

NO

TURNING

BACK!



Women and
the struggle
for socialism

A Women's
Fightback/
Socialist Organiser
pamphlet. 60p

“How man enslaved woman, how the exploiter subjected them both, how the toilers have attempted at the price of blood to free themselves from slavery and have only exchanged one chain for another — history tells us much about all this. In essence, it tells us nothing else. But how in reality to free the child, the woman and the human being? For that we have as yet no reliable models. All past historical experience, wholly negative, demands of the toilers at least and first of all an implacable distrust of all privileged and uncontrolled guardians.”

Leon Trotsky



Women are fighting back!

WOMEN ARE fighting back! Thousands of women around the country are active against the Alton Bill. Women hospital workers have been taking action against privatisation. Nurses have struck against threatened reductions in their pay. All signs are that action in the Health Service will continue — with undreamt-of public support.

But there are many more women who are under attack and aren't yet organised to fight back. Women living in bad housing conditions, women with no nurseries for their children, women whose meagre incomes are threatened by proposed cuts in child benefit.

Labour Party women's sections should be playing a key role in reaching out to these women, in organising campaigns on issues which affect them. Sadly, for the most part, women's sections aren't doing this.

Most women's sections are small and semi-active. There were only 300 women at this year's Labour Women's conference. In part this was due to the downgrading and change in timing of the conference because of the General Election campaign. Nevertheless, it was a poor turnout and indicative of the state of the Labour women's organisation around the country.

Women need to get into the labour movement and to change it in line with

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our needs. Otherwise we will never be able to change society. But at present the big revival of the Labour Party women's sections, dating from the late '70s, has petered out.

Nationally the Labour women's organisation is dominated by two factions. The Women's Action Committee (WAC) is the present leadership of the women's organisation. WAC began as a campaign for real representation for women within the Labour Party, and for a real role for the Labour Women's Conference — demands with which we wholeheartedly agree.

But its political approach is to take 'power' for women, rather than to organise in outgoing campaigns. A leading WAC member, Anne Pettifor, has argued that it is unthinkable to campaign now. Women must have power in the Party first.

Forget FAB, forget fighting hospital closures, concentrate on getting a few more women on the Labour Party National Executive and into Parliament! With this sort of leadership, no wonder the women's organisation is stagnant.

The most visibly opposition to WAC, nationally, is the *Militant* tendency. It also has nothing to offer. Indeed, it is surprising that *Militant* are active in the women's sections at all, given their vehement opposition to any form of autonomous women's organisation.

Militant's bureaucratic caricature of socialism, where the answer to every question is 'nationalise the top 200 monopolies', would stifle the women's organisation, which they are quite happy to use purely as a vehicle for their own propaganda.

Campaigning? *Militant* have not even bothered to join the FAB campaign — their sectarianism towards any campaigns they don't themselves control is notorious.

What the women's sections need is a new approach. Women's sections should turn outwards to campaigns in the community. They should go on to the estates and into the shopping precincts, talk to working-class women, help them get organised, help them get involved.

Some women's sections have done this around the Alton Bill — leafletting estates, petitioning, campaigning door to door. We have to see our women's sections as not just another meeting every month, but as organising centres for campaign activity.

Women are suffering attacks, but when women are organised they have bags of energy. We only have to look back at Women Against Pit Closures to see that.

Let's get out of the meeting room and on to the streets! Let's get back to basics! That is the way to beat the Alton Bill; and it is the way to go on after the Alton Bill campaign to build a mass working-class-based women's movement.

The long struggle

THE ALTON Bill is not the first threat to abortion rights since the 1967 Act. Since 1967 there have been a number of attempts to limit women's access to abortion.

The 1967 Act was a big advance. When Simone de Beauvoir wrote her book *The Second Sex* in 1949, she could name only two regimes which had given women free access to abortions — the USSR between 1917 and 1936, and Germany between 1918 and 1933. In Britain, the Infant Life (Preservation) Act of 1929 said that abortion would not be an offence if 'such an act were done in good faith with the intention of saving the life of the mother'. But the earlier 1861 Offences Against the Person Act, which was unequivocally against abortion, was not repealed. In practice legal abortions remained difficult to get.

The 1967 Act, introduced by David Steel, gave as legal grounds for abortion the following:

- if the continuation of the pregnancy would endanger the life of the mother, or any of her existing children, more than termination;
- if there was substantial risk that the child would be seriously handicapped, mentally or physically.

Abortion would depend on the agreement of two registered doctors, and would only be allowed up to 28 weeks.

Between 1968 and 1979, eight amendment Bills were introduced into Parliament. The most important was the Corrie Bill in 1979.

Fight the Alton Bill

On 27 October last year, Liberal MP David Alton introduced a Bill into the House of Commons which will attempt to restrict women's abortion rights. At the moment, under the 1967 Abortion Act, a woman can be up to 28 weeks pregnant and get an abortion. Alton's Bill seeks to reduce this to 18 weeks.

The vast majority of abortions are done in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. But every year 6,000 women have an abortion after 18 or more weeks of pregnancy.

These include:

- teenagers who do not realise they are pregnant until late, or who are scared to go to their doctors;
- older women who misread the signs of pregnancy for the menopause;
- women who find they are carrying an abnormal foetus through tests which work only after 18 weeks of



In 1969 Norman St John Stevas introduced a Bill which got no further than its first reading. It required that one of the doctors approving an abortion be an NHS consultant, or a doctor of similar status. Six months later, another Conservative MP put forward a similar proposal, also getting nowhere.

During the Heath government (1970-74), two more Bills were introduced, one by John Hunt, another by Michael Grylls, neither with any success. But in 1971 Keith Joseph as Social Services Secretary appointed a committee under Mrs Justice Lane to examine the operation of the 1967 Act. The Lane Committee's findings, published in 1974, proposed reducing the time limit to 24 weeks.

In 1975, Labour MP James White put forward an amendment Bill the most important element of which was the

pregnancy;

- women delayed by unsympathetic doctors or by lack of facilities. One woman in every five who has a 'late' abortion first went to her doctor before 12 weeks of pregnancy.

If Alton's Bill becomes law, many of the 6,000 women who have late abortions each year will be forced to seek dangerous backstreet abortions. Many of them will die or be maimed.

A campaign has been set up called 'Fight the Alton Bill' (FAB), and there are local FAB groups in many areas. FAB has called a lobby of Parliament for 21 January, the date of the Bill's second reading, and a mass demonstration for 19 March, around the time of the Bill's third reading.

Contact FAB at Wesley House, Kingsway, Holborn, London WC1. Tel: 01-405 4801.

LIMIT THE

TIME

AND YOU
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CHOICE



elimination of the clause in the Act allowing abortion if on balance the risk to the mother of continuation was greater than that of termination. Since the risk from abortions carried out in proper conditions is very small, this clause allows abortion in a wide range of cases. White, like Corrie in 1979, wanted to specify that the risk to the mother from continuing the pregnancy must be 'grave' or 'serious'.

Two later attempts at amendments

were by William Benyon (1977) and Bernard Braine (1978). But it was John Corrie in 1979 who mounted the most serious and radical challenge to abortion rights.

Corrie wanted to limit abortions to 20 weeks in most cases, and to require that the 'risk to the life of the pregnant woman' from continuing the pregnancy must be 'grave'. The aim was to limit abortions to cases where the woman had special and unusual medical problems.

A huge campaign was mounted to

defeat the Bill. On 28 October 1979 the Trades Union Congress called an anti-Corrie demonstration joined by about 50,000 people. It was the first time a demonstration of such size had been organised by the labour movement on a "women's" issue.

In no small part thanks to such action — and to independent lobbying and campaigning by the women's movement and the National Abortion Campaign — the Corrie Bill was defeated.

Right to choose and wrong choice?

