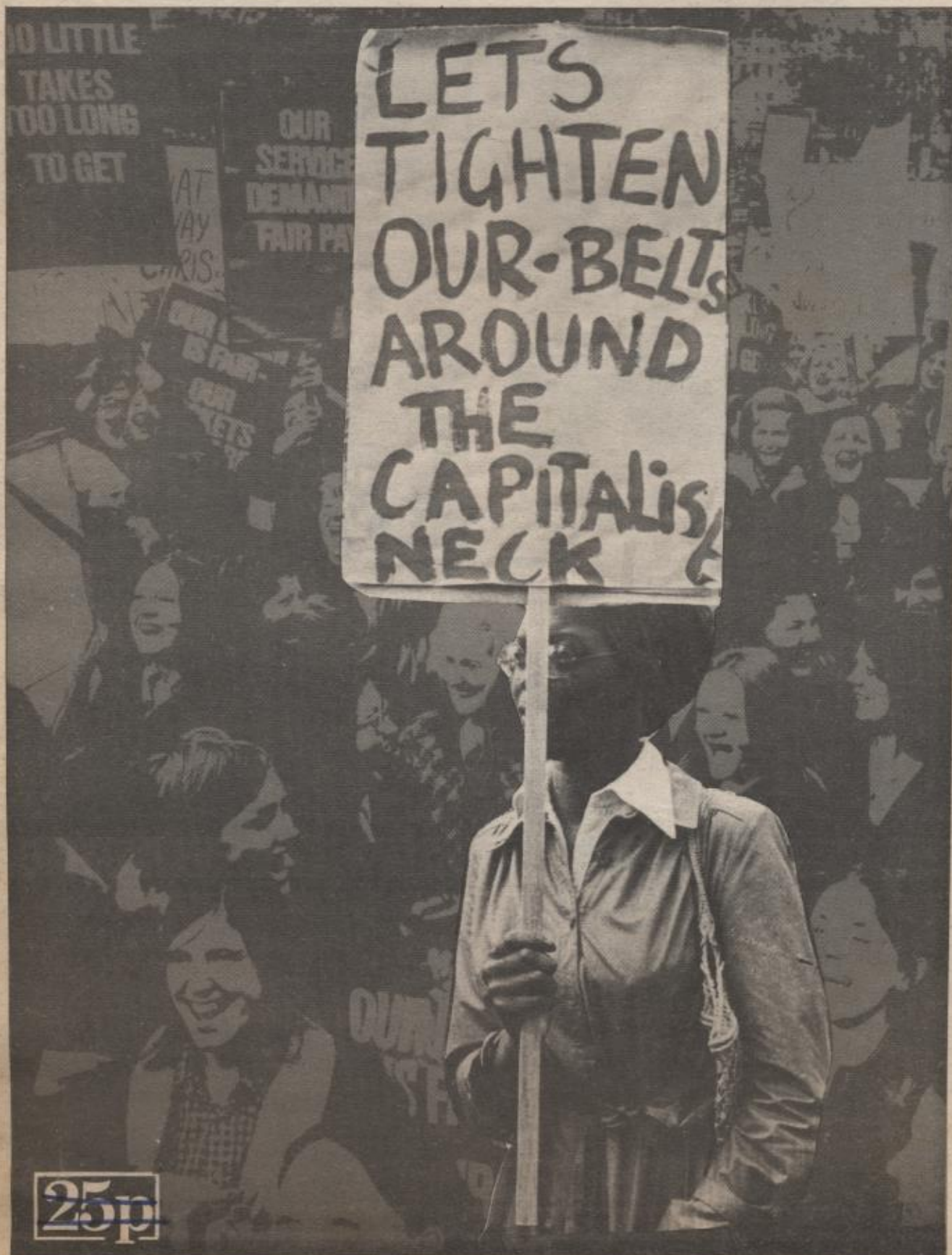


Socialist Woman

A JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP

VOL. 6 No1



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Socialist Woman

A JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP AUTUMN 1974

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EDITORIAL



Now that we are into 1977, it is a fitting time to make an assessment of all the promises given by the Labour Government in International Women's Year. The Working Women's Charter Campaign's proposals for a National Rally to draw up such a balance sheet is a welcome move. However, it is absolutely clear to increasing numbers of women that this balance sheet cannot be but an extremely negative one. The articles in this issue of **Socialist Woman** bear testimony to this fact. The shining example of the equal pay strikers at Trico and the current struggle being fought in the North West of England around nursery facilities underlines the message which is being brought home to growing numbers of women and men: the Equal Pay Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, and the Employment Protection Act — while representing a step in the right direction — are a mere pittance in contrast to the needs of women in a period of deepening economic and social crisis. As these struggles also show, the needs of women will only be met through their self organisation rather than relying on 'pie in the sky' promises from the Labour Government.

Perhaps the clearest statement of where the Labour Government really stands is its attitude to the new threat to women's abortion rights. It has been the Government's flouting of the democratic decisions of the bodies of the labour movement calling for free abortion on request that has played an important role in paving the way for the introduction of this Bill. William Benyon's Abortion (Amendment) Bill was introduced to the House of Commons for its first reading on 22 December 1976. Despite a virtual press black-out of what this Bill will involve, **The Times** did "leak" the eight clauses which are expected to be contained. This Tory ex-whip from Buckingham has introduced a Bill most consistent with his role as chief speaker on many of the platforms organised by SPUC in its recent mobilisations.

According to **The Times** article, the following restrictions are on the way:

- * lowering the time limits on legal abortion by a full two months! In the current situation of cutbacks in NHS spending, plus the atmosphere created by the anti-abortionists which intimidate doctors so that they impose an even lower cut-off date to safeguard themselves, this means that backstreet abortions are once again on the agenda in even larger numbers than we have today.

- * increased police access to the medical files of women having abortions, so that simply the agreement of a magistrate enables police to scrutinise records of abortion clinics.

- * continuing the attack on the private sector, particularly the charities, where 50% of women obtaining abortions are forced to go as a result of the run-down of the NHS. This is being done by calling for a complete financial separation between the counselling services and the abortion clinics, thus sounding the death knell for many of the charities.

- * restricting the two doctors who can approve abortions by making it necessary for one of them to have practised for 5 years. In addition, the Bill will permit signatures of doctors only if there are no links between

them.

Any fight against this latest threat to the struggle for women's rights has to be placed firmly in the context of the fight against the Social Contract. The entire basis of the Social Contract was to get agreement between the labour leaders and the Government for a truce on the wages front. The trade union bureaucracy has capitulated yet again, selling out the interests of its members. But they have done so without even a struggle to demand their side of the despicable bargain. That is, the wage truce was to be in return for social benefits to the less well-off in society, of whom women were deemed to be a significant portion! The Social Contract therefore pitted women's interests against those of the organised labour movement. But even within its framework, it is becoming clearer that social benefits will not be forthcoming without a challenge to the Social Contract itself.

1977 will be a year of testing the growing commitment for the ideas of the women's movement. There is no indication that attacks on women's rights will be alleviated in the coming year. On the other hand, the victories won in local struggles over the past year have provided a firm basis for the emergence of a strong movement committed to freeing women from the chains which bind them to the home and the family.

The situation in other European countries is similar to that in Britain. Abortion has continued to be a focus for both a concerted attack against women's rights, as well as for the emergence of mass women's movements. In Italy, the organisations of the left have undergone a test of their commitment to women's liberation. As the article in **Socialist Woman** demonstrates, the Communist Party in particular has not stood the test. It has branded the Bill before the Italian Parliament — which calls for abortion on demand — a "social fascist measure".

In Spain, as in Italy and Ireland, the dominance of the reactionary Catholic Church continues to impose itself. The focus of many actions taken by Spanish women during the past few months has been adultery. The Statutes remaining on Spanish law books reflects the continuation of Francoism in Spain — with all of its implications for women's so-called "crimes" including abortion — despite the death of Franco. Nevertheless, the women's movement, which has virtually exploded on the Spanish scene over the last year, is an important one for socialists to monitor, particularly because the Iberian peninsula continues to be the centre of the highest form of the working class struggle at the present time.

With these developments before us, it is essential that socialists in the women's movement have utmost political clarity on many of the fundamental questions. To this end, we are continuing the debate on Domestic Labour for another few issues. In addition, we will be opening a debate on "The Origins of Women's Oppression". This will be timed in conjunction with the speaking tour by Evelyn Reed, authoress of **Women's Evolution** and a long time campaigner for women's liberation in America. Contributions welcome, subject to length considerations.



DOMESTIC LABOUR

In the continuing series on Domestic Labour, CELIA HOLT has submitted a reply to Anne Chesterton's contribution which appeared in the Spring 1976 issue of Socialist Woman. The columns of Socialist Woman continue to be open to further contributions on this important debate, subject to length considerations.

ANN CHESTERTON'S main argument in her article Domestic Labour [Socialist Woman, Spring 1976] is wrong. It is important to take this up because the real relation of domestic work to capitalist production has political consequences for us.

She argues that domestic work forms part of the value of labour-power, because it transforms wage goods before they can be consumed. This is a dangerous argument for three reasons. One is that it can be a basis for demanding wages for housework, although her article takes a position against this demand.

Secondly, the argument cannot prove that capitalism could not socialise domestic work, which would eliminate the material basis of our oppression. This destroys our case against an idea current on the left that women's liberation is an 'ideological issue', a question of changing 'attitudes', not a real part of the class struggle. Finally, the separation of public and family life — the political and 'personal' — cannot be properly

understood if housework is considered as part of value-production. These latter points will be developed in a later article.

