS

To try to broaden the boys' education, we drew up proposals for a new subject of the curriculum called 'Skills for Living' which covers those skills of homemaking and social living traditionally separated into women's and men's work.

We should not relegate this problem to oblivion but seek to change it. Out of the evil of the cuts perhaps we can pluck this reform.

This article is adapted from one which appeared in Hackney Teachers Association Newsletter earlier this year.

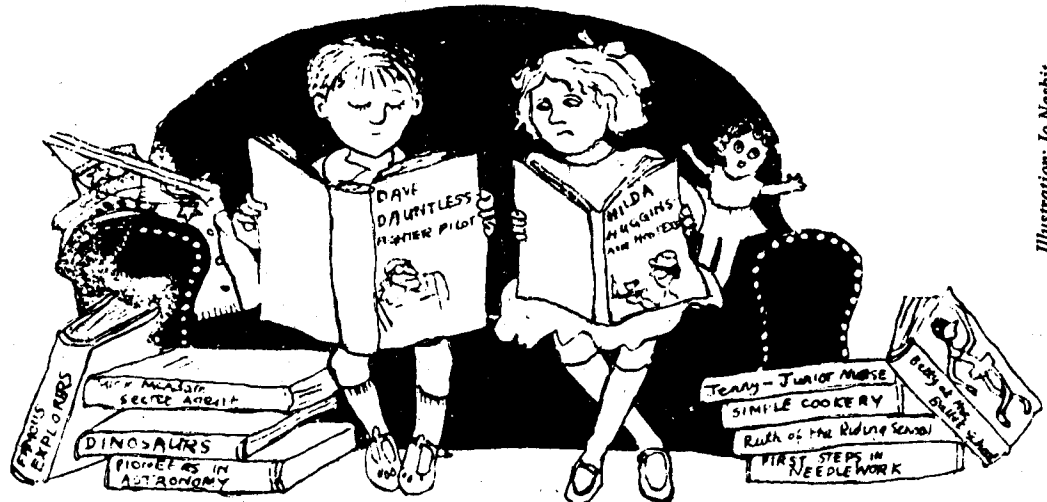


Illustration: Jo Nesbit

WOMENS HEALTH

INFERTILITY

MOST OF us spend a great deal of our time and energy trying to prevent ourselves becoming pregnant. It is a constant strain on our minds, and in the majority of cases, our relationships. But what of the women who are unable to have children?

Infertility is very common. Many women, and men, have to deal with the shock of being unable to conceive. In some cases the condition of infertility is curable, but only after a long period of traumatic and frequently painful tests. In other cases it is not.

In a society which sees motherhood as a

faceted with no change at all. It was a big anti-climax really.

'One thing that really upset me was that our doctor refused to send us for tests until we had been trying for a baby for two years. I was already 29 and didn't want to wait for much longer. If I couldn't have children I wanted to know now so that I could start to cope with the situation.

'In the end I was referred to a special infertility clinic by another doctor. We had to wait three months for an appointment, but at least we were both tested. I've since

Some of them, like tubal insufflation, which involves blowing carbon dioxide through the Fallopian Tubes to see if they are blocked, are really painful.

'The worst thing about the tests is the way they affect your sex life, and how easy it is to start blaming each other, not just for the failure to have a baby but for the degeneration of your relationship. The clinic advised us to have sex on certain days which takes any spontaneity out of a relationship, and you can always bet that the day that you are meant to have sex is just the day that you don't feel like it.

'I knew that many of the conditions which cause infertility are incurable, so I was really hoping that the clinic would find something wrong. So that they could either cure me or tell me that I would never be able to have children. We found ourselves amongst the 10 per cent of couples for whom no cause of infertility can be found. We were advised to keep on trying as some people do fall pregnant. I've just resigned myself to it now. I don't think I could go to an adoption agency though. If I was rejected it would be like trying to have a baby—hoping and then being disappointed.'

On the whole it is an agonising experience to find out that you can't have children, especially if you want them. But more agonising must be the tests that women have to endure for 'cures'. NHS facilities for treatment and diagnosis are inadequate, and waiting lists are up to a year long. Although there are new discoveries being made to cure infertility, most people don't know about them. The situation in towns and cities with-

'In a society which sees motherhood as a 'natural' role for women, being unable to have children can produce great feelings of inadequacy.'

'natural' role for women, being unable to have children can produce great feelings of inadequacy. In a socialist society, where children would be seen as belonging to a community rather than to the individual, the pain of being unable to have our own children wouldn't be so great. Those who wanted to could still participate in the caring for children. But today being infertile means that, generally speaking, people don't often get the chance to be involved in bringing up children.

I spoke to Doreen, who is infertile, about her own experiences.

'I was 24 when I got married, I had been on the pill since I was 18. It's ironic that for years I had been pumping an unpleasant, and probably harmful, drug into my body when it was actually unnecessary. I've always been terrified of becoming pregnant—for all the usual reasons. I couldn't afford to give up work and, most importantly, I wanted to keep my freedom.