It seems every time there is an attack on abortion rights some "shock horror" story hits the headlines. Usually it's of the "babies left to die on draining boards" sort. This time it is something subtler, a story about women (mainly Asian) having abortions because the foetus is female.

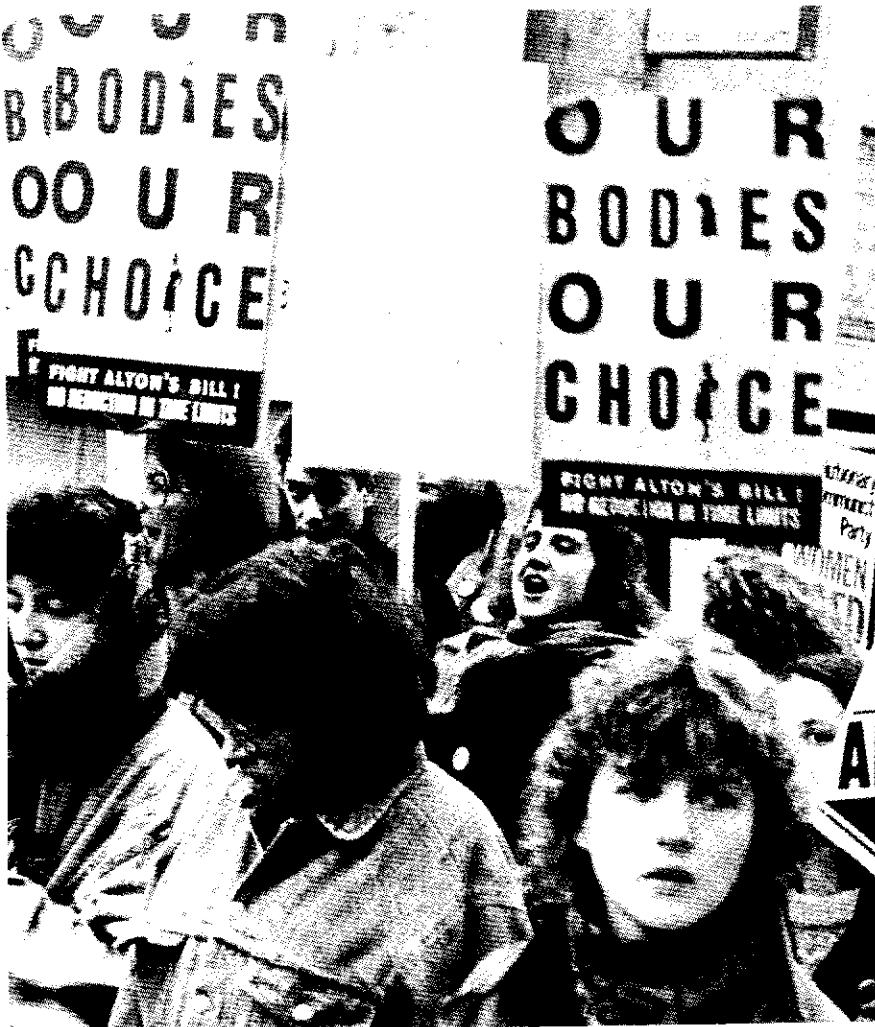
The original report was on Radio 4's morning programme 'Today'. By teatime it was one of the main news items, and the point was stressed: abortion on grounds of gender are illegal. This point is dubious. Currently, two doctors must agree abortion is advisable on health or social grounds. This is far from abortion on demand, and what one doctor considers grounds, another will not. However, two doctors could, presumably, agree gender constitutes social grounds for abortion.

Even without the question of legality, the story's ingredients — abortion, race, gender — had something to shock everyone, including women on the Left. It's natural that women who have fought for women's rights, including for choice on abortion, will be shocked by that right being used solely on the grounds that the foetus is female.

In the pro-choice movement we have tended to argue that women do not have abortions for trivial reasons, but because they feel they need them. Some people see gender as a trivial reason, and further, others will see it as a downright reactionary anti-woman. Where does this leave 'a woman's right to choose'?

For a start, to the women involved, gender is not a trivial issue. There are strong cultural reasons for some women going to lengths to have a boy instead of a girl. Sometimes having a son will seem so important that a woman will undergo pregnancy after pregnancy. A researcher into sex determination wrote to the Guardian saying she received "frequent letters from desperate women contemplating divorce, or even suicide, because they are so frightened of having another daughter." It is therefore not surprising such women should seek abortions as an alternative.

Of course it is disgusting that any



culture should place such a low value on females. However it is that aspect of the culture which must be condemned, not the women who live within it and seek abortions as a way of dealing with its prejudice.

The women's movement must stand by its slogan of 'a woman's right to choose' and each woman must decide for herself what constitutes grounds. It could be argued these women are not making a free choice, but are forced into it by husbands and a culture in which they have little say. There may be truth in this. However, the same applies to

other women. Besides simply not wanting a child at that time, women also have abortions through feeling they can't cope, because of lack of help, money and facilities, or because the foetus is disabled and this society undervalues the disabled, providing little support or facilities for them. In each case it is society that should be condemned, for making abortion less than a totally free choice. Our aim must be to change society, meanwhile fighting for abortion to be available to all women who want it, whatever their reasons for making that choice.

Why we need the right to choose

David Alton apparently believes that imposing an upper time limit of 18 weeks and criminalising women who have abortions after then, will wipe out late abortions altogether. This is rubbish.

A study of abortions between 1965-8 showed that, of the 734 women admitted to a London hospital following a 'criminal' abortion, at least 40 of them were carried out after 18 weeks — i.e. 5%. In 1986 7% of all abortions were done after 17 weeks, which shows that illegality will in no way reduce late abortions.

This is hardly surprising. Criminalising abortions after 18 weeks without, for example, providing adequate NHS facilities to ensure women can have early abortions, or increasing sexual education amongst young women, won't remove the need for women to have late abortions.

In 1933, in a lecture to the Abortion Law Reform Association, Dr. Eustace Chesson estimated that there were 250,000 abortions every year in Britain, one for every four live births. In 1986 the total number of legal abortions was 172,286.

Opponents of abortion, however, refuse to accept such overwhelming evidence and state that abortions only began after the 1967 Act. In an article in the Times in 1980 one Ronald Butt asserted that abortions had risen by 400 per cent since 1967, although he could quote no statistical evidence to back up his claim and indeed, evidence already existed which showed that the 1967 Act only legalised the existing practice. Another ignorant anti-abortionist, the eminent gynaecologist Professor Hugh MacLaren greeted the 1967 Act with the words "There'll be no-one murdering little babies in Birmingham" oblivious to the fact that Birmingham used to be a well-known criminal abortion centre, even attracting women from London who were in need of cheap abortions.

By Rosie Sibley

Criminalising abortion after 18 weeks won't prevent women from having them, but it will force them onto the backstreets and increase the risk of death, infection and sterility.

In Britain, maternal morality associated with abortion has disappeared: legal abortions are safe. However, in 1933 463 deaths were directly attributable to abortion and 97 more were "associated with abortions but not classed to it". But the social stigma attached to abortion — and its criminality — means that these figures are likely to be hugely underrepresentative.

As the Chief Medical Officer at the time admitted: the figures so provided are far from complete, as from the nature of the case no mention is made of the condition in a certain number of death certifications in which abortion has, or may have, played a part."

Nor do we have figures of how many women suffered sterility through infection, or other disabilities. Some of the abortifacients available carried enor-

mous health risks, in particular silver coated quinine tablets which, because they were so cheap, were the method most favoured by working class women.

They rarely led to the desired abortion, but often led to blindness. Others were lead-based and caused severe lead poisoning in women but again, didn't terminate the pregnancy. Other common methods included vaginal douches of vinegar, hysol, or even turpentine.