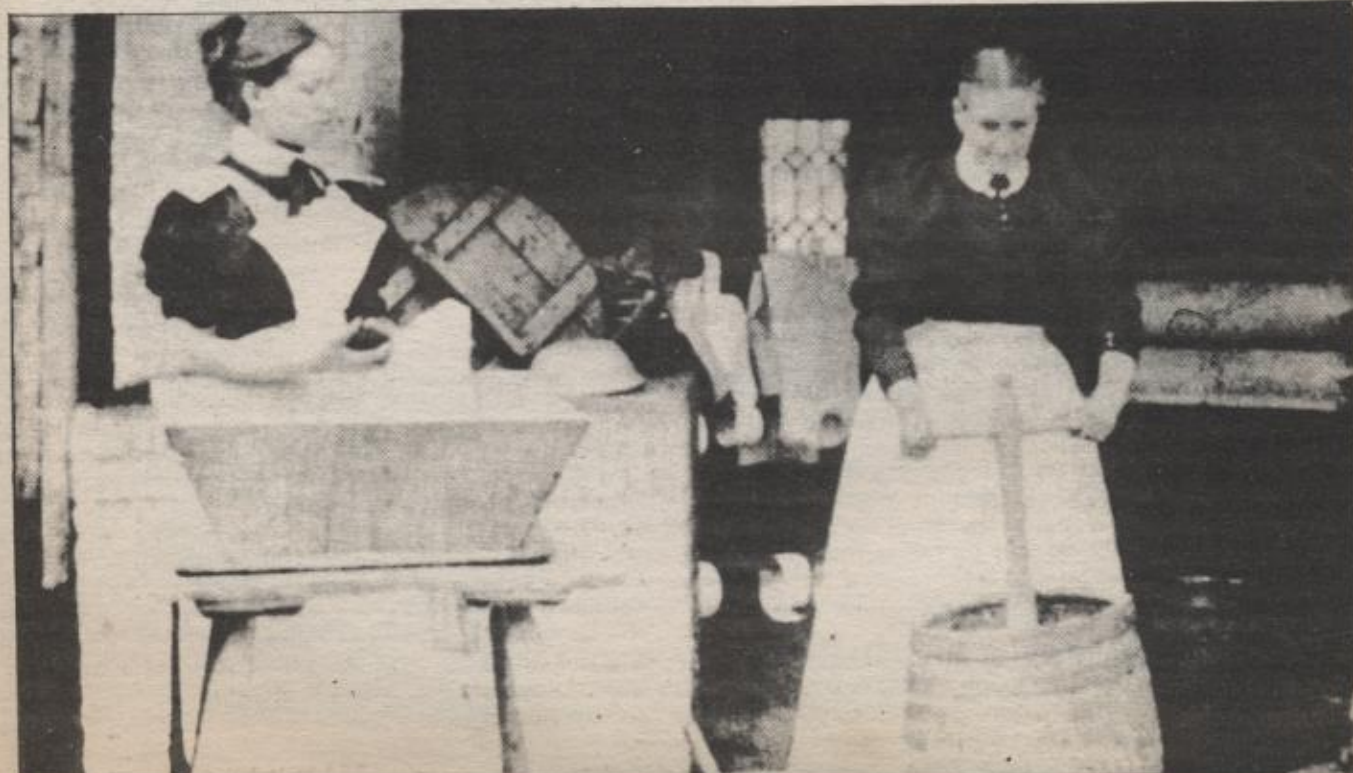
NO VALUE

Housework does not produce value; the domestic worker is neither productive or unproductive for capital, but performs a socially necessary function which goes on outside the sphere of social production. The critical point which is not understood by those who refute this argument is the separation of labour-power from the labourer under capitalism. The worker does not sell herself or himself as a labourer to a capitalist. What we sell is our capacity to labour, our labour-power. Labour-power is a commodity but the labourer

is not. We are not like slaves, who were owned in person, or like the serfs tied to a landlord and his land. Capital accumulation is based on the emergence of the wage-labourer as a 'free agent' who enters into an apparently equal contract with an employer.

LABOUR POWER

The development of labour-power as a commodity separate from the individual creates the category of abstract social labour — as opposed to specific, individual labour — which is the basis for capitalist exchange. (Money, the medium of universal exchange, is the expression of this abstract social labour). Productive labour — labour which makes profit for a capitalist — creates both something useful, and something of value which can be exchanged for money. Unproductive labour, such as most of nursing, teaching, or social work, is paid for out of state revenue, which is



a tax on profits, but is part of capitalist production; it has been socialised by the state.

REPRODUCE

What the housewife does is to reproduce the labourer. This is not the same thing as adding value to labour-power. Cooking, cleaning and child rearing reproduce and maintain the labourer as an individual, but have no bearing on the value of the commodity which this labourer sells. If it did, capitalism would have an interest in socialising, modernising and streamlining housework in order to depress the value of labour-power, as it has done in the production of wage-goods such as food, clothing, etc.

Ann Chesterton agrees that housework is not abstract, social labour, but then argues that it produces value. She also argues that domestic 'labour' produces value which is not realised in exchange. Neither of these things is possible. Marx explains in the first few pages of *Capital* that 'exchange value is the **only** form in which the value of commodities can manifest itself or be expressed... A use-value, or useful article... has value only because human labour in the abstract has been embodied or materialised in it.' (My emphasis).

VALUE PRODUCTION

Two things follow from the exclusion of domestic work from value-production. One is that since the 'freeing' of the wage labourer, and the existence of labour-power as a commodity producing value, is the basis of capitalist production, capitalism cannot overcome this exclusion. To do so would be to overturn the wage-capital relation, to abolish the wage-labourer and the wage system which depends on it. Since we do not sell ourselves as individuals, and are not a source of profit as such — only our capacity to labour is — capitalism has no interest in that part of the day in which we reproduce and maintain ourselves. It is of course in the indirect interests of the capitalist that we do, but we can be relied upon to do it anyway.

WORKFORCE MAINTAINED

It is true that in the interests of maintaining a minimally healthy and literate workforce, capitalism has taken over some social functions previously fulfilled in the family. But it has only done this, and to a very limited extent, when state intervention in the economy on a vast scale has become necessary for the continuation of private profitable production. It is also true that during the war, state nurseries, canteens and laundries existed on a large scale because of the wholesale introduction of women into the workforce. But war, although it is endemic to capitalism, is not a permanent feature of it.

On the contrary, the destruction of values during the war, and the political defeat of the workforce by tying it to its national bourgeoisie, are preconditions for capital getting on its feet



again, for the regeneration of profitable production. A striking feature of the post war boom has been the extent to which 'A woman's place is in the home' has **not** been challenged.

The proportion of state spending going on in nurseries, for example, has been minimal. This is why a large part of the female workforce works part time outside the home. The crisis takes away even those facilities which do exist, but capitalism even in a boom period cannot create full employment, and cannot make the maintenance of the labourer an absolutely social concern.

WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

This means that woman's oppression, based on her position as an unpaid, private domestic worker within the nuclear family is inherent in capitalist social relations. The 'issue' of woman's liberation from her 'private' sphere is a central part of the class struggle. Only socialism can socialise housework.

Ann Chesterton's only argument for capitalism's interest in maintaining the family — which she does not attempt to say is an absolute one — is that if domestic work became wage labour,

capital would have to pay more for labour-power. This is not true. The socialising and rationalising of any labour-process which determines the value of labour-power will **lower** that value, by shortening the time necessary for its production. Domestic work does not add value, and the capitalist has no interest in socialising it.

SOCIALISATION

Demands for the socialisation of housework strike at the core of capitalist production relations, because they assert that society must take responsibility for the reproduction of the labourer, must abolish 'private' life. It is true that the family has other ideological, political and psychological uses for the ruling class, but it is essential to recognise that these have a material basis.

Otherwise the working class movement can afford to ignore women's liberation, to break up the totality of our oppression into a purely trade union, economic level on the one hand, and a 'personal and private' sphere on the other.

CELIA HOLT

Labour's programme for

women

one

year on

Almost one year ago, Michael Foot and Barbara Castle were wining and dining in the resplendent surroundings of Whitehall. They were joined by such defenders of women's rights as Lord Longford. The Occasion: a celebration of the introduction of the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination legislation.

In a more modest and qualified style, the legislation was also welcomed by the Women's Movement and the labour movement as a gain — however limited — for women's rights. On the one hand, we recognised that it corresponded to economic needs for more skilled female labour, and the need to catch up with EEC legislation. On the other hand, we saw it as a response to a decade of struggles by women, including the strikes by the Leeds clothing workers and Ford machinists, backed by mounting pressure from the Women's Movement.


MORE DEFEATS THAN VICTORIES

The last year has allowed us to take stock. The real limitations of the legislation have become blatantly clear. In the first six months after the Acts came into force, 72% of equal pay cases and 73% of Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) cases were rejected by the tribunals. Cases brought under the SDA have not fared much better.

Evidence is mounting from sources as varied as *Woman's Own* and the Labour Research Department that employers are driving unimpeded through the gaping loopholes in the legislation. A recent study by the GMWU of its tribunal claims concludes: 'In common with other women we have met more defeats than victories under the Act.'

In most cases, employers have found shelter in the arguments that women are not doing 'like work' with men, or that there is a material difference in their conditions of employment. Avoidance of equal pay is made even easier for many employers because the Act does not cover jobs which have

the new women's questionnaire came to fill in. We why they didn't; what problems they named the questionnaire simple. Their replies ty"



No you are not getting what the law says you should

WOMEN AND WORK: OUR NATIONAL SURVEY RESULTS

economic future of the country largely ignoring the needs of three-quarters-of-a-million women.

Women with children need more help

■ One third of mothers at home wants to go back to work but can't find child-care

Most women give up work, at least for a time, when they start a family. Two-thirds of the mothers at home told us that they didn't go out to work because they believed in caring for their children themselves. But the vast majority are conscious of making some kind of sacrifice to stay at home—only one in five mothers at home said she did not want or need a job. For some the sacrifice is financial, for others it's the lack of adult company.

The realities of bringing up a young family clearly destroy any idealised picture of motherhood. Mothers of children under five consistently thought that the ideal time to return to work was earlier than those who hadn't yet tasted day life with a toddler.

Even though many mothers

they appreciate getting back to work. Among working women a greater percentage of mothers than non-mothers say they enjoy their work, and the younger their children the more likely they are to find pleasure in work outside the home. More than a third of mothers of under-fives go out to work because they get bored at home.

Many women clearly are prisoners in the home. Nearly one-third of all mothers at home say the only reason they haven't got a job is that they can't find any reliable care for their children. The poorer the family, the more likely this is to be the reason for a mother staying at home.

All these findings emphasise that the country as a whole (which needs these children to support it in the future) cannot continue to leave mothers unsupported.

Some mothers need a playgroup just to give them a breather and a chance to enjoy adult company uninterrupted by piping demands. Others need full-time child care.

Everyone knows there is a dire shortage of nursery places in this country. More of our working readers with children under five left their toddlers with friends or relatives every day than in both private and local authority nurseries put together.

The Government says there isn't the money for fully equipped nurseries, but some local authorities have already been successful

into action to give child-minders proper support and training. Why don't more follow their lead?

There's no reason for "child-minder" to be the rather grubby word it has become. A good child-minder can provide excellent care, and it is far better for a child to have a caring substitute mother for a few hours and a relaxed and loving mum the rest of the time, than its own mother all the time feeling imprisoned and harassed.

Mothers forced to take poor jobs

■ Having children makes a woman three times as likely to be stuck in a badly paid job

We found that two-thirds of our working mothers had part-time jobs. But two-thirds of these part-timers would work full-time if it were not for the children.

One problem is that employers tend to take advantage of mothers' needs for particular hours or for a job just round the corner. For example, we found that 16 per cent more women without children had

Even *Woman's Own* exposed the loopholes in the legislation

been traditionally become 'women's work', where over 75% of employees are women. An estimated two-thirds of women who work outside the home are in this position, including the Trico workers at Northampton, earning only £23 for a 40-hour week. Because there are no men with whom to compare their work, these women are still earning only half the average male wage for the industry.

BUILT IN DISCRIMINATION

Apart from the loopholes and avoidance of the legislation, both Acts have built-in discrimination against women. The Equal Pay Act (EPA) is allowing for job evaluation schemes to determine equal work, provided management with a handy manipulative tool. Naturally the criteria employed to evaluate jobs militates against women.

In comparing skill, length of experience, responsibility and flexibility, women are always at a disadvantage. Childcare problems, inequality of education and training, inadequate maternity leave and other handicaps make it impossible to compete on equal terms.

The SDA has similar failings. In explicitly excluding cases where a woman is denied a job because she is less skilled, creditworthy, etc, it totally ignores the centuries of discrimination which hold women back from these starting points for equality.