'After being married for over five years we decided to have a baby. I expected to fall pregnant within a few months. But after a year nothing had happened. This was one of the worst times. I had been ready for a big change in my life—I was going to take time off my work, I knew I would have to cut down on my social life and we were planning to move into a bigger flat. But instead I was

heard that some places only test the woman which is ridiculous because the tests for the men are simpler and less painful, and besides it could be the man or the woman. We both had a general medical examination and then my husband's sperm count was tested and found to be normal. I was then subjected to a barrage of tests—which took nearly a year.

out teaching hospitals is even worse, as there are no specialist clinics. Even the units that do exist are being axed by the cuts.

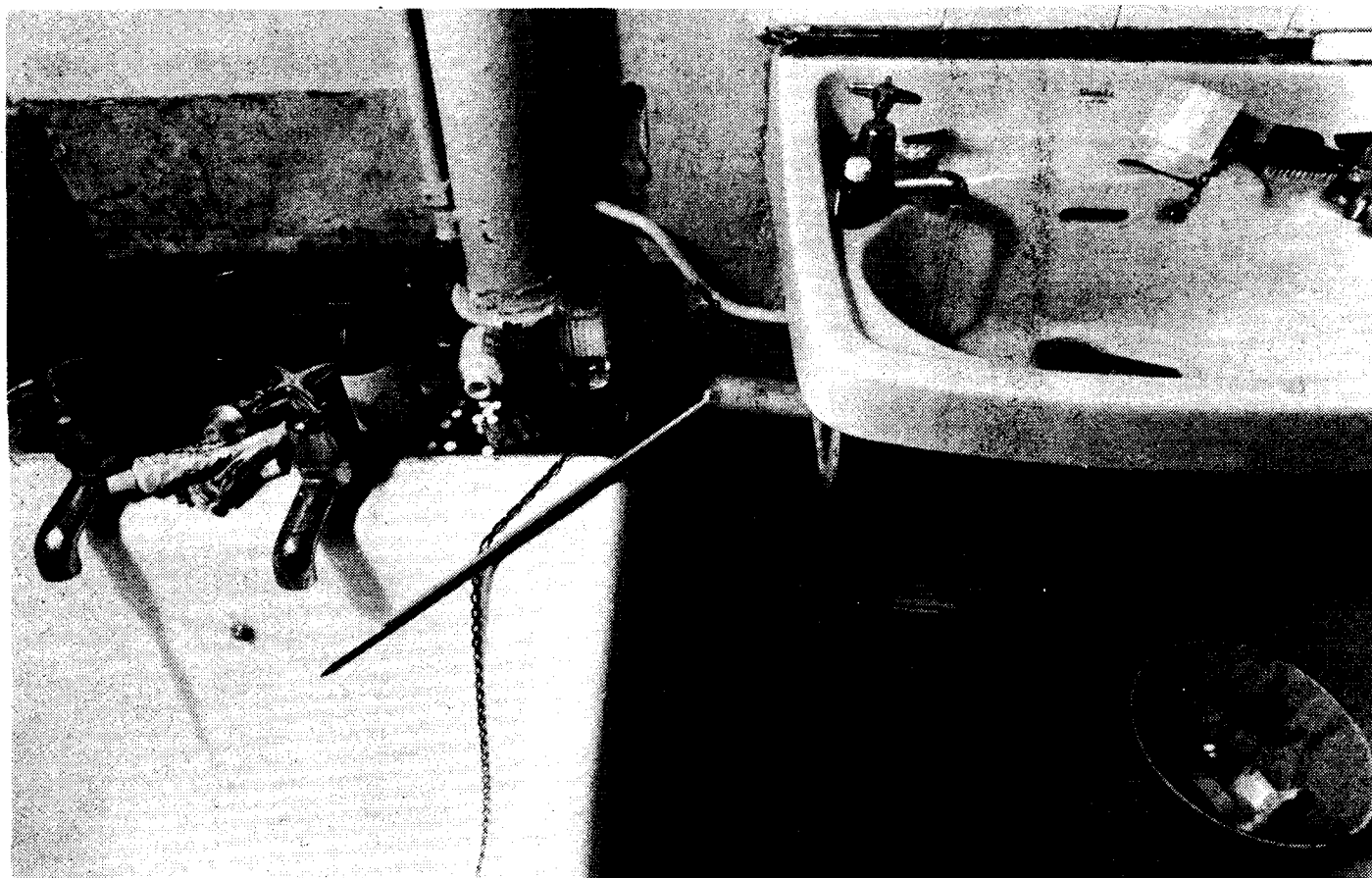
Infertility, like all other aspects of our health, is something of which we know little or nothing. This will only change when we win the right to control our own bodies.