If these didn't work, women then were forced to turn to "foreign objects", inserting wax tapers, goose quills, crochet hooks or meat skewers into their wombs. One midwife in the 1930s reported removing a five inch piece of elm bark from one woman, which she had inserted inch by inch over five days.

If David Alton, the great promoter of the "sanctity of life" has his way, women will be forced back to such methods, or unhygienic, unsafe abortions by often unqualified practitioners. More women will suffer permanent injury, and more women will die.

Alton must be defeated. Women must fight for their right to choose, their right to safe legal abortions.

Fight the health cuts!

THE CAMPAIGN against the Alton Bill has brought out a number of other issues which restrict women's access to abortion.

One question which often springs to mind is: if David Alton were really so concerned to reduce the number of late abortions, wouldn't he be campaigning against health cuts which force women to wait for weeks on end for their terminations?

Many women at present will borrow money to have private abortions, to ensure they get the whole thing over with

early. But what of women who simply cannot afford it?

In London abortion facilities have suffered badly over the past few years, and London Health Emergency has produced a survey of the cuts. Here's just a taste.

- **Brent:** District Health Authority is considering terminating a contract with the Pregnancy Advisory Service, which provides a daycare abortion service.

- **Islington:** The hospital that currently provides the only daycare abortion service in the district is due to close in 1991.

- **Richmond, Twickenham, and Roehampton:** A District Health Authority meeting later this month will discuss plans to end completely Well Women and Family Planning clinics in the area.

- **Hounslow:** From 1 January this year, Family Planning services have been cut by 60 per cent.

This is only the tip of the iceberg. These cuts are part of a conscious Tory policy to run down the NHS. As usual, women's services are the first to go. They're seen as less important.

Nurses and other health workers are taking action now against the NHS cuts. When we have defeated Alton, we should go on to support the health workers' fight. That is the only way we'll keep our right to abortion — and to free health care generally.

The Fight Alton's Bill campaign has been going since October in the Manchester area. Local groups have held public meetings, petitioned, and picketed MPs' surgeries. The groups range from Rochdale to central Manchester and Stockport.

While the initial Manchester meeting attracted around 200 people, activity had until recently been organised in the main by various left groupings. Monday proved to be a show of strength for the support of the FAB campaign, when with very little notice, 400-500 people were mobilised to picket a SPUC rally, at which David Alton was speaking, at the Free Trade Hall. The meeting itself was more or less a Catholic church rally, with supporters of Alton shipped in by

coaches.

The anti-Alton picket had representatives and banners from left political groups, the Labour Party, Labour Party women's sections, student unions, the area NUS, and trade unions such as NALGO. The atmosphere was noisy and positive, and it received a lot of media coverage. The most provocative behaviour came from Alton's supporters, with antics such as Nazi salutes directed at the protesters.

Manchester FAB is now building for the national demonstration on 21 January, with coaches being booked mainly by the larger college student unions but also by a couple of Further Education colleges.

Abortion in Europe: the truth

David Alton claims that Britain has the most liberal abortion laws in Europe and that his Bill to reduce the upper time limit from 28 to 18 weeks is merely to bring us into line with the rest of Europe, where the average time limit is 14 weeks.

This is only partly true however. What Alton and his supporters omit to point out is that in the majority of European countries abortion is available *on request* up to 14 weeks (on average). Norway, Denmark and Austria give abortions on request up to 12 weeks; in France 10 weeks, Sweden 18 weeks, and in the Netherlands there is no legal upper time limit: in practice women can have abortion on demand up to 24 weeks.

This is not the case in Britain, and when Alton and his "pro-life" supporters claim that the 1967 Abortion Act provides for abortion on demand they are lying.

In fact abortion in Britain is still a criminal offence unless two doctors agree that the operation is necessary because the mother's life, her physical or

How do abortion rights in Britain compare with the rest of the world? Michele Carlisle, student organiser of the National Abortion Campaign, surveys Europe and the so-called 'socialist' countries of the USSR and China.

mental health — or that of her existing family — is endangered by the continuation of the pregnancy; or that there is a substantial risk of the baby being seriously handicapped.

So, in this country a woman, far from being able to demand an abortion, has to prove to two doctors that she satisfies these stringent conditions. The decision is theirs not hers. In fact, if a woman's doctor is an anti-abortionist the 1967 Act allows him/her to exercise his/her own "moral" principles over the woman's wishes, whereas in the majority

of European countries the woman is treated as capable of being able to make her own decisions, control her own body.

The other fact that Alton ignores when referring to the situation in other countries is that extensions *are* available beyond the 12, 14 or 18 week limits for a variety of reasons: medical and socio-economic. In Sweden, for example, abortions are legal up to viability if there is a risk to a woman's health. In Greece, unlike Britain, rape is recognised as a valid reason for an abortion up to 20 weeks, as is incest. In the vast majority of European countries foetal abnormality is a legitimate reason for "late abortions".

David Alton, however, if he has his way, would force a woman to continue with a pregnancy with no regard as to whether she wants or can cope with a disabled child. For David Alton, looking after handicapped children for 8 hours a day, five days a week, knowing he can (and did) walk away whenever he chose may be 'ennobling': for women who have to care for such a child 24 hours a day, and not being able to walk away, it can be a nightmare.

Alton has said that "killing people because they are handicapped is neo-fascist". What is humane about forcing women to carry on with unwanted pregnancies?

Britain is indeed more liberal on abortion than some European countries: Ireland, for example outlaws abortion altogether. Yet in 1985 as many Southern Irish women had abortions, mainly in Britain, as Danish women who have abortion on request up to 12 weeks. So outlawing abortions doesn't mean women stop having, or needing, them.

If Alton seriously wants Britain's abortion laws to match the rest of Europe's he would be fighting for abortion on demand. He isn't because he wants to ban abortions altogether. We must expose his hypocrisy and fight for free, safe, legal abortions on demand and the right to make our own choices, to control our own lives.

In a personal capacity

No real choice in Russia

The Russian revolution in 1917 provided safe, state-provided abortion for women. Abortion was seen as a woman's right, control over her own fertility as vital if women were to play a full part in social and political life.

The Bolsheviks were committed to the fight for the full liberation of women — an uphill struggle in the backward, predominantly peasant economy of Russia at the time.

But as the state degenerated into a Stalinist police state, women's rights were lost. The family again became enshrined as a lynchpin of society. Abortion was made illegal in 1933.

In 1955, after Stalin's death, the Soviet state adopted the policy of 'conscious motherhood' — abortion was legalised.

But have Russian women really got 'the right to choose'? What are the abortion facilities like?

Contraception is difficult to come by in the Soviet Union, and unpleasant or downright dangerous to use. Primitive and uncomfortable IUDs, high-dosage pills, poor-quality condoms. This is the sort of contraception available to Soviet women.

As a result, on average a Soviet woman will have 7 or 8 abortions throughout her life. These abortions

take place in the most appalling conditions. In a Russian feminist Samizdat publication, a woman describes an abortion clinic, known locally as the 'slaughterhouse'.

"Each ward contains ten to fifteen curtained-off beds piled with flannelette blankets. There are never enough sheets.

"The crucial moment comes. The women line up outside the operating theatre.