In short, the legislation does nothing to provide women with the material prerequisites for equality and independence: equal pay and opportunity, adequate childcare and fertility control provisions, and the other basic needs

outlined in the Working Women's Charter.

UNDER ATTACK — BUT FIGHTING BACK

In practice, even the limited rights provided by the legislation are under attack. Mounting unemployment and social expenditure cuts are strengthening the grip of women's family responsibilities. Far from laying the foundations of equality, the Labour Government is tying the millstone of full-time childcare, second-rate education, low-paid jobs, inadequate facilities to control their fertility, and unemployment around women's necks.

Far from taking this lying down, women throughout the country are taking the struggle for their rights into their own hands. The most significant example of this is the Trico equal pay strike. Recognising the need to rely on the strength of their collective action, the Trico strikers boycotted the Tribunals and emerged victorious from their fight. Their victory has lit the path to equal pay based on collective working class action. And in claiming — and winning — more than the 4½ per cent permitted by the Social Contract, they have demonstrated to all workers that they should refuse to take responsibility for the crisis.

Women are also fighting the cuts in jobs and services as part of the struggle for women's rights. It is ironic that within a year of the passing of the equal rights legislation, women were marching to save the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital and women teachers and hospital workers were striking in defence of their jobs. In the same period, the Government tried to sabotage the Child Benefits Scheme; the row this caused at the Labour Party Conference is yet another indication of women's determination to fight back.

RALLY FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

It is becoming clear that the development of the struggle for women's rights must combine two processes: evaluating the legislation and learning how to benefit from it, and at the same time building up our self-reliance so that we are able to take independent action to achieve our demands. In fighting for our rights we have found ourselves fighting the Social Contract, the cuts, unemployment and all the other policies of the Labour Government — but so far we have been fighting national, centralised policy in a fragmented way, area by area and issue by issue. The fact that we have lost more times than we have won is enough to show that this response is inadequate.

This is the conclusion the Working Women's Charter Campaign has reached; and this has led it to call for a national rally — 'One Year On from the Sex Discrimination Act — A Rally

Average gross hourly earnings in industry, 1975 (women's earnings as % of men's)

Industry	Germany	France	Italy	Holland	Belgium	Britain
Chemicals	74.8	74.1	83.1	70.1	66.3	66.4
Car assembly	85.6	89.6	90.8	n.a.	94.4	78.2
Office machinery	81.6	86.2	105.9	n.a.	n.a.	80.2
Food	70.3	80.2	91.2	74.5	78.2	73.0
Clothing manufacture	78.2	82.0	88.8	81.7	74.8	72.6
Total manufacturing	72.6	76.4	80.3	73.2	71.6	66.9

for Women's Rights'. This rally has been called to assess the situation and pool experience of fighting for women's rights. It will bring together trade unions, women's groups, labour movement bodies and campaigns for women's rights to abortion, nursery facilities, financial and legal independence and many more. Through speakers, theatre, exhibitions, stalls and literature, these organisations can exchange their experiences. Already support for the rally has come from 15 Labour MPs, prominent labour movement figures, NUPE National Executive, students unions, trades councils,

Labour Party branches and the Co-op Political Committee.

We ask all readers of *Socialist Woman* to obtain support for the rally and build for it by taking part in local activities to investigate the implementation and/or sabotage of the Acts, by gathering details of the struggle for women's rights, and by publicising the Rally in your area.

For information write to: 49 Lother Hill, London SE23 1PZ. Financial support for the Rally is urgently needed. Make cheques payable to the Rally for Women's Rights.

ONE YEAR ON FROM THE SDA

FEB 26th
1977
11am

A RALLY FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Marxism and Women's Liberation: A Reappraisal

The recent Conference on Women in Eastern Europe held in Birmingham set itself the goal of beginning to develop a "more detailed and historical analysis" of the Marxist Movement's politics and practice in the fight against women's oppression, according to BARBARA HOLLAND, one of the organisers of the Conference. In her article below, Barbara Holland, herself a student in Soviet Studies, makes a contribution towards explaining the basis for the official support for the "socialist family". Future issues of *Socialist Woman* will be devoted to continuing the debate on many of the questions posed.

The governments of nearly half the world — the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China — claim to have liberated their women. This claim obviously needs scrutiny. The initial reaction of many feminists as far as the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is concerned has been to reject the claims to women's equality. Women are seen to bear a double burden which is, if anything, more oppressive than conditions in the west, and this disappointing outcome of early revolutionary hopes is usually put down to the inadequacies of the Bolshevik party, and in particular their failure both to build an autonomous women's movement or develop a Marxist theory of personal liberation. These failings are themselves in turn seen as the result of male prejudice.

A second argument holds that women **have** in fact made important gains in these countries, and that the only remaining obstacle to be overcome is (once again) male prejudice in the form of men's reluctance to take on an equal share of household duties. More pressure on men, plus the continued improvement of state facilities will soon lead to the establishment of a new "socialist" family, in which husband and wife have equal rights and duties.

I feel that both these arguments are too general, as they fail to take into account the complex reality of both the revolutionary period and the present day situation. In particular, male prejudice is seen as an abstract phenomenon, apparently without need of explanation. The purpose of the conference on 'Women in Eastern Europe' is to make a start towards developing a more detailed and historical analysis of these questions — which hopefully could then be compared with the experience of Chinese women. In the meantime, however, here are some initial reactions to the views outlined above.

Bolshevik Failings?

An example of the Bolsheviks "half-hearted" attitude to women's rights is

sometimes found in their failure to give support to the bourgeois feminist movement. However, as supporters of a proletarian, rather than bourgeois, revolution in Russia, the Bolsheviks were against allying with bourgeois forces. The bourgeois feminists were interested only in equal rights for their own class, not in abolishing either the system of private property or the sexual division of labour on which the double oppression of working class women was based. If revolutionaries had encouraged working women to join a movement with such limited aims, it would have made the task of organising them to fight on the basis of their oppression even harder. Before the revolution, the conditions of clandestine political activity made it virtually impossible to set up an autonomous women's movement as an alternative, and what the Bolsheviks **did** achieve in organising women factory workers and soldiers' wives should not be ignored.

The women's departments (Zhenotdel) that developed from 1917 on were a step in the right direction. They succeeded in raising women's issues among the masses and in encouraging working and peasant women to be active. However, male resistance in the party probably made itself felt in the struggle for resources and for prioritisation, particularly towards the end of the Zhenotdel in 1930. This period saw an influx of new, inexperienced party members, many of whom had close links with the countryside and its strong patriarchal traditions.

The failure to integrate the individual insights made on the women's question into socialist theory, or to develop a theory of personal liberation can also be admitted — but with various "extenuating circumstances". Of these, the main one to mention is the extreme backwardness of the Russian masses. Even the steps taken (such as the introduction of liberal marriage and divorce laws) created problems, in that it made women more open to exploitation by men. The material and social

basis for the kind of sexual revolution which Reich desired was simply missing, so it is hardly surprising if attention was focussed elsewhere.

The significance of this failure has also been exaggerated. Bolshevik weakness on this question doubtless made it easier for the reaction in the family structure to become established. But more importantly, it was the bureaucracy's reaction to the crisis within the economy which governed the failure of women's full integration on an equal basis into social, cultural and political life.

One of the most important clauses in the Soviet constitution is its guarantee of the right to work. Though in the early days, economic difficulties made the full achievement of this impossible, the drive for industrialisation, plus the more or less adequate provision of creche facilities has made it possible for all women to work outside the home (only 6% choose not to do so). However, in the absence of other, good-quality collective facilities women still bear the main responsibility for domestic work. The time and energy women have to spend on housework in turn helps to perpetuate the sexual division of labour outside the home i.e. women have less skilled, lower-paid jobs and are rarely found in top positions. Criticisms can certainly be made of the party's failure to understand the importance of transforming domestic labour and to prioritise such tasks, but this should not be used to hide the importance of the gains women have made in the right to work. Soviet women are proving this themselves in their refusal to return to the home, despite the incentives the government is offering in its anxiety to increase the birth rate.

Is Sexism Disappearing?

The financial independence women have gained through employment is helping to weaken the traditional sexism of Russian men. (I say Russian rather than Soviet because the case in some other republics, particularly the Eastern ones, is more complicated). The great shortage of men after the war held back this process, but the new generation is far more willing to divorce unsatisfactory husbands and have 'illegitimate' children — though the women soon marry and there are few single parents. Men are helping more in the home, but it is still "helping", and on



This fashion photo, from a Soviet women's magazine, says more than words about the need for a women's liberation movement there today

the whole progress remains painfully slow. The obstacle of male resistance is also being aided by another powerful obstacle — in the form of Government policies. The Government is failing to extend communal facilities at the rate it could now afford, it is perpetuating traditional sex roles in its propaganda, and it is introducing measures aimed at persuading women to return to the home.

I believe this is because with women's right to work secured and a commitment still present to ending the sexual division of labour, the Government is concerned about the effects of

this on the family. At the moment the family is useful in absorbing workers' increased leisure time, as well as in socialising children, and these functions explain the official support for the "socialist" family. The other possible course of development, in the direction of collectivised domestic work and more time spent in social and political activity outside the home is too threatening to the regime, which depends on the atomisation of Soviet life. The dominance of the family prevents people from making choices about how they arrange their lives, in such ways as living arrangements, variety of relation-

ships, and sexuality. To make such a wide range of choices feasible, the system would have to become more flexible and democratic — a situation that would quickly lead to a challenge to bureaucratic power and privilege.

In conclusion, the problems facing women in the Soviet Union, both past and present, are not simply reducible to male prejudice. It matters, but so do the economic, social and political conditions in which it operates, and ultimately it is these conditions which work to encourage or restrict male domination.



Women and the Lebanese civil war

The occupation of Lebanon by Syrian forces has resulted in a precarious state of pseudo-stability. Socialist Woman interviewed MAJIDA SALMAN, who has recently toured Britain speaking on the situation in Lebanon. We asked her to describe the position of women in the struggle, and what role the Revolutionary Communist Group [Lebanese section of the Fourth International] has played in raising women's issues in the struggle.

'I would like to explain the position of women in Lebanon as part of the condition of Arab women, who are probably the most oppressed women in the world — even when compared to women in underdeveloped capitalist countries like Latin America. The oppression of Arab women is very crude. In Lebanon you have to add to this the role that the country has played as an intermediary between imperialism and the Arab market. This has created a big layer of women who are secretaries, bank clerks and so on, which differentiates it from other Arab countries.

Of course this is also related to the religious divisions. There was a big difference between the mobilisation of Christian women and that of women in the resistance movement and in the Moslem neighbourhoods.

The mobilisation of Christian women can be seen as an aspect of the fascist and reactionary organisations relying on petty bourgeois women and using them as a tool in a reactionary way. The arming of women in the reactionary camp was stronger than it was in the anti-Phalangist camp.

The reason, firstly is that the situation of Christian women is better than that of Moslem women — you can compare it with the situation of women in Catholic countries. Christian women were the first to be mobilised because they can go out of their houses more easily. Also there was the policy of weakening the consciousness of women by playing on the fact that they have privileges. The Phalangists tried to give a feeling of superiority which is completely false — because in Lebanon there is no law on all the questions which affect women — marriage, divorce, etc. It is the church law for the Christian women, and for the Moslems the Koran.