Ann Rogers



Have you ever heard the expression 'Kids, they're alright—as long as they're someone else's'. What about when you want kids and you can't?

REVIEWS



IN THE BACK STREETS—BEFORE THE ABORTION ACT.

FOR MOST of us abortion as an issue goes back as far as 1967, except for those women who had to seek illegal and often horrific abortions before then. Very little documentary evidence is available or so of this century. We all have images in our minds: the gin and hot bath approach; the rich women, fur clad, in Harley Street; the unhygienic knitting needle of some quack out for a fast buck.

What is obvious from the underplayed statistics is that women have always sought to avert unwanted pregnancies, by almost any means, and that this burden fell hardest on working class women. Women like Lilly Langtry, mistress to Edward VII, had the resources to make their abortions as safe as possible.

But who were these back

street abortionists to which women were forced to go? Were they all unscrupulous butchers? There is some evidence that some were really trying to help women, such as Dr. Daniel Powell from Tooting, whose grateful clients raised £1,700 for his defence in 1938 when he was arrested for performing illegal abortions. Women from all over the country later attended his funeral. Illegal abortionists like Powell were often tolerated and police and doctors were reluctant to give evidence against them, perhaps in recognition of the desperate need among women for their services.

Many women however never went near abortionists and were forced to use potions and instruments on themselves often with disastrous consequences. Abortifacient drugs have been available since the beginning of the century despite frequent attempts to make them illegal. These drugs were very expensive, as

much as £9 per bottle, sold by barbers, hairdressers and rubber goods shops. Working class women had to make do with 'silver-coated quinine' pills at 7s-6d or poison ergot at 12s-6d. In the 30s this represented a real sacrifice for families living on £2 a week. Worse than these drugs were the lead based abortifacients which caused lead poisoning among women.

Vaginal douches were sometimes preferred to drugs. Carbolic soap, vinegar, iodine and lysol were amongst the liquids used. Foreign bodies were also pushed into the womb and midwives have experience of elm bark, crochet hooks and even a hairpin attached to an electric battery being used by women desperate to abort unwanted babies. Most of these methods were totally useless in bringing about the desired effects and extremely dangerous for the mother and foetus.

What these experiences

do tell us is that women have always been determined to control their own fertility, especially in times of high unemployment and hardship. Abortion is a fact of life, especially while no foolproof and medically safe method of contraception exists. Male MPs try to claim, as soon as restrictive legislation rears its ugly head, that the numbers of abortions performed has risen massively since 1967. This is blatantly untrue, from the statistics that exist. What is true is that abortion is now much safer, much easier and legal and the horrific experiences of women, our mothers, our grandmothers before 1967 should keep us fighting for the right to free abortion on demand.

Allison Kirton

Source:- 'Abortion in Britain before the Abortion Act' Birth Control Trust 27-37 Mortimer Street London W1N 7JR Price 15p

FROM HAND TO MOUTH WOMEN AND PIECEWORK

Marianne Herzog,
Pelican, £2.95.

THIS is a first hand account of women's unskilled factory work in West Germany. Marianne Herzog describes work she did in Berlin, Munich and other cities—spot-welding tubes for TV and radio, assembling vacuum cleaners, packing olives and spare parts for lorries. There are precious few books describing what factory work is really like, and this brings to life the horrible reality of wage slavery behind the smooth household names of Electrolux and Gillette, Siemens, and AEG-Telefunken. For anyone who has to confront people who believe 'technology' has abolished all that, this book is live ammunition.

Piecework...piecework; this is the exhausted refrain throughout the book. But as well as the tyrant of the clock and supervisor, the minute details of the work process which is sickeningly repea-



ted, until nerves and muscles ache, really give you a feel for what it must be like.

These are the very good points about the book. And yet, I found it irritating. I found the style, which is like a very simple and somewhat disjointed diary, overdone, so that it no longer seemed 'simple', so much as a 'clever' literary technique to reflect the disjointed mental state of someone doing piecework. I think it's a pity the writer

didn't manage to retain the character of her book, while at the same time offering some analysis of its subject. The vivid descriptions seem to cry out for some political, economic and trade union background to West Germany.

There is no reference to struggle—whether organised or not—and no analysis of its absence. There are a few descriptions of the importance of personal ties between women on the factory floor—and these are good. But this is never developed. There is nothing about the types of informal strategies workers use to resist their exploitation. And if even these fail here, this defeat is taken for granted and never questioned.

I think that the basic weakness of the book is that it is as much about Marianne Herzog as about other women and piece-work. I am not against personal, subjective accounts; but I am against self indulgent, irrelevant private episodes—where they are at the expense of a broader, more political perspective in a book which is about the collective experience of

women workers. Such books have a responsibility to those struggling to change things. Yet it's a lively book and well worth reading.