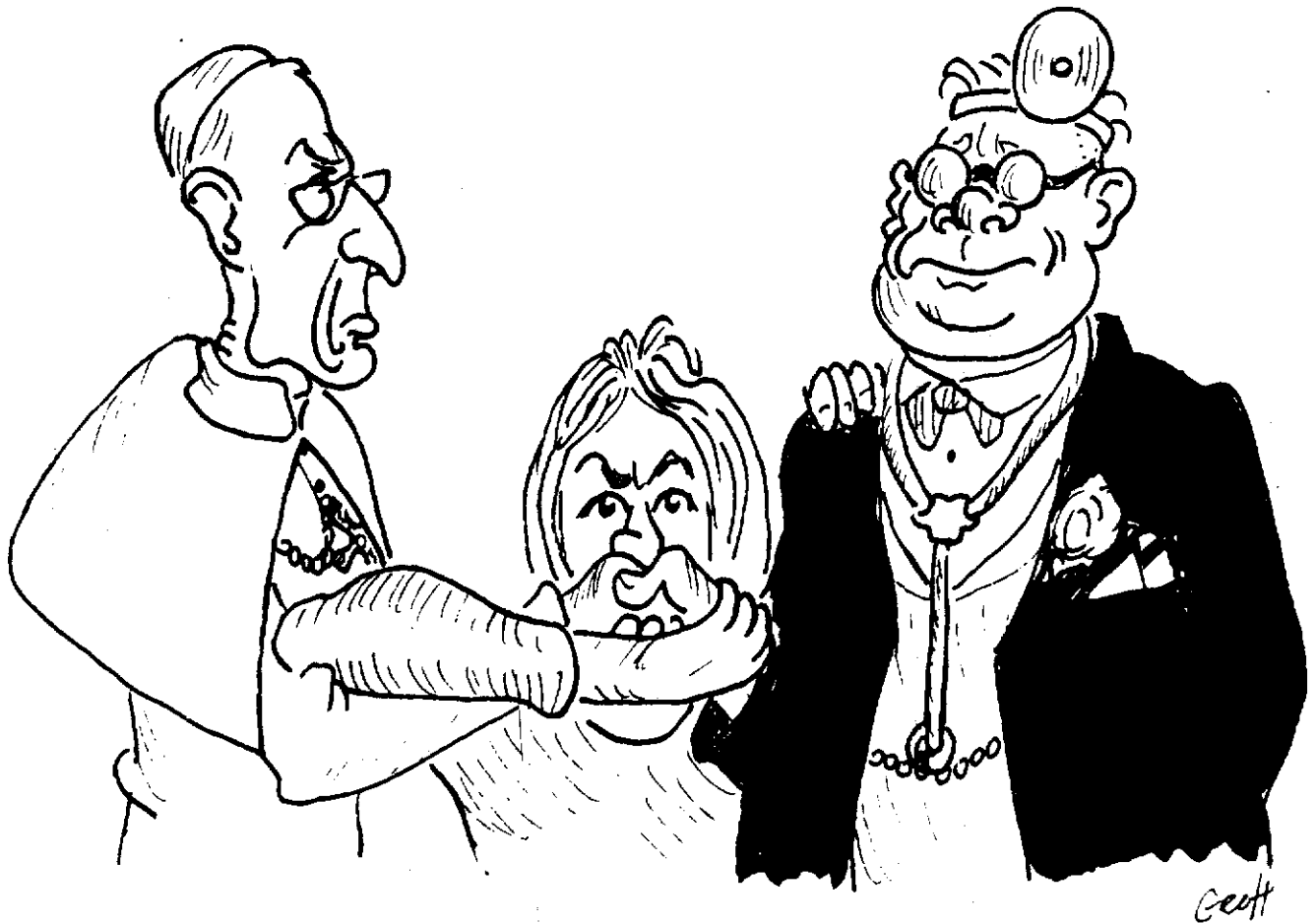
"Abortions are carried out on two, even on six women simultaneously in the same theatre. The tables are placed so that a woman can see everything that goes on opposite her. The face distorted in pain, the blood mass extracted from the womb...

"As she isn't anaesthetised, the woman suffers terrible pain. Some lose consciousness."

After the operation the woman has to walk back to the ward unaided, and is discharged after only a cursory examination the following day. 300 women a day apparently pass through this particular clinic.

Women may formally have the right to choose in Russia. But Russia's production line medical techniques treat women completely inhumanely.

Women not only want the right to choose, but also the right to decent facilities.



“AGREEMENT ON ABORTION RIGHTS?”

China: a long march to equality

Most revolutionary movements, even those with bad results, involve and mobilise thousands of women. The Chinese revolution also to a significant extent changed the conditions of life for the millions and millions of women in China.

But the very millions of people in China pose, for policy makers, immense problems in the field of reproduction. Since the coming to power of the Communist Party in 1949, various efforts have been made to control the increase in population — and in the area of abortion rights, this has not always been good news for women.

The first census in 1953 revealed China to have a population of 600 million with an annual 2% growth rate. In 1979 it was estimated that the population would reach 1.28 billion in the year 2,000 — later considered to be an underestimate. Since China could not hope to feed this many people, the government introduced drastic measures.

A one-child-per-family policy was started in 1979. In the countryside, for example, this means that at the begin-

ing of the year an official decides which couples are entitled to have a child — although this system sometimes, inevitably, breaks down.

Depending on the area, economic incentives are used to encourage people to stick to the one-child policy. In urban areas, parents could get a pay bonus of 5-8% of the average worker's wage until their child is 14.

But if a second child is born, they must return all their bonus points. After a third child, their income is reduced 10%.

All this obviously has serious implications for abortion. Abortion, clearly, is absolutely essential to the one-child policy, despite extensive contraceptive provision. Abortion is available free, on request, without any need for the husband's consent. And abortion is common: just over 1 in 3 pregnancies are terminated. The vast majority are performed on married women.

But in China forced abortions are a real problem. An American anthropologist, Margery Woolf, discovered that what is known as 'mobilisation' is very common — i.e. political measures to ensure lower birth-

rates. In some regions, 'mobilisation' involved reducing the wages of workmates of women with an unauthorised pregnancy. She claimed women were forced into vans to be taken to abortion centres.

Infanticide of female children, especially in rural areas, and abortion of female foetuses also occurs. Parents wanting to qualify for one-child benefits but who would prefer a boy (considered still by many Chinese to be superior), have been known to practise female infanticide.

As the one-child policy allows parents of crippled children to have a second child, sometimes female children are deliberately disabled by their parents.

According to a Chinese survey, there were 300,000 cases of female infanticide in 1983.

Husbands sometimes divorce women who have had female babies in the hope of getting a boy with a second wife.

China is a huge country with a huge population and huge problems. Any government would have difficulty overcoming the backwardness of rural China and in limiting the population explosion. But for certain, the position of women in China is a long way from real equality, despite the propaganda of various post-revolutionary regimes.

Whatever happened to the women's movement?

From the 1960s a new mass women's movement emerged in the advanced capitalist countries. There were more women workers than ever before, more women were going into higher education, and traditional moral restrictions had been loosened.

The original four demands of the women's liberation movement in Britain, adopted in 1971, were focused on giving women freedom to escape the housewife role and to take part in society as equals with men:

- Equal pay
- Equal education and job opportunities
- Free contraception and abortion on demand
- Free 24-hour nurseries under community control.

From its very beginnings the modern women's movement contained different strands of thought. Some women saw 'male power' as the root of women's oppression. Some saw women's liberation as a matter of legal reform within existing society. But most saw the oppression of women as tied to class society, as part and parcel of a society based on exploitation of one class by another. They saw the fight for women's rights not purely as a matter of reforms but as tied to a socialist class-struggle perspective.

Initially, despite arguments at the women's liberation conferences, this variety did not harm the movement. But, as time went on, the differences became more and more sharp — and the socialists more and more marginalised.

Partly this was the fault of the socialists themselves, in particular the organised Marxist groups. Most Marxist groups at the time had a particularly sectarian attitude towards the women's liberation movement. They went along and 'intervened', but tended to counterpose bread-and-butter demands to the discussions of sexuality and other more ideological manifestations of women's oppression.

No doubt some women were hostile to all socialists, but mostly the Marxist groups gave themselves a bad press.