'God, country and family' was the device of the Phalangist party. Women were not struggling to change their situation, but were struggling for their oppression, for the strengthening of the reactionary bourgeois state.

In the anti-Phalangist camp the situation was different. Here, even if the participation of women in the struggle was more difficult — due to the stronger oppression of women by the family tradition and the Moslem

religion — it was understood as part of an anti-reactionary struggle, as a liberation struggle. Because politics were brought into every house, many women tried to participate in the struggle. But this was on an individual level, because there was no point raised in the programme of the progressive front on the question of women. The Stalinist and nationalist organisations never dealt with the most elementary democratic questions of women, like the separation of church law or Moslem law from the civil law.

But because of the general upsurge, women tried to participate, first through the traditional roles of women — hospitals, cooking and so on. Although this obviously did not change the position of women it permitted them to go out from their houses. Going to a hospital was easier than going to fight, especially if you consider that in the majority of the nationalist organisations the headquarters were mainly male. It was difficult for women to fight all the traditions of the family and enter them.

There were only political organisations to integrate women. Because of the lack of organisation in the neighbourhoods, women were not integrated on the level of solving the problem of the neighbourhoods. And, as their position was secondary on every social

level before the civil war, it was very difficult for them to make this jump during the war.

However, women did gain new experiences. For instance, in some hospitals, women challenged rules which always required them to do very routine work when men could do it. Even if they had nothing to do, the men refused to do this work.

The question of the armed struggle is important, but it has been too often assumed that this is the central question. It is just a reflection of other developments. Women can participate in the armed struggle, without considering their role, seeing it as something different from their own problems. It is only when the link between armed participation and questioning the traditional problems of women is done by women themselves that they can give participation in the armed struggle its real meaning.

Women fought in some of the nationalist organisations. But this was qualitatively different from women fighting in the left organisations. In the nationalist organisations, it was just an example of a few heroic women, and the way they were looked at in other ways did not change at all.

In the Communist Party the majority of women were still cooking in the HQ — although the CP did train some women to fight, the general trend was to put the women in the kitchens. The CP had the strength to challenge the family in the neighbourhoods, but instead they merely adapted to it.

I think that the RCG was the only force to intervene around the women's question. Women in the RCG were trying to organise and discuss with other women in order to relate the struggle to the problems of women. We always had a section in our publications on the situation of women in the Lebanon. We met as women together as this avoided certain problems — for example that of the family. When you meet with other women and are trained with other women it's easier than going to a HQ where the majority are men, and where the women wouldn't feel at ease.

As you can see, there was a conscious integration of women into the tasks of the RCG, an understanding of the role of women in the fighting and in the political work. Women were involved systematically, like men, at all levels. This doesn't mean that complete equality was achieved, but there was at least a conscious attack on the problem.

There was not a qualitative change in the situation of women in the civil war. This is a barometer for the situation as a whole. This is why we can speak of an experience of women's struggle but not a real step on the road to women's liberation and revolutionary struggle.

EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

In November the third planning meeting for the European Socialist Feminist Conference was held in London. Representatives from the women's movement in Britain, Spain, Germany, France and Holland attended. Women from almost every other European country have expressed interest in this project. DODIE WEPPLER, a member of the British Planning Group reports on the London meeting, calling for setting the date of the proposed Conference so that the debates that have been opened can continue, and so that European co-ordination and exchanges can begin in a more efficient manner.

The call for a conference of socialist feminists was first put out by two tendencies in the French women's movement — the Elisabeth Dimitriev Circle and Les Pertroleuses. The idea of a Conference which would bring together socialist women from all over Europe was seen as especially important in the wake of International Women's Year — a year used by bourgeois governments internationally to put forward their policies concerning women's rights. Lavish amounts of resources and money were doled out by these governments in the wake of the growing movement for women's liberation. At the same time, the international recession has prompted some of the most savage attacks on women's rights.

The idea of such a conference was therefore to exchange experiences about how socialists in the women's movement have confronted both the attacks levied against women as well as the undoubted by-product of the designation of 1975 as International Women's Year. In Britain this by-product cannot be underestimated: the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act and the full implementation of the Equal Pay Act has in fact stimulated growing numbers of struggles among women.

How have we as socialists in the women's movement responded to this increased awareness among larger sections of women?

And what lessons have we drawn from battles we have fought — against closures of nurseries, against attacks on women's abortion rights, against the rising unemployment figures amongst women?

Just as important, what can we learn from the mobilisations undertaken by women in other countries, so that we do not have to repeat their errors?

These were some of the questions that were to be raised at the conference. To date, three planning meetings have taken place to discuss the Conference — in Paris, in Zurich, and in London. In London a sharp, though unclear political debate took place which made it appear that the whole project of an international conference was in jeopardy. Four points were

central to the differences that emerged. First, whether the appeal for the conference drafted by the French women was restrictive and would fail to attract many women who considered themselves to be socialists. Second, if the Conference was to be action-oriented or more theoretically biased. Third, whether the proposed session of the Conference on "Women and Work" (although specifically described as including both domestic and waged work) would fall into the old trap of seeing women's oppression and exploitation as flowing solely from her relation to the productive process. Finally, the exact nature of the relationships between the struggle for women's liberation and the struggle for socialism.

Many sisters at the planning meeting in London argued that these kinds of debate should be held at the Conference itself. However, the meeting was divided almost exactly down the middle (the French sisters' appeal was carried only by a majority of one vote). The Dutch sisters — who had previously offered to organise the Conference in their country — announced that in the light of the voting on the French appeal, they were no longer prepared to do so. The delegation from Britain, composed of sisters who had responded to the many appeals in the Columns of **Spare Rib**, **Wires**, and other women's liberation newsletters, was the only delegation where the votes cast were divided. This might be an indication that the delegation represented broad areas of opinion in the British movement, as well as the heterogeneity of the socialist current itself in this country.

Despite the lack of clarity in the debate, held under grave time pressures, it was unanimously agreed to meet once again in Paris on 11-12 December. Hopefully the Paris meeting will set the date for the conference — which **could** be a useful experience in taking the fight for women's liberation forward on a European scale. With a firm date, even more sisters from Britain can be drawn into the vital debates raised only superficially in London. Further information about the Conference from Barbara Yates, 20b Batoum Gardens, London W6.

ABORTION RIGHTS TRIBUNAL

'The pro-abortion fight will not end with the tribunal'

The following interview is with MARIA DUGGAN, activist in the women's liberation movement, an executive member of South Bank Polytechnic Students Union and the co-ordinator for the Tribunal For Women's Abortion Rights to be held on 29 January at Central Hall, Westminster.

Why has the National Abortion Campaign initiated the Tribunal, and what is it about?

If we look at the developments in the abortion campaign over the last year I think we become aware of certain extremely important developments — both for the campaign on the abortion issue and for the many areas of attacks on women generally. To illustrate this point, one only has to think about the large numbers of women that have been made redundant, or the attempted closure of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital. These attacks on the EGA are especially important since this is a state service provided specifically for women. We are beginning to see, that in a generalised crisis situation, women are actually affected by a very specific attack. Therefore the attacks on abortion provision are simply a link in the whole chain.

The Tribunal arose directly out of the re-convening of the Select Committee. We have to understand the enormity of the act of reconvening this body. It is an anomaly in Parliamentary terms to re-establish a Select Committee to consider a Bill that has already fallen. The terms of reference of the Select Committee were those of the James White Bill, and to reconvene it is just one aspect of a specific ideological attack on women's rights and issues which concern women. So, when NAC and other pro-abortion organisations boycotted the Committee, we became aware that there was a need for an alternative forum in which to present our particular types of evidence — the sort of evidence that would illustrate particularly the way in which the attack has been concentrated on abortion rights. At the same time, within that, we hoped we could build up a picture which would inform us more generally of the way in which women have been coming under attack in the past year.

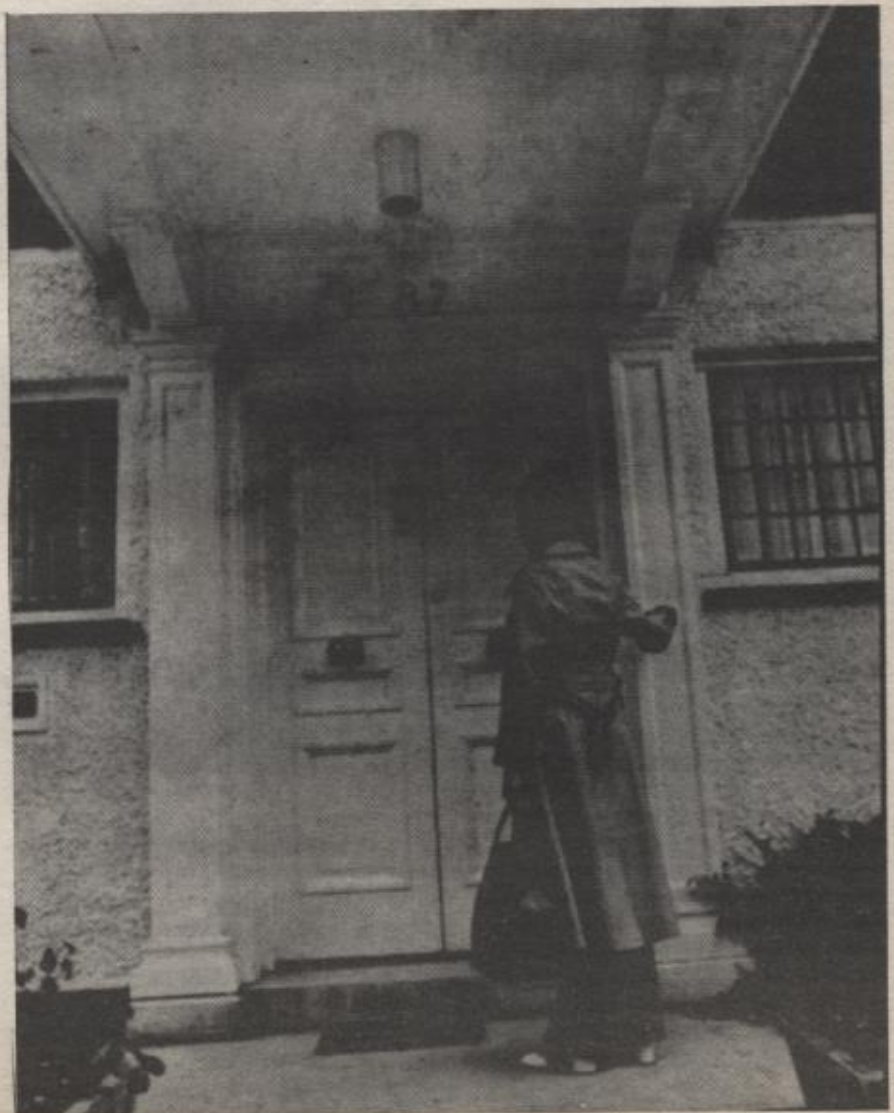
In motivating the Tribunal we have to say first of all that it is going to be a mass event. It's going to be an open event, based on the evidence that has

been campaigned for in the localities by women and women trade unionists, and other representatives of the labour movement. The open nature of the Tribunal is extremely important — this is our answer to the biased, closed, secretive Select Committee. We are approaching it almost from the point of view of a working class enquiry. This will be our day of evidence, when

we will state our case for our right to choose.