Anna Pollert

JOAN ARMATRADING WALK UNDER LADDERS (A&M)

Joan Armatrading's debut single, 'Love and Affection', was different. Gentle, meandering, but unlike most MOR love songs, it was full of soul and the emotions seemed *real*. Joan was different too, strolling onstage in old jeans and a baggy shirt when you'd expect a sequinned dress, but without falling into the aggressive she-male stance that girls like Suzi Quatro were selling at the time.

She stunned me by being the first woman singer I ever saw who came on stage and was, quite simply, herself. And because she sold an awful lot of records A&M very kindly let her carry on doing that.

So what happened? If you sell a lot of records, there's a big pressure to keep on doing that, and if you sell to a fairly conservative audience as she does, it's hard to take risks. So slowly, she has moved from *creating* to copying, using diluted bits of rock and reggae instead of inventing her own forms as she used to. It's not that this is a *bad* album, it's just that it could be so much better.

That voice is still full and strong, the songs are tasteful and well-performed... too well, in fact. To put it bluntly, it is boring. There's nothing that moves me like the first two albums did, and they're the records I'd recommend you spend you money on. If you really want to hear 'Ladders' I'm sure they'll play it to death on Radio 2 for years, it's the sort of safe stuff they love.

When their music becomes the property of a big company, women especially have to be careful of the way they are marketed and presented to the world. Joan Armatrading seems to have saved her independence but her music has suffered, and I suppose that's how it will be as long as music is made for profit and judged on the number of units it can sell. Heads they win, tails you lose.

Diana Windsor

THE GREAT ESCAPE OF DOREEN POTTS JO NESBITT SHEBA FEMINIST PUBLISHERS

Whilst doing the weekly wash, our heroine Doreen Potts is abducted from the laundrette by two royal henchwomen. She is taken to the royal palace of the land of

Ossify. There the bride-to-be Princess Brassica has a tummy upset and refuses to get out of her silk bed. Her wedding to Prince Egfrith (is it an anagram?) can't be postponed—the towels have already been printed! So look-alike Doreen has been chosen to act as a stand in.

Meanwhile Grandma and brother Willie have entered the palace and are planning a rescue attempt. Doreen, however, has other plans and decides to take part in the

deception. She has discovered some crooked account books and decides to reveal all to the assembled press.

All this is amusingly illustrated, throughout the book, by Jo Nesbitt. Three months ago, when anti-wedding feeling was at its pitch, I would have bought the book. Now I think it's too late to expect anyone to pay £2.50 on an out of date joke. But perhaps some of you may need a bit of light hearted escapism.

Liz Gibson



LETTERS



National Union of Women what?

Dear Womens Voice,
I agree with the general point made by Norah Carlin in her article on feminist history in the last issue—but I do think we need to be careful with the facts we use to make our case. Unfortunately the National Union of Women Workers was *not* a union, nor did it involve many women workers.

Despite its name, it was nothing to do with the Womens Trade Union League: instead it held yearly conferences for 'women workers in the voluntary services', which considered what sort of legislation should be lobbied for to help the working classes. They were addressed by women like Mrs George Cadbury and Mrs

Sidney Webb—Fabians, and most certainly *not* feminists.

It's easy to assume that all politically active and articulate women involved in womens organisations are feminists—but it's sloppy. Just think of Margaret Thatcher or Women's Institutes. So we can't blame some sinister conspiracy of feminist historians for not mentioning the National Union of Women Workers. It was a rump body which never did anything, with no real relationship to the womens movement or the labour movement of its day—a good enough reason for any socialist or feminist historian to ignore it.

Lin James,
East London

BEING LIBERAL CAN KILL YOU...

Dear Womens Voice
I have always been disgusted at the inhumanity of the majority of whites living in South Africa, but now the measure of inhumanity has really come to light, not only in the recent incidents in Angola, but also in the form of the AWB. This neo-Nazi sect which claims to have over 10,000 paid up members is led by a man Hitler would have been proud of.

They are a 'South African resistance movement', whose latest victim was tarred and feathered, and only just escaped with his life when a

steel bolt was shot at him from a cross-bow. His crime-being a liberalist.

Hundreds of white South Africans braved the cold weather, to attend the AWB's latest meeting, in a beer hall! Sounds familiar. They say they are scared of loosing their jobs and heritage to the blacks. Some hope of that! Their leader is a hypnotic orator, who talks of protecting the motherland and of the pure white race—sounds familiar again!

Louise Gore
Cheltenham



TROOPS OUT OF IRELAND

Dear Womens Voice
At the beginning of August I went on a Troops Out Delegation of about 200 people from Britain to Northern Ireland. I think that the presence of the British Troops in Northern Ireland makes life worse for everybody; the soldiers get very bored and aggressive and are often sent to raid Catholic homes, shoot plastic bullets and kill little Catholic kids. Some soldiers crack-up having to do this, as they don't want to break up working class homes.