By the time of the last-ever women's liberation conference in 1978, the emphasis had shifted from demands around social issues to more personal

By Lynn Ferguson

questions of sexuality. The 'right of every woman to a self-defined sexuality' was made a preamble to all the other demands. The slogan 'the personal is political', which had had at its core the idea that problems which manifested themselves as personal were in fact the result of the sort of society we live in, was transformed into its opposite — the idea that changing our personal lives was the political struggle.

'Cultural feminism' began to dominate — a feminism focused on challenging 'male values' and creating a 'women's culture'. The sort of feminism which sees men as inherently aggressive and violent, and women as nurturing and peace-loving, gained ground. Stereotype ideas which the early women's movement had rebelled against were now the ideas of the movement itself.

Something else happened, too. In the late '70s and early '80s a new left emerged in the Labour Party. The 'Benn for Deputy' campaign and the fight for constitutional change in the Labour Party became a focus for a left wing which drew in many activists from campaigns in the '60s and '70s — people for whom feminism in one way or another formed part of their personal history.

Many women who had been active in the women's movement joined the Labour Party at this time. The Labour Party women's sections were transformed.

This influx of feminist women into the Labour Party had enormous potential. Women from outside the traditional sluggish structures and routines of the labour movement could shake up the Labour Party. A fight to force the labour movement to take up "women's" issues could have an immense impact on the party as a whole.

Women's Fightback argued: "If we can mount a strong campaign along these lines — challenging the existing hierarchies, helping to turn bits of the labour movement outwards to join up with struggles of the women's movement, and constructing bridges and signposts to show women ways to get in to and organise together inside the

labour movement — it could open up whole new territories for the women's movement".

Why was this potential never realised? The debacle of the local government left played a big role.

The new left in the Labour Party made a big impact in local government. Between 1978 and 1983 left-wing Labour administrations were elected in local authorities, at first in London, then in other major cities, for instance Manchester. In May 1981 Ken Livingstone was elected leader of the Greater London Council (GLC).

The GLC of May 1981 was very different from the image we now have of it. Its manifesto contained an explicit commitment to confronting the government over cuts.

"A Labour Greater London Council and Inner London Education Authority will resist any cuts and demand that the Tory Government provides the necessary finance to maintain and improve all council services. Understanding that the Tory Government does not listen to pleas but only responds to pressure, a Labour GLC and ILEA will appeal to the trade union and labour movement to take action, including industrial action, to support 'this stand'".

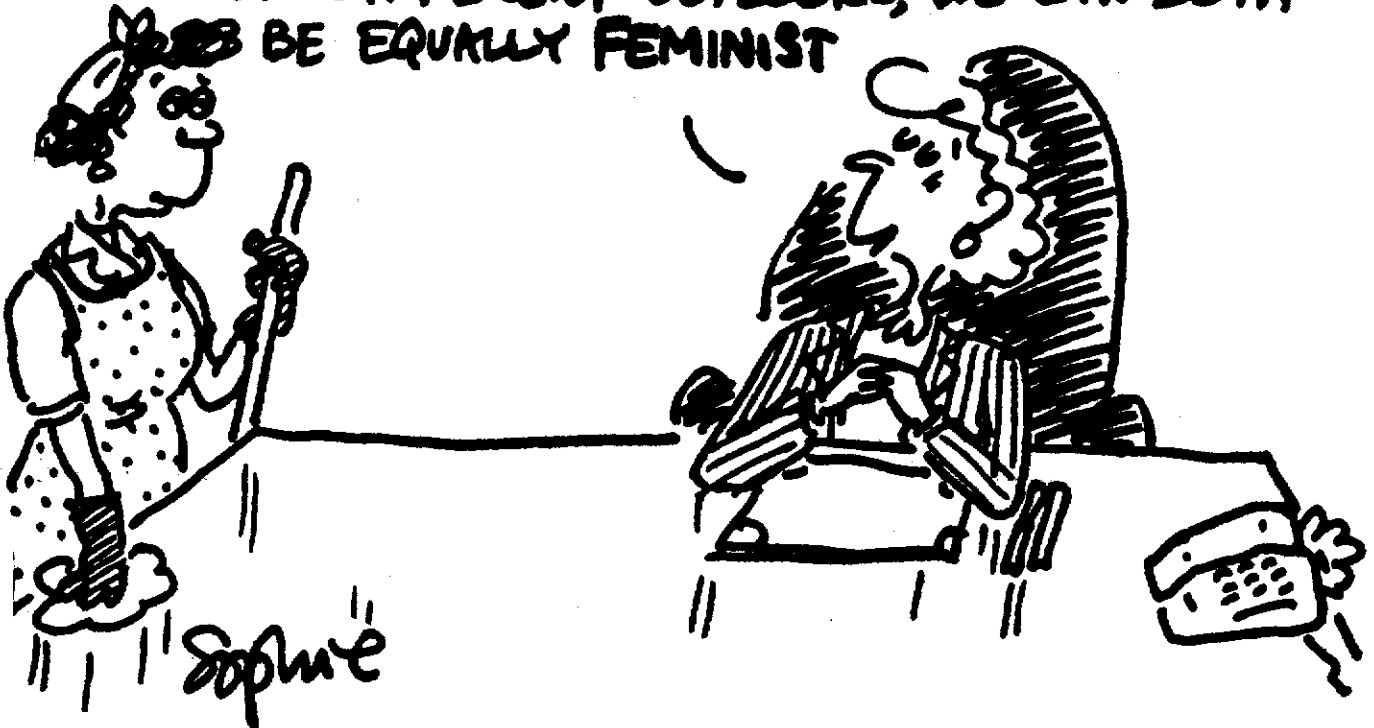
Livingstone personally pledged the support of the GLC to any workers in struggle, as part of the fight to "bring down this government ahead of its time". The GLC was geared to and focused on class struggle.

But it began to veer away from that focus very soon. At the beginning of 1982 the GLC decided to obey the courts over the 'Fares Fair' issue. As John Carvel puts it, the GLC "went legit".

From then on, Livingstone's GLC slid away from its commitment to the working class. Socialist politics were abandoned for a variant of radical liberalism. It was *after* the GLC had capitulated to the Government that the turn towards women, lesbians and gays, and equal opportunities, took place. These causes did not figure largely in the 1981 manifesto. They were adopted in the search for ways of being radical that did not mean collision with the Tories and the courts.

Hackney councillor Hilda Kean pointed out the problems with this in an interview in 1985. "How can the GLC on the one hand make all this propagan-

ISN'T IT NICE, MRS MOPPS, THAT IN SPITE OF
OUR DIFFERENT OUTLOOKS, WE CAN BOTH
BE EQUALLY FEMINIST



da about having a GLC Women's Committee and supposedly take notice of the interests of women in London, while at the same time it draws back from the fight for adequate resources for such facilities?

This is to miseducate people about the nature of women's oppression, which is seen on the level of ideas in people's heads rather than the economic way in which women are discriminated against".

Now decentralisation, women's committees, and access to local government resources for new groups, can be good. But they are not inherently socialist. And, as Hilda Kean pointed out, they do not tackle the real roots of women's oppression, and they do not touch the lives of most working-class women. The women in the GLC typing pool still had to raise their hands to ask permission to go to the toilet!

In her new book, *Labour, a tale of two parties*, Hilary Wainwright, who worked for the GLC, is fairly explicit about her views. "Looking back, the Labour Party manifesto for the 1981-85 GLC was nothing like as radical as the policies for which it later became known". What Wainwright sees as radical is the extension of pressure-group politics, not a fight against the Government.

To put it in perspective — what the GLC did was to introduce into British politics some methods from US politics — methods going back to the early 19th century, when Tammany Hall became the vehicle for the disadvantaged Irish of New York to seize control of the local government machine from the establish-

ed gentry. It introduced pressure-group politics of a broader and more extensive sort than traditional in Britain.