If the Tribunal is to be seen as an alternative forum to the Select Committee, as you suggest, how is this the case in terms of its structure — for example, what difference does it make that it is organised primarily by women?

First of all, I would like to agree that it is an event that will be organised by women especially, around their own issues and it will be based on evidence from the grass roots of the women's



For the rich — the option of the private abortion clinic is always available!

movement and of the labour movement. Therefore it will have an immediate impact that goes well beyond the walls of Central Hall. The sort of evidence we are going to base it on will be the ongoing experience of many women — throughout their lives generally. It will include areas outside the big cities, such as London, where often the issues don't appear as polarised as they do in the provinces.

Further, the fact that it is an open event, and the philosophy on which it was founded, indicate again the contrast between the Tribunal and the Select Committee. We are saying, 'We have enough faith in our evidence, and the way we can mobilise to present our case to reach an informed verdict about why abortion is a woman's right to choose.'

How exactly is the Tribunal being organised?

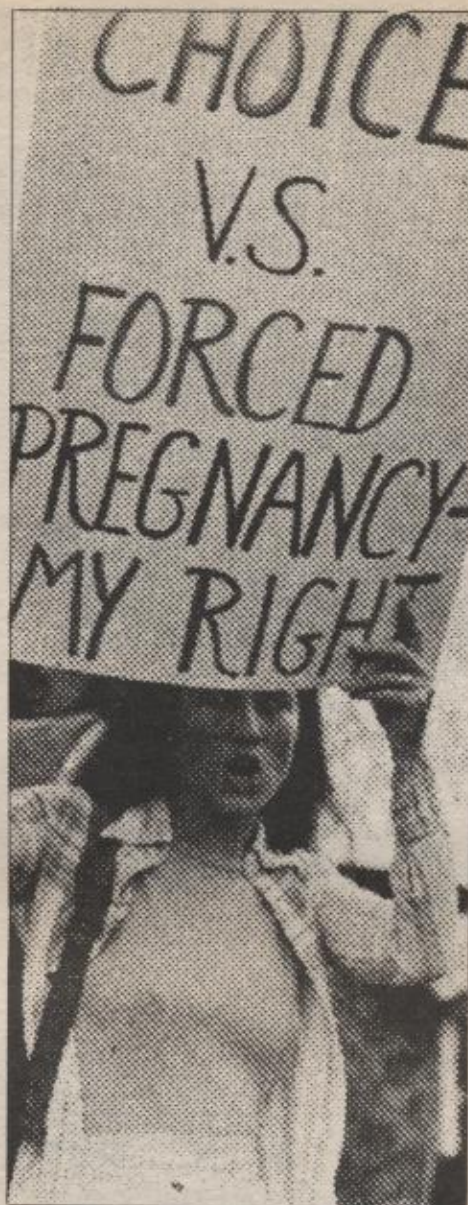
It is being organised with the support of the women's movement, the National Abortion Campaign, and the various interested bodies among the labour movement who are sufficiently aware of the importance of the demand, sufficiently aware of the ramifications of liberal access to abortion for women in this country, and internationally, for their own self-determination and their liberation.

The Tribunal is being organised by a Mobilising Committee, which is an open committee, meeting in London every Tuesday evening at the London School of Economics, Houghton Street. It is open to all people, although we try to encourage organisations to send women as responsible representatives.

There have been criticisms from the women's movement about the abortion campaign. Leaving aside the allegation that the campaign is run by men, how do you feel about the criticisms that NAC is a non-feminist organisation and that it concentrates on a single issue?

As a representative of the National Abortion Campaign I would like to say that we are extremely sensitive to these criticisms — and I think I speak on behalf of the whole campaign in saying that. But my approach is different. I don't counterpose NAC to the women's movement — I see it as being part of the women's movement, working around one of its specific demands. Also, I think that those who say that the abortion campaign is not feminist have to clarify what they mean by 'feminist', and what they mean by 'feminist practice'. I feel that the best thing which would enable us to take up their criticism seriously, and help to evolve a practice more in accordance with what these critics would agree with is for them to come and join us and raise their criticisms within NAC itself — both at the national level and at the grass roots level.

With regard to the criticism of concentrating on a single issue cam-



paign — well, yes, we do. To win this particular campaign for the right of a woman to have free access to abortion is of the utmost importance for women in this country. But within that fight I think that NAC has never ever failed to draw the links and to say why it is so important for women's liberation. I think that through concentrating on abortion, we have been able to lay the basis for raising consciousness about all areas of sexuality and about a wide range of other related issues. In that sense, I think that this criticism is unfounded.

It could be said that NAC has responded in the past purely in the direction of Parliament, rather than concentrating on self-help and the self-organisation of women. Do you think that this latter aspect would help women more than winning legal reforms or trying to stop restrictions? Does the fact that the Tribunal has been seen as an alternative to the Select Committee signify a move in the direction of the campaign?

Firstly, it is not possible to ignore the

parliamentary situation. However, I would say that we are not going to put all our faith in Parliament to win reforms for us. This is why the Tribunal is a correct initiative, because we are saying that we are not going to put all our faith in a Select Committee, but we are going to provide our own forum for our evidence. We are going to draw in women from all over the country who are working on and campaigning around evidence — about women's lives and experiences. I think that this is important to reiterate this because in organising the Tribunal we are giving the lie to people who say that we are directing our energies towards Parliament, not towards considering the experience of women themselves. This is an alternative forum, with women in the forefront of its organisation, and we must never lose sight of the aim of the Tribunal, which is for a woman's right to choose.

On the more direct question of self-help I think that we have to realise that NAC is a political campaign, attempting to force the state into providing women with the sort of abortion facilities that they need. So for those who raise the plea that NAC should concern itself with self-help, we would reply that they could be accused of trying to patch up the situation, instead of directing our forces against the state, in order to get those facilities for all women.

However, I don't think that there really is that kind of crude counter-position, because I feel that the evidence we will gather from the Tribunal will inform us about how women are attempting to struggle round the issue themselves — and to develop the sort of practice which will enable them to carry out self-help, if need be. But I think that the main point of not losing sight of NAC as being a political campaign, attempting to force the state into providing free abortion on demand on the basis of a woman's right to choose.

What can women in the women's liberation movement do for the Tribunal?

Firstly, I think that women in the movement must support the Tribunal. As an initiative, it is incredibly important as it is concerned with a demand that has come under concentrated attack for the last two years, and indeed is coming under attack again because of the Private Member's Bill which is being introduced by William Benyon. I would like to see the women's movement involving themselves in the Mobilising Committee, and more importantly to take the lessons of the Tribunal back into the localities to ensure that the women's movement is able to put forward a coherent, very direct feminist presence in the campaign during the following months. The pro-abortion fight will not end with the Tribunal.

Italian abortion rights at the crossroads

MARY FERRALI, an activist in the Italian Abortion Campaign and a member of the International Communist Group [Italian section of the Fourth International], explains in the article below the renewed struggle for women's right to abortion. In it, she takes up the reactionary positions of the Italian Communist Party and the role of the far left members of Parliament elected in the June elections.

Two elements have contributed to relaunching the struggle for free abortion on demand in Italy — the explosion at the ICMESA (La Roche) chemical factory in Seveso, near Milan, during August, which spread the defoliant dioxine (tetrafenolo — used in Vietnam) over the surrounding countryside; and secondly, the parliamentary debate on a new abortion law has been taken up again at the level of the Select Committee.

The terrible pollution caused by the multinational La Roche led to the evacuation of the entire population of the towns of Seveso and Desio, but not before over two weeks had passed through the criminal incompetence and blame-shifting of the local and national authorities, and notwithstanding such obvious signs as wilting vegetation and the death of all small animals in the zone. One of the reasons for this delay may well lie in the connection the ICMESA factory has with the production of secret chemical warfare arms for NATO.

Whilst debating whether to burn the entire zone, or bury it under a metre of cement, or wash it down with olive oil and water, the authorities took a census of the number of pregnant women living in Seveso and Desio, and hastily revived a law passed 18 months ago by the Corte Costituzionale (equivalent to the British High Court), and which had been applied only very sporadically. This law concerned therapeutic abor-



tion.

When it was found that around 400 women were pregnant, the Mangiagalli Gynaecological Clinic in Milan was made available for therapeutic abortions in the first three months of pregnancy. Of course that part of the bourgeoisie most in difficulties from the population realising the disastrous effects of dioxine on fetuses and small children, suddenly discovered that abortion was preferable

to women giving birth to deformed babies, inexorable witness to the horrors provoked by uncontrolled industrial development in which the only criteria is maximum profit. The Vatican promptly objected to such moral laxitude and threw its forces into a shameful campaign to deny the effects of dioxine (in this they soon reached agreement with the industrialists!) and to deny that deformed babies might be the result — or if they did, that many Christian couples would be happy to adopt one!

There was a subsequent line-up of the medical profession on one side or another, and the consequence of this stalemate is that to date, only 25 women have obtained legal abortions at the Milan clinic, and most of the pregnant women in these two towns have resorted to the usual backstreet solution.

The main worry of the Vatican can be summed up as 'therapeutic abortion is the thin end of the wedge and will lead to conceding free abortion on demand' — and, to a certain extent this has proved true, as many women from all over Lombardy wanting abortions promptly knocked on the door of the Mangiagalli Clinic, where the only help they found came from the women's groups who have picketed the clinic.

The facts of Seveso have clearly demonstrated the limitations of therapeutic abortion; in order to fulfil the requirement that abortion be conceded only in the case of grave danger to the mental or physical health of the woman, those few women who have pass-





ed the test have done so pretending to be crazy, going through the humiliating experience of screaming and throwing themselves on the floor of the clinic on order to salve the delicate consciences of the medical and psychiatric professions.

After the political elections of 20 June 1976, which registered a noticeable advance for the Italian Communist Party (PCI), the revolutionary left entered Parliament for the first time (with five seats) after conducting a united electoral campaign as 'Democrazia Proletaria'. As one of the factors which had brought down the previous government had been the discussion on the new abortion law, the new government had to take up the matter immediately with all political parties presenting their own proposals currently under discussion in the parliamentary select committee.

The Christian Democrats, after much hesitation, have presented an even more reactionary proposal than the past legislation, placing limitations even on therapeutic abortion, and maintaining the concept of abortion as a crime, although women are no longer to be prosecuted for aborting within the narrow limits conceded. The Communist Party's proposal has aroused, inevitably, the most interest, and is a masterpiece of condensed 'historical compromise' (the Italian CP's strategy of alliance with the bourgeoisie). For the PCI, abortion is limited to a number of cases, taking into account, however, the social, economic and mental condition of the woman. The total number of abortions carried out is not to exceed 25 per cent of all operations in any one hospital, but no abortions are to be performed other than in public hospitals. Abortion is free but only within the first three months of preg-

nancy — and all transgressors are to be fined; minors must have the express permission of parents; all women requesting an abortion have to undergo a medical and verbal examination/interrogation even though the woman 'may have the final say in deciding'. This clumsy and bureaucratic procedure is designed to make abortions 'available' but difficult to obtain, and means the continuation of backstreet abortions for all those women who cannot face such a trial. The proposals of the



A young Seveso victim

Socialist and Radical Parties permit minors access to abortion, and give women the right to choose, but limit this right to the first three months of pregnancy.