The day we arrived in Belfast a hunger striker called Thomas McElwee died and we went on a silent demonstration to protest against his death. The hunger strikers should be granted political status and allowed to wear their own clothes, read their own books and mix freely with other prisoners. They are in prison because their so-called 'crimes' are committed in order to free Northern Ireland from British rule and make it part of a United Ireland.

After the demonstration we listened to some speeches. A woman who had been freed

from Armagh jail the day before talked about the terrible conditions and harassment the women in the jail had to put up with: male screws locking them in rooms for hours and beating them. She looked very ill and tired, but made it clear she would carry on fighting alongside the men to make Ireland a free country for Catholics, even if it killed her! All the women we met were as determined, if not more so, to fight! Many had husbands, sons, daughters who had been killed or imprisoned for life, but they didn't complain, or even feel sorry for themselves. One woman had had her house raided over 300 times in the last five years.

The next day we went on another demonstration to protest against 'internment'—a special law which applies to Ireland which means if you are suspected of committing a crime you can be jailed and don't have to be charged or appear before a court for several months.

We then went to Derry, where I stayed in a family's house. It was a very useful experience to visit men and

women in their homes and helped me understand why the war is dragging on after 10 years. I don't think it will stop until people here make the British Government recognise the right of Irish people to control their lives, stop wasting money and take the Troops Out.

Wendy Pettifer
East London.

ATTACK THE REAL ENEMY

Dear Womens Voice,
I'd like to say how much I agree and disagree with Zoe Pitt's letter (September). It always amazes me how internal wrangling among left wing bodies produces much bitter comments than those aimed at the real enemies, the Tories.

'The main culprits' as you put it, are not women with children who fail to sign on, but the Tory government who create the unemployment figures. I totally agree that women at home caring for children would swell those figures drastically. However, it isn't women caring for children at home who close nurseries and put childworkers out of a job. It's the Tory cuts, and if you're unemployed yourself of course you can't afford to pay for childcare.

If I was lucky enough to find a job which gave me a decent wage after paying for childcare, what choice would be open to me? A nursery (if I find one that will accept a one year old) which starts training three year olds for their places in capitalist society. The boys amuse themselves with war toys whilst the girls play with toy ironing boards.

Please, the fight is against all of these things. Don't turn on your own ranks. Put the blame where it lies—on the capitalist state in general and specifically the Tory government.

Olly Evans
Glasgow

DIRTY LINEN



Thatcher recently played the 'proud housewife' role to a dazzled *Woman's Own* reporter: "She points out the handsome carpet runner we are standing on: 'I got this from one of the embassies. Without it there was rather too much bare space between the door and the main carpet. I think it works rather well, don't you?'"

The reporter also notices that, unlike real housewives, Thatcher has a tendency to refer to 'my coal mines'.

Someone else who thinks that mines and everyone connected with them are his personal toys, is the Australian mining magnate and multi-millionaire, Lang Hancock.

Mining is very big business in Australia. But it occasionally gets hampered by the aborigines. Many of the richest mining areas are on land given to the aborigines in the hot, arid north and west Australia.

The land, especially the 'sacred sites', are so central to aboriginal culture that they're not prepared to sell off their remaining land rights to the mining companies.

So Hancock has come up with the traditional solution: genocide.

He suggested in a recent TV interview that all social security cheques to aborigines should be made payable in North West Australia and 'When they got there I would dope the water so that they would become sterile and would breed themselves out'.

Thatcher didn't have many kind words for the women's movement when she talked to *Woman's Own*. 'Look,' she said, 'So many of them are strident and wanting things not on merit but wanting some sort of preference. Life isn't like that.'

Anyway, she explains 'It is really creative work, running a home, bringing up children ... It would be terrible if these women were made to feel guilty, but some of them are made almost to feel guilty if they don't have a career as well as a home.'

But while Thatcher rhapsodises about being a housewife, the reality for more and more women is bringing up children alone and therefore in poverty. A recent report estimates that one million children are living in poverty because their parents are divorced.