In terms of women's politics, the GLC experience and the model it provided for other Labour left administrations was crucial. Equal-opportunities pressure-group politics, combined with a variant of cultural feminism, has become the dominant form of women's politics. It has replaced real campaigns and real at-

'In terms of women's politics, the GLC experience and the model it provided. was crucial'

tempts to organise women to fight here and now for their liberation.

The GLC did act positively in providing money for women's projects, groups and centres. It had a huge budget which enabled it to do so. But feminist publications such as *Outwrite* and *Trouble and Strife* have expressed ambivalence about the whole funding experience. Many groups found that it limited what they were able to do politically. Some found that it militated against real involvement.

"You get paid workers in, and, in a sense, what you're doing is removing the need for the involvement of dozens of

women who used to put in the effort to produce newsletters, organise conferences, contact the press, keep the whole thing going. I think across London there are very few campaigns left, just offices and workers".

Now, of course, the party is over. The cuts which local authorities are making this year seriously affect women both as workers and as consumers of services. They have also blown apart the whole project of achieving equal opportunities by positive-discrimination measures decreed from above. What use is positive discrimination in hiring when you are cutting jobs?

We need to regroup and reorganise. We need to start building a new women's movement, a working-class-based women's movement which can fight for the interests of women now. It should be a movement like Women Against Pit Closures, but one which fights on a multiplicity of issues, and seeks to involve the mass of working-class women.

All women are oppressed under capitalism. But only working-class women have the power to lead the fight for women's emancipation.

Middle-class women and women in management may be oppressed as women, and experience sexist prejudice and male violence. But they have a definite class interest, ultimately, in maintaining the status quo — after all, they're doing very nicely thank you out of it. It is working-class women who have a real interest in fundamental change in society, the sort of fundamental change which is essential if all women are to achieve their liberation.

A working class heroine

By Alan Johnson

THE STORY of Marvell Scholl is the story of a working-class woman and a revolutionary.

She led the Women's Auxiliary which organised women to support the great truck-drivers' strike in Minneapolis, USA, in 1934.

The road by which Marvell Scholl became a socialist was one taken by many socialists before and since. She took that road with her husband Farrell Dobbs, who later led the 1934 strike and wrote a history of it.

Scholl and Dobbs married in 1927. Their hearts were full of hope and yearning for the 'American Dream'. Dobbs had left high school in 1925 to get a job. But capitalism could only offer 'the school of hard knocks', and when Marvell had children they found it impossible to make ends meet.

Farrell Dobbs scraped a living as a telephone engineer. Then he was marked out for management responsibilities — but he rebelled against big business. Scholl and Dobbs decided instead to go for their dream. He would use his termination pay to set up a small business, earn enough money to finance college education, and after that become a judge and 'use that position to deliver justice'.

As Dobbs recalls, "Before long, though, we discovered the whole thing was a pipe-dream. Our venture into the dog-eat-dog business world soon bankrupted us, and I wound up in 1933 working long hours in a Minneapolis coalyard... able to provide Marvell and our children [by then there were three of them] with no more than a hand-to-mouth existence".

The class struggle was about to take hold of the lives of Marvell Scholl and Farrell Dobbs and turn them upside down. Minneapolis was a non-union town, a scabs' paradise, ruled over by the Citizens' Alliance. This association of Minneapolis employers had full-time staff, a spy in every union, and the police at its beck and call. It had held the line against unionism for more than a generation.

Truck-drivers in Minneapolis faced poverty-level wages of as little as \$10 for up to 60 hours a week, with the threat of the sack at any time.

Dobbs joined the Teamsters' (truck-drivers') union in 1934. It was a union branch in which Trotskyists were already organised. In that same year the Trotskyists developed a plan to unionise Minneapolis in a series of courageous strikes and organising drives. The way they ran those strikes is still a model for trade unionists today.



Marvell Scholl

Marvell Scholl became active organising working-class women to support the Teamsters' strikes. The Women's Auxiliary she helped to form was inspired by the example of the women's auxiliary of the Progressive Miners of Illinois of two years previous.

Dobbs recalls that when Carl Skoglund proposed the Auxiliary, most men voted for it without enthusiasm. But once the strikes got under way the Women's Auxiliary proved its worth. It organised field hospitals for strikers injured in the street battles with police, it distributed *The Organiser*, the first daily strike bulletin in America, and it fought on the picket lines.

The Trotskyists, who had pushed for the Women's Auxiliary to be established and treasured its existence, did so for a clear political reason. As one of their leaders, James P Cannon, wrote: "Local 574 did not take any stock in the theory that capital and labour are brothers, and that the way for little brother labour to get a few crumbs is to be a good boy and appeal to the good nature of big brother capital. We see the issue between capital and labour as an unceasing struggle between the class of exploited workers and the class of exploiting parasites."

It is a war. What decides in this war, as in all others, is power. The exploiters have organised to grind us down into the dust. We must organise our class to fight back. And the women are half of the working class. Their interests are the same as ours and they are ready to fight for them. Therefore: organise them to take part in the class battle".

Victory in Minneapolis — along with victories in other strikes around the same time in San Francisco and Toledo — was the beacon for a wave of unionisation campaigns across the USA, which saw millions of unskilled workers enter the labour movement. Many of them were women and blacks, previously excluded by a trade union movement which concerned itself mostly with the skilled white male workers.

The Minneapolis Teamsters' union also organised the unemployed to refuse to scab. It repaid its debt. The Works Progress Administration set up by President Roosevelt in 1935 involved 'make-work' schemes like the Tories' present YTS and CP schemes. Then, as now, the wages paid were hardly enough to keep body and soul together, and the work was not productive.

In spring 1935 Local 574 established



Teamster defence guard battles with cops.

an auxiliary unit for the unemployed — the Federal Workers' Section. Dobbs recalls: "A close affinity grew up between the truck drivers and the unemployed. The average Local 574 member thought it only fit and proper to form the Federal Workers' Section so as to help those who had so loyally backed the union in its time of need. Affiliation with a strong trade union gave their movement unprecedented elan, stability, a new measure of dynamism, and an enhanced growth rate".

The most positive developments in today's Transport and General Workers' Union, such as in Merseyside, stand in the tradition of this movement.

"Although the Federal Workers' Section functioned under the supervision of the union's Executive Board, it had full democratic rights in forming an internal structure and in shaping its own policies. The section had its own Executive Committee, and due to the particular needs of the unemployed movement the Committee was viewed as an open-ended body to which personnel could be added as required. There was a steward formation which consisted mainly of representatives elected on WPA projects".

Marvell Scholl played a key role in fighting for aid for dependent children and organising women on a large WPA sewing scheme. Centred on this scheme was a special women's division of the Federal Workers' Section.

The FWS organised a series of battles with the city authorities over pay levels and conditions. With each victory the

size and strength of the FWS grew.

1937 saw a six-week campaign, including strikes, which forced the Public Welfare Board to grant increased payments. As one activist recalls, "We stormed every session of the Welfare Board, picketed City Hall, organised mass meetings, and mobilised big demonstrations. We held all-night vigils at the homes of Farmer-Labor Party representatives on the Board. In the end we won a year-round supplement for WPA workers".

Later in 1937, the Roosevelt government and the Minneapolis bosses launched a legal attack on this movement, with a Federal Grand Jury 'investigation' into the strikes. Over 150 strikers were convicted, most of 'conspiracy to deprive the WPA of workers' services', others on framed-up charges. Arrested in their homes, they were marched, manacled together, to jail and a series of show trials.

Marvell Scholl produced one of her most powerful pieces of writing about the first of these show trials. The strikers on trial were mainly women. The article was called 'From one woman to another'.

"Next week, when the court reconvenes, a group of our sex is coming to trial on the WPA thing. I would like to talk about these women today, to tell you something about them as persons and unionists.