The new factor in this discussion are proposals which have come from about 30 women's groups, which met and organised on a national scale to work out a law on abortion reflecting their experience in the "consultori" (self-help clinics) created by the

women's movement. These proposals were taken up and presented in Parliament by two of the members of Democrazia Proletaria. They have aroused ferocious attacks, and have also been the source of an ongoing debate within the women's movement. The main points of the proposals are; free abortion on demand within the first 22 weeks of pregnancy, to be performed in public hospitals, state approved clinics (and in municipal birth control clinics in the first 8 weeks of pregnancy). No woman who asks for an abortion after 22 weeks of pregnancy can be refused as it is felt that only the most severe problems can lead a woman to take the decision to abort after this length of time, and also that, under capitalism, a woman's right to choose must be defended without limitations.

The terrible effects of Seveso, the general ignorance about contraception maintained by the reactionary positions of the Catholic church, the economic and social subordination of most layers of Italian women are all aspects which contributed to the 30 women's groups taking this stand.

The last aspect of the proposals has been the object of attack from all quarters — not just from the most reactionary ones. The progressive paper *Repubblica* headed its editorial: 'The Slaughter of the Innocents' and the PDUP (whose member of Parliament refused to support the proposals) headed a signed article 'Abortion up to the 61st Month'.

In the women's movement itself, the proposals have generated a great deal of debate, which cannot simply be divided into the category of those for and those against them. The debate centres on whether the organised women's movement can really "translate" its experience into laws, whether it loses its autonomy in so doing, whether it has, in fact, delegated its battle to the members of Democrazia Proletaria, thereby limiting the influence of the proposals to the far left. An important discussion is also taking place on whether abortion and maternity are obligations or choices under the capitalist system; whether in a society organised on a socialist and collective basis the conflict between a woman and the unwanted foetus might not be resolved differently and so on. An important conference on these themes is to be held in Naples on 13/14 November, and will be followed by a mass demonstration in Rome on 20 November, called by the 30 women's groups in defence of a woman's right to choose.

Spanish women challenge fascist marriage laws

FOR THE PAST forty years Spanish women have had to live under an oppressive order carved out for them by Francoism and the Catholic Church. But today, as this old order is crumbling to dust under the rise of the mass movement, women are beginning to fight back for their rights.

One of the most repressive features of Spanish family law is the law relating to adultery. In theory adultery is a crime for both men and women; but whereas a husband is only guilty if he actually brings another woman into the family home, any sexual act outside of marriage by the wife is deemed a crime. In a country where divorce does not exist, this means that a woman is separated from her husband is permanently denied sexual relations.

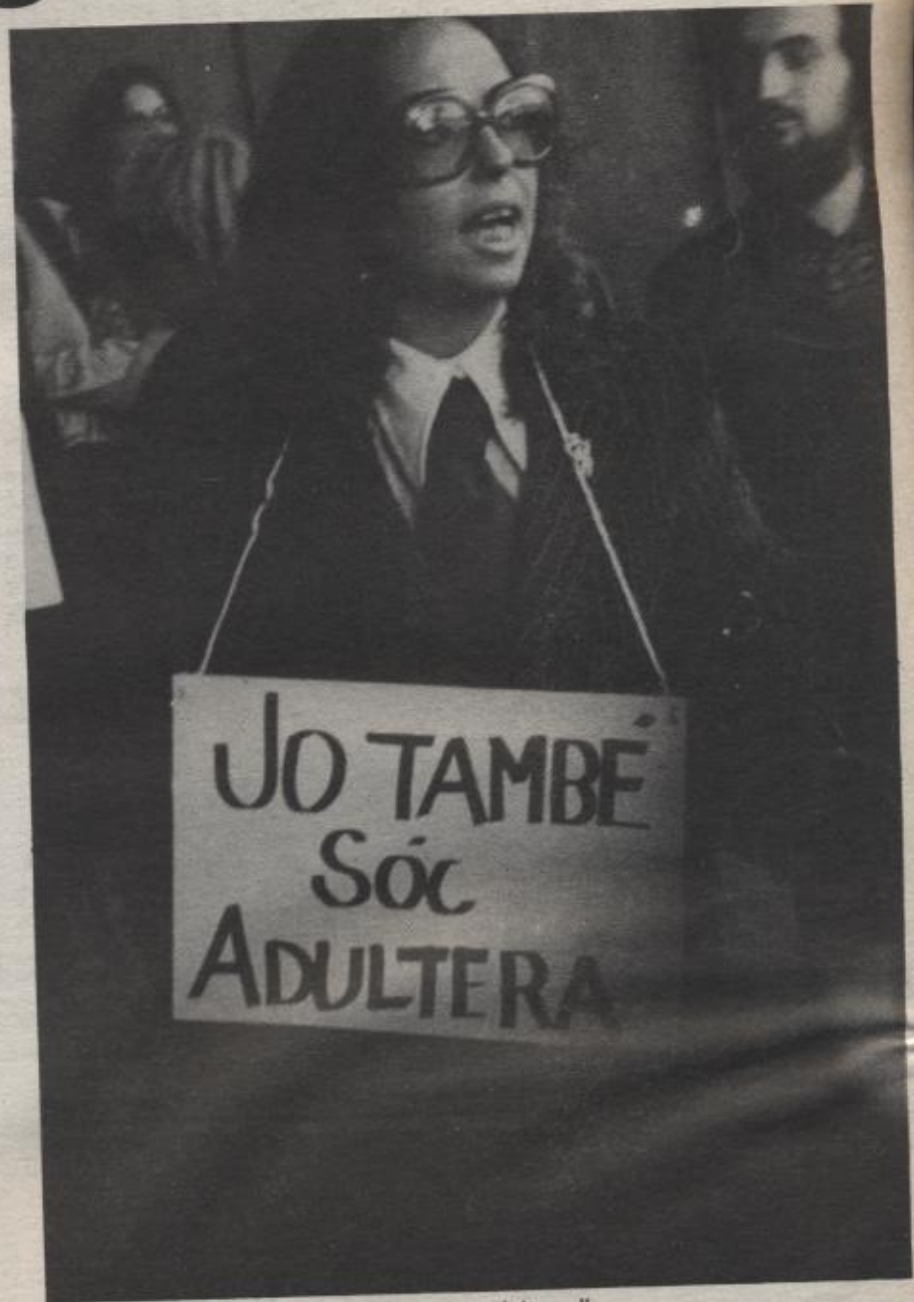
While conviction for the crime of adultery requires a substantial amount of proof, even the suggestion of an 'indiscretion' on the part of a woman is enough to lose her custody of her children in the event of separation.

Nor is this law an outmoded one, gathering dust on the shelves — in 1975 there were 23 cases of adultery heard before the courts.

Along with the fight for the rights of divorce, contraception and abortion, the Spanish women's movement is taking up the battle against this unjust law, and it is finding no shortage of causes to champion.

In Barcelona a demonstration more than 5,000 strong was held in support of Maria Angeles Munoz, a woman who is threatened with the loss of her daughter after her husband — who had deserted them several years before — returned to find that she had had a child by another man. When the police arrived at Maria's home to take the daughter into custody before the court hearing, they were blocked by a solid wall of Maria's neighbours who refused to let them pass. Since then they have kept an around-the-clock vigil to prevent a sudden raid.

The most recent news of this case is that Maria and her daughter have had to go underground in order to remain together as they fear an adverse judgement by the courts.



"I am also an adulteress"

In Madrid, hundreds of women have demonstrated and faced the fury of the capital's special riot police in order to show their solidarity with F.C.G., a woman who is on trial for adultery. Her husband is calling for her to be imprisoned for six years (the maximum

penalty under Spanish law) and an indemnity of £50,000 for his 'loss of honour'. He claims that he found her in bed with another man — after he and two policemen had broken down the door to her flat — **eighteen** after they had separated.



Below, F.C.G. tells her own story, and sketches out the deep oppression that still afflicts Spanish women today.

'When I found out that they were asking for six years imprisonment and all that money from me — who barely earns enough to keep alive — my world collapsed about me. But later, when I had time to think, I said to myself, well, after having lived through an eight year sentence, because that is what my marriage has been, it's all the same if I am thrown in prison for six years. It can't be any worse in prison.

'Yes, my marriage has been hell since the first day. I had known my husband since I was only 14 years old. He was nine years older than me. I married at nineteen. And I took him seriously when, on our wedding night, he said to me that he would have liked me to be inspected by a doctor to know if I was a virgin. Later he became jealous about the period of our engagement. He became jealous and he started to spy on me.

'And money, he gave me the necessary amount each day, penny by penny and weighed the food that I bought. If there was just 20 grams short out of a kilo of lentils or sugar he made me go through the shame of taking it back. One time, after five years, I was so fed up with it all that I tried to kill myself. I took all the aspirins I had in a tube.

'We separated in July 1973. The day before my husband gave me a terrible beating. He was in a rage and insisted that I confess to having deceived him. He threatened to kill me if I wouldn't confess at the police station to having done it. He took me there and accused me, and I said "yes" to everything,

everything he asked me. When the copper asked him if he knew that he could put me in prison with this accusation, he became frightened and

took me away. He took me home, sent the kids out to the cinema, packed my suitcase and took me to the station. He got me a ticket for Valencia.

'I called him from Valencia the next day to say that I wanted to come back, that I couldn't live without my children. He forbade me to return or to see or speak to my children ever again.

'I came back to Madrid, went to live with my brother, and started to look for work. I found a job, which I lost in the first year due to him and the scandal he stirred up over me. Not satisfied with this, he turned up at my house each day with the cops, and wrote to all the members of my family saying that he had detectives spying on me.

'Was I not free even though we were separated? And the most cynical thing was that he was such a womaniser and a drunk that he had often come home in the small hours of the morning. But listen, this didn't matter to me. The only thing that mattered to me were my children. I would have done anything to be with my children.

'The solidarity demonstration of women in front of the court has raised my spirits greatly, given a tremendous boost to my morale. You cannot imagine how thankful I am for it. Thanks to this I can remain calm in the court.'

1977 CALENDAR

THE WOMAN'S DREADNOUGHT

THE EARLY END DEPUTATION TO THE PRIME MINISTER

Great Frustration and Tactless Sarcasm

WOMEN FIGHT LOW PAY

Remember all our women in campaigns

Remember all our women over many fighting years

Remember all our women for their triumphs, and for their tears

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Nov 26	Nov 27	Nov 28	Nov 29	Nov 30	Dec 1
Dec 2	Dec 3	Dec 4	Dec 5	Dec 6	Dec 7
Dec 8	Dec 9	Dec 10	Dec 11	Dec 12	Dec 13
Dec 14	Dec 15	Dec 16	Dec 17	Dec 18	Dec 19
Dec 20	Dec 21	Dec 22	Dec 23	Dec 24	Dec 25
Dec 26	Dec 27	Dec 28	Dec 29	Dec 30	Dec 31

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WOMEN FOR PEACE .

OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS the 'Women for Peace' movement in the Six Counties has caused a great confusion on the British left, and in the Women's Movement. Its endorsement by the Labour Government can be no surprise, since over the last eight years, in harmony with the Tories, it has tried to impose the 'peace' of the army on the nationalist minority. But support, critical or not so critical, for the 'Peace Movement' has also come from the British Communist Party, and the Militant grouping inside the Labour Party, who view it as an unclear but potentially progressive development. Similarly it has been seen by sections of the Women's Movement as a step forward for women's liberation. In a recent article in **Women's Report** (Sept/Oct 76) we are presented with the following view of the 'Peace Movement':

'... we get glimmerings of the existence of a separate women's consciousness about the war in Northern Ireland and the sudden sprouting of a mass movement... (and in conclusion)... few people can doubt the positive effect the participation has had on the women involved.'

In our view, the 'Peace Movement' represents a gigantic step backwards, right into the arms of the Church, the army and British imperialism. To the extent that it has the support of the left and the women's movement, it represents the latter's attempt to separate the struggle for democratic rights, for women's rights and for socialism, from the fight for national independence, from the anti-imperialist struggle itself. Such a separation is a death blow to women's liberation, and to the struggle for socialism in Ireland, leading only to an alliance with the Lord Longfords and Brigadier Kitsons.

Return to 'Peace'

The avowed aim of the 'Peace Movement' is simply that of a return to 'peace'. But what was this peace before the war? The division of Ireland represented an earlier peace, which was imposed on the backs of the Irish people after the nationalist movement had been defeated. It was the terms of this peace which are central to the roots of the suppression of women's rights in Ireland, and the 50 year suppression of the democratic rights of the nationalist minority in the North. With partition the alliance between Church and state in the South was confirmed, and with it the reactionary positions of the Church on abortion, contraception and the exaltation of motherhood and the family, have dominated women's lives. In the North an artificial state was created to protect British investment and to reward the supporters of British imperialism in Ireland, the Unionists. The condition for maintaining this state was the political and economic disenfranchisement of the Catholic minority.

It was precisely because this peace, based on the artificial division of Ireland to further the interests of British imperialism and unionist supremacy, involved the systematic suppression of the democratic rights of the Catholic minority, that the civil rights movement developed in 1968. National freedom and the elimination of the Unionist state as a precondition for restoring the democratic rights, was revealed by the response of the Unionists to this movement. From the attack on the civil rights demonstration in Burntollet, to the pogroms against the minority in the Bogside and Bombay Street, the intrinsic violence of the state as the guarantor of Unionist supremacy was made clear. It was as the defenders of the Catholic minority in their struggle for civil rights that the Provisional IRA emerged. The way was open for civil war which threatened to engulf the South — a development which would jeopardise Britain's plans for the continued economic subordination of Ireland. It was this aim of maintaining the conditions for continued British domination which led to the intervention of the British Army in the North. It is not possible to separate, therefore, the struggle for democratic rights from the anti-imperialist struggle. This means also that a movement for the liberation of women in the Six Counties must be based on an anti-imperialist commitment.

Grim Situation

The position of women in the Six Counties is grim. For those who can work, the average weekly wage is only 53 per cent of the male rate, which in turn is only 88 per cent of the male average in Britain. Unemployment has reached drastic proportions for the Catholic minority — reaching as much as 50 per cent in the Belfast ghettos. But in the job creation scheme women have been heavily discriminated against. Out of 6,864 extra jobs provided in 1972, only 622 were for women. The Equal Pay Act as applied to the Six Counties is even weaker than in Britain, since it allows for separate women's grades, which is particularly accentuated by the high number of 'women only' jobs — the 20,000 women in the textile industry for example. Similarly the Sex Discrimination Act does not apply, nor does the 1967 Abortion Act, which means that it is practically

The growth of the 'Peace Movement' has been consistently opposed in the columns of **Red Weekly**. Here, Cath Cirket examines why this movement has attracted women into

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PEACE



BELFAST, OCTOBER 1976

A LEADER OF THE 'PEACE' MOVEMENT REA
OUT TO A MEMBER OF THE RUC AND SAYS:

"We fully support the rule of law... the R
Ulster Constabulary and other security forces
the only legitimate upholders of law and order

IRELAND UNFREE W

OR IMPERIALISM?

its ranks and how that has, in reality, weakened the struggle for women's liberation in the framework of the fight against British imperialism.

**BACK
AND'S
SSORS:
TT THE
PEOPLE!**

BLOODY SUNDAY, DERRY, 1972

BRITISH TROOPS MURDER 13 CIVILIANS.



NEVER BE AT PEACE

ed by the Peace Through Freedom Cities., 84 Mayton Bl., London N7.

impossible to get an abortion. Given the weakness of any socialist movement, and the collaboration of the trade unions with British imperialism, and the ascendancy of unionism, Catholicism has symbolised opposition to Unionism and this has strengthened the hold of the Church and its reactionary positions on abortion and contraception, together with its equally reactionary exaltation of women as the defenders of the family, with all its pacifist and anti-class connotations.

Subordinate

In spite of the heroic involvement of women in the anti-imperialist struggle over the last eight years, their role has been firmly subordinate. The specific oppression of women in the Six Counties has not been challenged by the left, and there has been no systematic attempt at their organised integration into the resistance. This has meant that they have been forced to suffer the imprisonment and killings of their friends and relatives and to face the raids and harassment of the army in the isolation of the home. In these conditions, and without an autonomous women's movement able to organise women against their oppression within the framework of an anti-imperialist position, it is little wonder that sections of Catholic women fall prey to the appeals of the 'Peace People'.

But has the 'Peace Movement' anything to offer women? Its central slogan is 'Peace' — at any price. A peace on these lines will mean the strengthening of everything which has made the lives of women in the Six Counties intolerable. This is clear in the language of the Movement — the rosary and the hymnal — which aims to split women from 'politics' (the left), while bringing them onto the streets to defend peace, the family, and traditional values (the right). Unlike the Women Together, an earlier 1971 version of the current movement, the latter takes up no demands relating to women. Instead in the world of Mairead Corrigan in a speech in Derry, the movement must be strengthened by winning the support of strong men (the army?) to help win the struggle against violence. Just as it aims to organise women into sujagation to the church, so it directs them to an alliance with the Army and RUC as the defenders of peace. But peace for the Army and RUC means the elimination of the IRA. The phone number of the 'Peace Movement' is constantly advertised on Belfast Radio, with an encouragement to people to give information to the 'Peace Movement' about violent offences. The result, according to army official information, is that there has been an increase in arrests as a result of anonymous tip-offs.

No Ambiguity

The role of the 'peace Movement' is to capitalise on the exhaustion and demoralisation of broad sections of the Catholic minority. The refusal or inability of the anti-imperialist forces to organise women actively and fight on issues facing women, together with the lack of an autonomous women's movement as part of the anti-imperialist struggle, have made sections of Catholic women the temporary tool of a movement whose aim is to restore the old peace — that of British imperialism — in the only way possible, through smashing the IRA.

But already there are signs that its support among those women is being eroded. The consequence of the 'Peace Movement', the greater harassment by the Army of the Catholic ghettos has led to a renewed resistance. In October a preprojected peace march in the Falls Road was pre-empted by a massive turnout organised by the Provisional Sinn Fein. More recently the establishment of a no-go area in the Turf Lodge area has been achieved through the mass involvement of women in the area, who have used the 'Peace Movement's' 'whistle' technique to a good purpose — to mobilise for the occupation of the streets against the army.

The lessons, however, from the success of the 'Peace Movement' must be learned, and the vital task begun of developing a movement for women's liberation in Ireland which takes the anti-imperialist struggle as its starting point.

Here in Britain, we should not allow the 'Peace Movement' to retain any credibility. For sections of the women's movement and the left to be ambiguous over the character of the 'Peace Movement' is to aid the repression of the minority in the Six Counties, and the deepening of oppression which the women of the minority are facing. To defend women's liberation in Ireland, the women's movement in Britain must campaign to expose the 'Peace Movement', and give active support to the 'Peace Through Freedom' Committees. Similarly in Britain, the fight for women's liberation demands that we take sides, because behind the 'peace' supporters in Britain are those forces most active in attacking the rights of women — SPUC, Lord Longford, and the Church.

Reviews

THE POWER OF SISTERHOOD

A review of 'The Rights and Wrongs of Women', edited and introduced by Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, published by Penguin Books, 1976.

Five years ago there were less than a handful of bookshops in London which could boast a section labelled 'Feminism'. I remember making the pilgrimage to Compedium Books to purchase one of the new bibles; standing at the bus stop afterwards fumbling through the pages with gloved hands, rejoicing at the boldness and vibrancy of the red-on-white cover which bore the legend: *Sisterhood is Powerful*. This was the literature of a young movement, still able to encapsulate its diverse political and social messages between two covers.

Today, the editors of a feminist anthology have to take into account not only the diversity of the Women's Movement, but also the direction in which it is going and the distinctions which have arisen in the course of its development. The strength of *Sisterhood Is Powerful* lay in its attempts to identify the many facets of our oppression; it was essentially a document of the here-and-now. Literature, psychology, sociology, politics and especially history were the repositories of accumulated crimes against women. Only the personalised narrative, the living experience of individual women, seemed free from the taint of male-dominated ideology.

With the growth of women's studies in higher education, a different tradition began to emerge. Using the tools of accepted disciplines, feminists — mainly academically trained — began to explore the place of women in literature, history and other fields. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley situate their new anthology firmly within this tradition. The twelve essays they have selected vary greatly in subject and scope; but as the editors point out, the volume is unified by the contributors' common conception of women as a distinct and oppressed social group. Most of the essays are written from a historical standpoint which reflects the need to understand how the structures which perpetuate women's oppression originated and developed. Each con-

tribution has an exciting richness of discovery and interpretation, though some are marred by styles reminiscent of the academic dissertation. They remind us too, that most of the pioneering work in feminist theory is being done in the universities.

Yet for all the excellence of the individual essays, *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* is a slightly disappointing book. Considered in terms of its parts, it is clearly a valuable addition to the women's studies literature. But considered as a whole, the impression it gives is one of distance from the movement which inspired it. Looking first at the range of subjects covered, we see that there is no indication of several major topics of debate within the present-day women's movement. I am thinking of the problems which have interested most women's conferences and many study groups over the past two years, such as the nature and function of domestic labour under capitalism, the impact of the welfare state on the family, the effect of equal rights legislation and so on. This is not just an arbitrary list of what feminists are discussing at the moment. All these subjects are linked, and the need to understand them has sprung from the need to develop a strategy for fighting sexism and winning our liberation. In a sense, they are the theoretical questions which have emerged from our attempts at feminist practice.

It is always easy to criticise omissions from an anthology, and it might be argued that Mitchell and Oakley chose deliberately to exclude essays on feminist strategy. They themselves say in the introduction that "none of the pieces speak directly to or from the practice of the women's movement", and that the essays "illustrate different strands of thought within feminism, but they do not offer a unified political perspective". Since the Women's Movement itself has no unified perspective, it is not surprising that they are reluctant to impose one on their anthology. All the same, there is no reason to leave the question of feminist strategy out altogether.