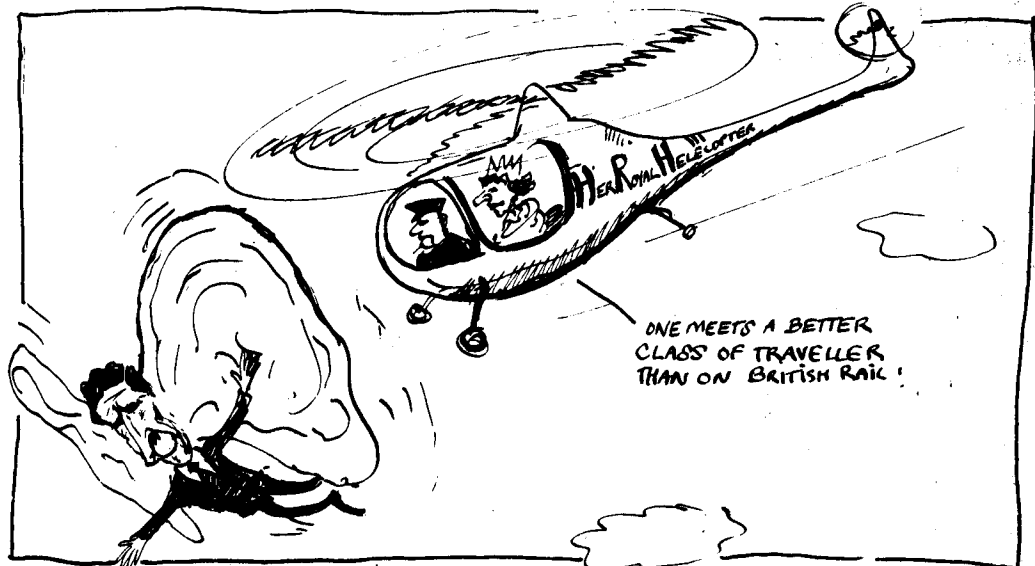
At their conference last month, the Tories showed that they are keen to involve women in their party. They are particularly keen to recruit women on to the local teams which will put out their party newspaper: 'What better reason for inviting someone on to your team than the fact that she is a super secretary with a wordsprocessor, a sympathetic boss and free lunchtimes in which to do your typesetting?'

The Marquis of Tavistock, who owns Woburn Abbey, has decided to save a bit of money by closing down for two months over Christmas and laying off all his staff.

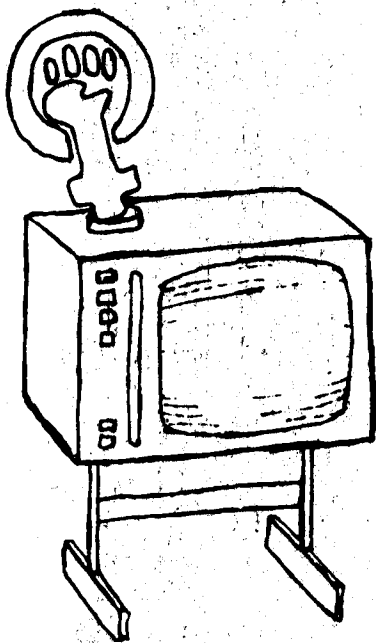
He says they can take holidays in the sun. And live on cake, presumably.

The *Daily Mirror* is sneaking in more and more *Sun*-style page 3 pics. Almost any excuse will do: like the actress whose flat was burgled, and was therefore pictured, naked, under the caption 'stripped'.

And for the woman who knows things do come 'on some sort of preference'... Princess Margaret likes to take the royal helicopter when she goes for a country weekend. This costs £300 in fuel alone. Nonetheless, for reasons her private secretary couldn't quite recollect, she prefers it to the train.



SANDRA



Revolting Women — and not very funny either!

When I saw the TV column in the newspaper my eye went straight to the Friday night programme **Revolting Women** — a non-sexist comedy programme involving only one man. I had already seen a one off version and had got the impression that the solitary man played more of a prop than a part.

The previous one off show was absolutely hilarious and dealt with everyday situations

in life—from the kerb crawling kisser to the over sexed bloke in the bus queue. It made you laugh, but it also made the point, and showed the best way of dealing with it.

This one for me, though, had something lacking—basically it was humour. The overall theme was hospital. I couldn't decide whether this time they'd just done the sketches with women playing the roles—or whether

they were being very subtle and trying to put over that cuts affect women mostly.

I don't think that I managed a smirk, let alone a smile, the main reason being that a lot of the sketches were long winded and drawn out, whereas before they were short, snappy and punching the point home. One sketch about romantic fiction was just a role reversal, with the men reading love stories (I

think the point was instead of Playboy!) His wife finds out—leaves him—totally boring!!

A lot of the jokes (!!?) were too obscure and so probably half the people watching it thought that the only difference between **Revolting Women** and the **Benny Hill Show** was that it was *all women* taking the piss, instead of the usual comedy team. Perhaps this was just a bad apple amongst the pile. I hope so, because situation comedy can be very funny if done right.

It came over like a Labour Party Broadcast—you know what they're saying could be true but it's whether you believe them or not. Mind you it doesn't exactly get huge exposure being plonked on BBC2 at 9.55 on a Friday night, just when the news is coming on ITV. The majority of women probably missed it because of this—perhaps that would make a good sketch—it would certainly be funnier than Friday night's stab at 'women comedians'.

Chris Fellowes

PS Did you hear the one about the three men going to the sperm bank? Two of them came on the bus and the other one missed the tube!

why I became a socialist

Ann Maria Torres is a refugee from Chile. She was involved in the mass movement of workers which was smashed in 1973 by the army. She told *Womens Voice* how her life in Chile turned her towards socialist politics.