Knowing them, working with them, taught many of us that women can be as good 'union men' as any member of the male sex. A little less than three years ago, the women on the WPA began to

realise that unless they did something about their own status they would be left far behind the men. Most women on the WPA are mothers, left alone to take care of their children.

Unlike the men, they had not only to work on the WPA, but they had also to maintain their homes, keep their children clean and in school, keep them fed and well.

In other words, they had a double job. It may have been easier, from a purely physical point of view, had most of them stayed on direct relief or mothers' aid — but women are no more ready or willing to take something for nothing than are the opposite sex. They clamoured for, and got, jobs, sewing, cleaning, assisting in hospitals, clerical work — anything at which they could work to earn money.

Working on huge projects, under supervisors who were prone to give favours to favourites, made a group of these WPA women workers realise that unless they organised they were lost. So they organised. They won new and better conditions for all the workers. They took care of their members, called on them when they were ill, helped them get relief when they could not work, helped them get back to a job when laid off, assisted them to do better work when they were in danger of losing good jobs because maybe sewing wasn't something they had been born to do — got parents of workers on Old Age Assistance — aided mothers to get Aid to Dependent Children when it was no longer possible for them to go on with the double job.

In other words, these women took upon their own shoulders the cares and tribulations of many hundreds of families. Took those burdens willingly, their only compensation the knowledge that somebody else's life was a little less burdensome than it had been. They worked tirelessly, completely forgetting themselves in their efforts to help others.

Next week several of these women come to trial. They are charged with 'conspiracy'. They face almost certain conviction. If these women — if any of the WPA workers who stands convicted or is in danger of being convicted — if they are guilty, then so is every man and woman in the United States who has ever dared to stand up for his or her own ideals; who has ever struck back against oppression; who has ever believed that this is a free country.

They are charged with 'conspiracy' because they believe in the Golden Rule which tells us to 'do unto others as you will be done by'. If 'conspiracy' is helping your fellow man to a better life; if 'conspiracy' is putting bread into the mouths of hungry children and old people; if 'conspiracy' is giving your all with never a thought for yourself, then they stand convicted.

They are real women. They make me proud to be a woman!"

Marxism and women's oppression

On the face of it, there is no necessary relation between women's liberation and socialism. Many socialists are sexist, and many feminists are anti-socialist. Logically, why should not common ownership of the means of production be combined with sexual discrimination, or private ownership with equality? The issue cannot be handled by abstract logic, but only by starting off from facts and history.

Women have been oppressed for thousands of years. Possibly they resisted the beginnings of this oppression with violence. For sure individual women have always kicked back and stood up for themselves. But the *programme of women's liberation* dates from capitalist society.

Mary Astell put it like this in 1706, linking women's liberation to the democratic manifesto of the bourgeois revolution. "Is it not partial in men in the last degree to contend for and practise that arbitrary dominion in their families which they abhor and exclaim against in the state?... If all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?"

Capitalism continued the oppression of women but changed it. In the old patriarchal household, women were domestic slaves. But the division of labour and the relations of power were all worked out within the household, which existed for the outside world only through the head of the household, the man.

Capitalism brought women into the labour force as independent individuals. However underpaid and overworked the woman factory or office worker, in the workplace she is not part of any man's household, but an independent person. In line with this, capitalist laws have given at least a measure or a promise of formal equality to women.

The underpinning of women's oppression in most societies has been the family property or plot of land, handed down from father to son. The woman is an indispensable partner in the family — for children are economically necessary — but a secondary one.

Jewish, Hindu, Islamic, and Christian ideologies all defined women as subordinate. Traditional Chinese usage bound women's feet. Ancient Greece was particularly ruthless in imprisoning women in the home. Roman law recognised women only as dependents of fathers or husbands. Ancient codes of law punished female adultery severely while not touching male adultery.

Probably feudal Western Europe was, of all major pre-capitalist civilisations, the least harsh in its oppression of

Lynn Ferguson traces the development of the idea of women's liberation from the pioneers, through the early socialists, Marx and Engels, the German working-class women's movement led by Clara Zetkin, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the betrayals of Stalinism — and concludes that women's liberation and workers' revolution must go hand in hand.

women. The sexual division of labour was not rigid. Women workers were frequently paid the same as men for the same work. Women, though their economic activity was much more centred on the home than men's, played a large role in social life. They dominated important trades, as for example the ale wives dominated brewing in medieval England. A widow could engage in trade as more or less the equal of men. Women at the head of convents were important people.

Still women were clearly subordinate. They could not hold any public offices. Even guilds of tradeswomen were headed by men. Generally they could not appear as independent persons in court. Rape, for example, was defined by law not as an attack on a woman's body, but as a crime against a man's property; and lords could rape peasant women with impunity.

Women inherited property only exceptionally, and in such cases the property was likely to be seen as dowry for a future husband rather than as a basis for the woman's independence. The household headed by the father was the norm on which society was based; and for each individual woman the best available course was to find a 'good' husband.

Oppression does not always, by any means, produce rebellion; and the oppression of women in feudal times produced no women's rebellion. There was no arena where women could gather collectively, as independent persons. Oppression produced not rebellion, but a search for consolations, as in the medieval Catholic cult of the Mother of God.

Industrial capitalism did not abolish women's old household drudgery, far from it. But the nature of housework was changed. It became a sphere sharply separated off from social labour, rather than closely intermingled with it. In the old order, the household was the basic economic unit. Most production was done in or around the home. Under the new industrial capitalist order, the centre of production was the factory, outside the home, bringing together people from thousands of different

households.

But the new factory system was not self-contained. The job of transforming the exhausted, dirty and hungry worker at the end of one day's work into a fresh, clean and fit person, ready for labour the following morning, was left outside it. So was the upbringing of children.

Seizing upon the subordination of women which it inherited from older societies, capitalism imposed this 'housework' on women. The natural role of women in childbirth solidified the allocation.

The state has taken on a few parts of the work (schools, nurseries). Some labour-saving devices have been introduced for the home. Yet average hours of housework are still reckoned today at about 70 a week — though in fact housework merges into (and blights) life, while wage-labour is sharply separated from it. Despite the fact that more and more housewives are also wage-workers, there is no sure evidence that hours of housework are decreasing. Unlike wage-labour, housework is structurally cut off from the labour-saving benefits of cooperation and (above a certain point) of mechanisation.

This burden of housework has become the basis for the whole elaborate structure of women's disadvantage in capitalist society, including the relegation of women to lower-paid wage-jobs modelled on their domestic roles, the organisation of labour without regard for women's special needs and problems (periods, maternity, etc).

It is structurally impossible to remove the burden within capitalism. State provision will always be limited because it is not profitable and because capitalism is inherently an individualistic system (families would not want to socialise all their housework under capitalism even if the capitalist state provided facilities). Enlightenment, feminist protests, and conscience can drive men to take over more of housework; but all evidence suggests that such a process of purely moral reform is and must be very limited in its effects.



Thus capitalism keeps women oppressed. In some respects it even worsens their situation.

But the replacement of the old order of god-given hierarchies and social stagnation by a new society which is fluid, which preaches the abstract equality of all people, and which changes itself constantly with the aid of science, contained a huge potential for women to demand and get better conditions. The relegation of the household to a secondary place in the economy likewise opened the way for women to become workers as independent persons.

Capitalism makes the promise of equality, and incites the demand for equality; but beyond a certain point its roots in the family household make it incapable of satisfying those demands and those promises. That is why the movement for women's liberation is a

child of capitalism, but potentially a tremendous force for anti-capitalist revolution.

Socialism can socialise housework and thus release the drive to equality generated by capitalism. But if it can, why should it do so? Why should the working class be expected to be responsive to feminist demands?