In fact, it is clear that the editors do

see their book as an intervention into Women's Movement politics, though rather differently from the way that I have suggested. Admitting that the collection is rather conventional, they explain that far from forging "a new concept of the feminist editor" they have edited in a conventional way; this was a result of their doubts about certain trends within the movement, connected with the concept of 'Sisterhood'. They are right to question the concept, particularly as it has led to illusions about the basis for feminist unity and the possibility for change in social relationships under capitalism. At one time, it seemed that women could form horizontal alliances, spreading wider and wider until all women had joined the movement, or at least supported its aims. Sisterhood was the concept behind this unity, and sisterhood was powerful, precisely because it can achieve this.

There are some important positive aspects to the idea of sisterhood. It implies a conscious recognition of shared oppression by women; it is a way of welcoming women to the movement. If the concept is in crisis, this must be a reflection of the Movement itself and the world around it. In practice, the Movement has been questioning the idea by seeking other bases for unity, notably campaigns. These have generated their own specific problems and arguments. While Mitchell and Oakley criticise some women for interpreting 'sisterhood' as separatism, others are asking under what conditions we should involve men and over what issues we should fight alongside them. It is a pity that the issues the editors raise in their introduction are not fully followed through in the essays they have selected.

The collection also raises questions about feminist theory which are very difficult to answer. Mitchell and Oakley write: "... we believe that part of the success of feminism will consist in the rewriting of history, sociology, psychology, economics and so forth from a standpoint which is sensitive to the situation of women as a distinct social group." This implies a re-evaluation of all academic disciplines. What tools must feminist theory develop? Will it be structured into sociology/anthropology/history/psychology and so on as the social sciences taught in universities are? How will it be related to other intellectual traditions — notably Marxism? Some of these questions — and attempts at answers — are present in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*: but they are mostly implicit and should be expan-

Reviews

ded. Otherwise, it is difficult to see how feminist theory differs from using the accepted categories of traditional disciplines to explore the position of women.

Despite this, *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* is a strong book, because of its sense of feminism as a tradition. This is shown most clearly in the essay which gives the collection its name: 'The Rights and Wrongs of Women: Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau and Simone de Beauvoir'. Margaret Walters looks at the dilemmas which faced these three women, who tried to reconcile the contradiction between the ideal of femininity and the actuality of women's lives. Through analysing not only their writings, but also the way they tried to live out their convictions, she succeeds in making their problems real and relevant to us. I also liked the essays by the two editors: Ann Oakley on medical practice and Juliet Mitchell on the concept of equality. There is a lot to recommend this book. Next time you head for the shelves labelled feminism — less few and far between now — make sure you buy a copy.

KAREN MARGOLIS

'SCARLET WOMEN'

Scarlet Women is a newsletter which grew out of the discussion at the 'Women and Socialism' Workshop at the Newcastle Women's Liberation Conference. It aims to provide a forum for developing a specific socialist-feminist analysis; it also publicises and coordinates activities organised in the regions. It is linked with the nationwide socialist feminist network also established at Newcastle to help communication between sisters involved in different women's movement activities and campaigns.

So far, two issues of *Scarlet Women* have been produced by the Coast Women's Group based in North Shields. They both contain very useful information and interesting articles. No 1 has an account of the Coast Women's Group activities and the problems they face; No 2 includes articles on the Women and Science

Collective, the Newcastle Regional Women and Socialism meeting, and a list of regional coordinators.

The next issue of *Scarlet Women* is planned for December/January, and contributions, local news or suggestions are welcomed. The Coast Group has been paying for production and postage out of its own funds, so it needs donations and help with postage costs.

To obtain back numbers of *Scarlet Women*, put your name/group on its mailing list, or send articles or donations, write to:

Irene Conkey,
Coast Women's Group,
5 Washington Terrace,
North Shields,
Tyne and Wear.

Please remember to enclose an sae, or send money to cover postage costs.

'THE DISPOSSESSED'

As an avid promoter of Evelyn Reed's book, *Woman's Evolution: From Matriarchal Clan to Patriarchal Family*, I closely follow newspaper and magazine reviews of her book. One in particular fascinated me. In the *Spokeswoman*, reviewer Jill Sellers writes a fine piece about Reed's book, but it's combined with a review of another book, *The Dispossessed* by Ursula Le Guin. Le Guin is a noted science fiction writer.

Neither knowing nor caring about science fiction, I was nevertheless curious about what a science fiction novel could possibly have in common with Reed's anthropological work.

It's safe to say that what *The Dispossessed* has in common with *Woman's Evolution* is: next to nothing. But, in its own right, Le Guin's book is fun, feminist, and intriguing.

The story unfolds through the space travel of Shevek, a physicist from the planet Anarres. On Anarres there exists an anarchist, egalitarian society. With neither the profit motive nor a repressive apparatus, social judgment and pressure are the guiding principles.

Child rearing and education, as well as cooking and cleaning, are arranged communally—though always voluntarily.

Women are totally equal. They are engineers, scientists, philosophers, and everything else as well. It never occurs to anyone that it could be otherwise.

Shevek travels to Anarres's twin planet, Urras, to cooperate with scientists there in developing a scientific theory he originated.

Urras is a planet containing various social systems and forms of government. It is wrought with wars, racism, and sexism.

Upon arrival in Urras, Shevek undergoes what you might call extreme culture shock. The most incomprehensible aspect of this society is its treatment of women. Born and raised in a society free of oppression, he cannot understand the degradation of half the human race.

After several days at a wealthy university, full of men, Shevek naively asks his fellow scientists, "Where are women?"

An exchange takes place, the Urras men becoming more and more horrified at the thought of a planet where women are totally equal.

"Shevek saw that he had touched in these men an impersonal animosity that went very deep. Apparently they . . . contained a woman, a suppressed, silenced, bestialized woman, a fury in a cage. . . . They knew no relation but possession. They were possessed."

Reviews

We learn that Shevek's planet, Anarres, was settled by anarchist followers of Odo, a woman. The anarchists had led a rebellion on Urras against class society and, although unsuccessful, were then allowed to leave the planet and settle a new one.

There are several competing social systems on Urras. There's the nation of A-Io, a class society based on private property and the pursuit of profit.

There's the nation of Thu, revealed through its newspapers: "The Thuvian paper is much better written but it reports only those facts which the Thuvian Central Presidium wants reported."

There's Benbili, "a backward sort of country. Always having revolutions."

Within all these countries, however, are groups of revolutionaries. Some are Odonians, some syndicalists, and some are . . . Socialist Workers. The Socialist Workers in the nation of A-Io help in leading a mass demonstration against the draft, war taxes, and the rise in food prices.

But it's Odo's theories about social relations in a

classless society, as practiced on Anarres, that make the most interesting reading in *The Dispossessed*.

There is complete sexual freedom. "No law, no limit, no penalty, no punishment, no disapproval applied to any sexual practice of any kind, except the rape of a child or woman, for which the rapist's neighbors were likely to provide summary revenge if he did not get promptly into the gentler hands of a therapy center."

Within this atmosphere people formed a variety of relationships, one of which was a "partnership."

"Partnership was a voluntarily constituted federation like any other. So long as it worked, it worked, and if it didn't work it stopped being. It was not an institution but a function. It had no sanction but that of private conscience."

This book is fun. Read it *in addition to* Evelyn Reed's book but not, by any means, *instead of it*.

—Linda Jenness

THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS OF WOMEN



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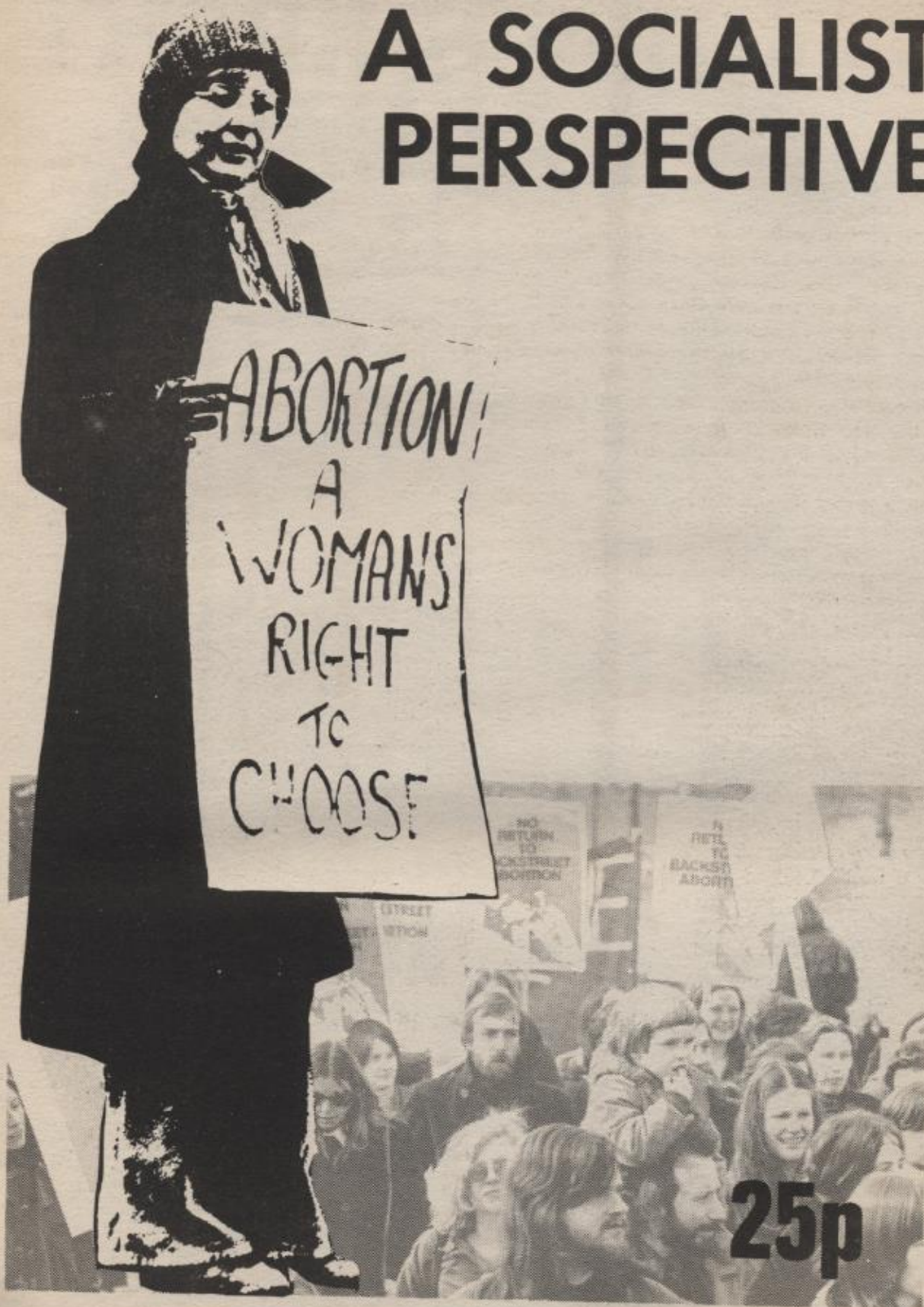
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