There are some events which stick out as landmarks in my life. The first is when I was 12 years old and my father sold all my toys. He had worked in a factory repairing tractors and was made redundant. Without social security we needed all the money we could get. This shocked me because there were things that even my father could not protect me from. He was a trade unionist, a socialist and a Roman Catholic. He had always paid for me to be educated privately. I was the only child in my 'barrio' who was, and when he was made unemployed I used to help people with reading, writing and sums in exchange for meat or eggs.

When I left school I went to join a catholic convent in the south of Chile. I did health and social work for the Indians. They were very poor, but we were not, we had plenty of food and shelter. One day I went with a senior nun to one of our benefactors. He was the director of one of the Unilever multinational companies. He gave us money for which the convent was very grateful. I felt it wrong for us to have this attitude when Unilever made the money from exploiting workers.

I left the convent and went back to Santiago to go to university. In the university I got involved in politics, firstly in the Catholic organisation and then with the socialists. It was the period of mass mobilisation in Chile. In the industrial areas workers were on strike, in the countryside we peasants were demanding the land, squatters were demanding their rights, students the reform of education, even the lawyers went on strike.

The ruling class were undecided on the way to dominate us, they could not choose a candidate and in 1970 this meant the Popular Unity left labour and communist government was elected. By now I was working as a social worker and was a member of the MIR which supported workers demands for self-organisation. Although Popular Unity were in power they did not support the demands of workers or peasants. They had formed alliances with the Christian Democrats and the Liberals who did not

understand the mass mobilisation that had taken place. Even the trade unions were controlled by Popular Unity, which is why workers created their own organisations, because the government was not meeting their demands.

In 1973 there was a coup d'etat and all political groups were outlawed. I never thought the working class struggle would be like this. I had known in theory that the bourgeoisie would never give up power, but in Chile we could see this in practice. The mass movement collapsed as its leaders were arrested, imprisoned or killed. Many of my friends had disappeared. Some left wingers fled to other countries, while others decide to stay to revive the mass movement and oppose the dictatorship of Pinochet.

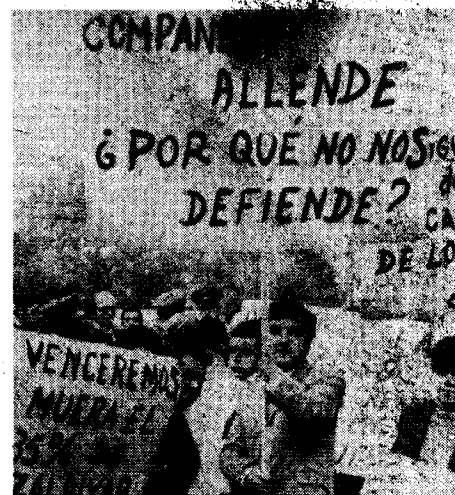
I spent the Christmas of 1973 in prison. I was pregnant and my husband had disappeared. After my release I stayed in Santiago for two years doing political work until I was wanted by the police. I fled to the south of Chile without money, clothes or a place to stay. The first few months were very hard. I earned money selling lottery tickets on the street. If I sold one I would eat and if I didn't, I wouldn't. Never has the relationship between work and survival been so clear to me. I then got a job teaching peasants and did what political work I could. It was a year before I was again at risk of being picked up by the police.

Quickly and quietly I went back to Santiago, picked up my child and went to the Swedish embassy. They transported me to a refugee camp near Stockholm where I met many other Chileans who had left during the coup. Our demoralisation was high. There was a lot of factional fighting about what had happened, but we never said 'we are here now and what are we going to do?' But in Stockholm there were also strikes, workers were voicing their discontent as they had in Chile and I started to see that workers in the developed world have the same relation with bosses as we did in Chile.

There was the amnesty of all Chilean



Santiago Stadium Sept 1974



'Comrade Allende. Why don't you defend us?'

The Chilean workers are the people who will change Chile, not the refugees across the ocean.

political prisoners in 1977 and my husband was released from prison. He had a scholarship to study in England and came to Sweden to ask me to join him.

Since I have been in England I have always been ready to return to Chile. I have never owned much—just a couple of suitcases. I would leave tomorrow if it would achieve anything but until then I have to live here. I have to find work, a place to live and education for my children. I cannot develop my politics only in solidarity with Chile. The Chilean workers are the people who will change Chile, not the refugees across the ocean. We can only respond to their struggle. Just as I cannot ignore my past, I cannot ignore the reality of my life here. I can only find out more about the struggle for socialism here and play my role in that.

Womens Voice is an organisation that fights for women's liberation and socialism. We fight for: Equal pay, Free abortion and contraception, Maternity leave and child care provision. The right to work. Against all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex, sexual orientation, or race. Women's liberation is only possible through women organising and fighting for themselves. Women's liberation can only be achieved by linking its struggles to those of the working class and overthrowing the capitalist system. *Womens Voice* supports the aims of the Socialist Workers Party. It is organisationally independent but based on the politics of the SWP.

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- BRADFORD WV Trish Bradford 585 913 for details of meetings and activities
- BRIGHTON WV phone 696897
- BRISTOL WV Katrina 46875
- Cambridge WV contact Trisha Cambridge 68226
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- COVENTRY WV 361 585
- COLCHESTER WV 22 5650 for details
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SPEAKING AT A MEETING



First, you have to learn to say 'yes'. If you always refuse to speak at meetings you'll just never learn. It may sound self evident, but the truth is there are few born speakers. It's practice that counts.

Speaking is not the same as asking questions or getting to your feet and making points of order. So if you find that nerve-racking don't assume you'd never have the courage to *actually* speak, you're wrong. When you're the speaker you have all the time in advance to plan what you're going to say.

Pick your meetings if you're not experienced and feel intimidated. Don't start off tackling a meeting in the local town hall—get in some practice at some small meetings, on a subject you know something about.

WHAT TO TALK ABOUT

Choose a specific subject, perhaps a historical one, or a topic based on your own experience, at work, in a campaign. Then you will have lots of facts which are new to your audience, some personal experience to make the talk lively and interesting, and all of that will cover up for a less than sparkling delivery.

Draw one or two general conclusions from what you're saying and you'll soon learn the art of talking about more general issues—the hardest issues of all because the temptation is to talk in such generalities that it becomes a lot of waffle. And that's boring.

KNOW YOUR SUBJECT

Think about what you're going to say. Mull it over in your mind. Ask yourself what you would like to know from a speaker on such a subject; what new points can you make; what questions are you likely to be asked. If you are presenting an argument, argue it through with yourself (on the bus going to work, in the bath) until you're satisfied you've worked it out. Stating the obvious and stringing it together with a bunch of clichés will not do.

If the subject needs research and reading, do it well in advance. If you go on uncovering new facts and reading

books up to the day of your talk you won't have time to sort out what it is you're going to say, what is relevant and what is not. A stream of unconnected facts, like a stream of generalities, is not a good talk.

PLANNING YOUR TALK

You need a beginning, a middle, and an end—it's a tried and tested formula and it works. The first and last should be short. If you know you're going to be nervous when you start, write down the exact words you want to use. The speaker who begins with an apology—not enough time to prepare the subject, nervousness, ill health, sorry to be late—loses the audience immediately.

Likewise at the end. If you have just one more point, and then just one more point, and finally another point...far better to write down your ending, a good quote or an answer to a question you may have posed in your opening, and again, remember, no apologies.

This will prevent you making two serious mistakes—starting badly and finishing badly. The third mistake is to have a bad middle. Work out a logic to the talk—perhaps a historical sequence, or a straight run through the three central points you want to make, with each of these illustrated and argued.

A couple of days before the meeting set aside an evening to prepare your talk. Write down the facts you want to use, the quotes and so on. Be honest with yourself—is it good enough? Where are the gaps, do you need more facts: fewer facts: or the same facts in a different order? Is it too long—it can hardly be too short (15 clear and succinct minutes are far better than an hour going round the houses)?

If you have never spoken in public

before, run through it, out loud. If you become vague in the middle chop it down. If you run out of steam, go back to the drawing board.

There aren't many speakers who can manage without a single note, but too detailed a script will be no use at all. As you get more experienced you will find it possible to speak with very short notes, *nothing more than a list of key* but too which are signals to the order of points you want to make.

If it's your first go, write it down in full—not every dot and comma, but enough to make it fluid, so that you know how to run from one point to another. Then go through with a marker and underline a series of key phrases. Now rewrite the whittled down version, reducing it again to a series of numbered points, in large handwriting, each with a heading and all its subsidiary points. It should be in enough detail so that you can talk and simply cast down your eyes to pick up your next point. It's no use if all your eyes can see is a blur of handwriting.

Work on it until it's as near right as possible. Then put it away and sleep on it.

ER..UM...

These two monosyllables are fatal to all audiences. They have an ability to send them to sleep, especially when they are interlaced with *actually* and *basically*. Try and listen to yourself when you're speaking—that too comes with practice. The more you speak the less your delivery will be a problem—you'll be more relaxed and you'll be able to think out loud.

A FEW TIPS

It is much easier to talk standing up (although that does depend on the meeting—you look a bit silly if there are only four other people in the room). Your voice will carry better if you are standing up and you won't be tempted to look down at your lap or the table in front of you. You should look at the people you're talking to.

If you're an arm waver put your hands in your pockets, or clasp them together or hold on to the edge of the table. You'll still wave them, but not so much.

Don't drink before you speak—if you're nervous it will go straight to your head and your legs (or your bladder).

If you lose your place when you're speaking don't substitute your vague thoughts, take a deep breath and stop for a moment to find it again.

If you're asked a question you don't understand say so. And if you don't know the answer to a question—say so. You're not expected to be an oracle. Ask if anyone else can help. That's much easier than giving the wrong answer!

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