For sure the capitalist class will not be. Not even the women of the capitalist class will be. Beyond some formal legal reforms, which have their limits, women's equality is *expensive* to capitalism. It also threatens capitalism politically, by mobilising 50% of the working class out of passivity. The women of the capitalist class are integrated into and depend on their households. They will not sacrifice their income, and ultimately the whole system of privilege they rest on, to sex solidarity. Besides, they have the

material means to evade the burden of housework, the hard core of the oppression which bears down on the working class woman.

Working class men gain materially from sexism. But their position is different. Whatever the annoyances of women refusing the role of submissive housewife, the overall programme of socialism and women's liberation offers a levelling-up to both working class men and women, whereas for women of the capitalist class it means catastrophe.

Short-term interests divide the working class in many ways — skilled versus unskilled, employed versus unemployed, permanent workers versus temporaries, natives versus immigrants, and so on, as well as men versus women. Yet it is possible in struggle to overcome those divisions and unite round a common long-term programme. The experience of working together in the factory or office and in the strike can make working class men come to support the measures needed to give women full equality.

It is not automatic; of course not. But over 50% of the working class are women. They can be expected to respond to demands for women's liberation; and then they will put a very powerful pressure on working class men to support those demands.

Classical Marxism and women

The early 19th century socialists — the most radical and thorough of the advocates of the idea of human emancipation or liberation which was launched by the American and French Revolutions — were also advocates of *women's emancipation*. Charles Fourier declared: "The degree of emancipation of women is the natural measure of general emancipation."

Fourier, writing in 1808, also went beyond legal formalities in his programme for equality. "People would be housed in large buildings which would be equipped with various services including creches. Young children would be cared for communally. There would be communal restaurants and public rooms..." (Sheila Rowbotham, 'Hidden from History'). Robert Owen had similar ideas.

There were exceptions in the socialist movement. Until relatively late in the 19th century there was a strong current of 'proletarian anti-feminism', represented by such leaders as Proudhon and Lassalle. They reflected the element in the working class that looked backward — to the old patriarchal household economy — rather than forward. (In early 19th century England, radical workers often defined their aim as a return to the happy state before the 'Norman yoke' was imposed in 1066). Claiming they wished to protect women, they opposed women's employment in industry. Proudhon, in Marx's words, sang "the glories of the petty bourgeoisie and of the miserable

patriarchal and amorous illusions of the domestic hearth."

Marx and Engels added little or nothing to the programme of their more radical predecessors. They integrated that programme into a perspective of class struggle rather than utopia-building; they opposed Proudhon's ideas as "both reactionary and Utopian" because they tried to run backwards away from that class struggle.

In 'Origin of the Family' (1884) Engels endeavoured to use the researches of the US anthropologist Lewis Morgan to map the evolution of women's position. The attempt has been criticised in the light of later research, but for sure the *approach* was a lasting scientific advance. The position of women was discussed in terms of the changing material conditions that determined it, not just in terms of abstract moral rights and wrongs.

Engels also summarised the socialist programme: "The modern individual family is based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement of the woman; and modern society is a mass composed solely of individual families as its molecules...In the family, (the man) is the bourgeois; the wife represents the proletariat..."

"The peculiar character of man's domination over woman in the modern family, and the necessity, as well as the manner, of establishing real social equality between the two will be brought out into full relief only when both are completely equal before the law. It will then become evident that the first premise for the emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry; and that this again demands that the quality possessed by the individual family of being the economic unit of society be abolished..."

"With the passage of the means of production into common property, the individual family ceases to be the economic unit of society. Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of the children becomes a public matter. Society takes care of all children equally, irrespective of whether they are born in wedlock or not" — and, Engels adds, this will underpin a great expansion of sexual freedom.

The German Social Democratic Women's Movement

In 1879 August Bebel, leader of the German Social Democratic party, the SPD, published a book "Women and Socialism". This explored the historical origins of women's subordination, and presented a picture of what socialism would mean to women, both materially, and in terms of relations between the sexes.

The impact of the book was enormous. By 1895 it had gone through 25 editions in Germany alone, as well as having been translated into several languages. Otilie Baader, a working class woman activist, later remembered:

"Although I was not a social-democrat, I had friends who belonged to the party. Through them I got the precious work. I read it right through. It was my own fate, and that of thousands of my sisters. Neither in the family nor in public life had I even heard of all the pain the woman must endure. Her life was ignored. Bebel's book courageously



Clara Zetkin

'The abandonment of serious attempts by the party as a whole to organise and educate women for socialism was the sharp end of its abandonment of any perspective of organising the working class as a whole for its emancipation'

broke with the old secretiveness...I read the book not once, but ten times. Because everything was so new, it took considerable effort to come to grips with Bebel's views. I had to break with so many things I had previously regarded as correct."

In 1885 came the publication of Engels' "Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State". This examined in detail, on the basis of the available anthropological work, the historical origins of women's oppression.

In 1891 the first issue of Die Gleichheit (Equality) appeared, edited by Clara Zetkin. This paper was intend-

ed as an educator of women party members, geared towards the development of women party cadre. It was quite heavily theoretical, and Zetkin constantly argued within the party for the maintenance of this bias, as against any watering down in the quest for some mythical 'mass appeal'.

Women workers had to be organised into trade unions, and drawn towards the party. For this a network of *vertavenspersonen* was to be appointed — women comrades who would take on the job of agitation/organisation amongst working class women. Because of the anti-socialist laws existing in Germany at the time, which prohibited women from directly joining political organisations, this seemed the best way to proceed. Women were also prohibited from joining the same trades unions as men, and one way this was got around was by setting up women's trade associations, which developed links with the corresponding 'men's' unions. This enforced separate organisation probably coincidentally aided the development of women activists, and forced them into leadership positions within the trades associations.

In 1908 the anti-socialist laws were repealed, and women were legally able to become party members. By 1910 there were 189,442 women in trade unions, 82,642 women party members, and Die Gleichheit had a circulation of 82,000. The circulation of Die Gleichheit peaked in 1913 at 112,000.

But the work amongst women was very much the task of the women comrades themselves. The party as a whole does not seem to have taken this work particularly seriously. During this period the divisions between right and left within the party, between the reformist wing and the revolutionaries was widening. Zetkin and Die Gleichheit were consistently on the left, and the marginalisation of the women's work cannot be separated from the attempts by the right to squash the left.

With the outbreak of war in 1914, and the voting for war credits of the majority of the SPD's representatives in the Reichstag, the split became irreparable. Die Gleichheit attempted to put a proletarian internationalist anti-war line in the face of terrible state harassment and censorship, colluded in by the SPD leadership. The paper appeared with more and more blank columns, to reveal the extent to which it had been silenced. Ultimately Zetkin was removed by the party as editor and Die Gleichheit was politically neutered.

Zetkin, with other Leftists, among them Rosa Luxemburg and Paul Liebknecht went on to form a new communist party and made attempts to continue some sort of communist work among women. As for the SPD organisation, after the war it became a sort of cross between the worst sort of

Labour Party women's section and the Women's Institute — mainly doing electoral donkey-work, and welfare work among the working class.

We have much to learn from the work pioneered by Zetkin. The development of special methods for work amongst women, which take into account their special difficulties of participation, is essential. The smashing of the women's movement by Social Democracy only goes to show how closely tied the fate of women is with that of the working class. The abandonment of serious attempts by the party as a whole to organise and educate women for socialism was the sharp end of its abandonment of any perspective for organising the working class as a whole for its emancipation.

Bolshevism and Stalinism

The Bolsheviks, under the leadership of Kollontai, Inessa Armand and Samoslova, were pupils of Zetkin and the German movement in relation to organising women.

On taking power the Bolsheviks abolished all reactionary laws relating to women, and established full political and legal equality for women. Freedom of divorce, abortion, etc., were introduced. Special trains were organised to take birth control facilities into remote areas. All laws against homosexuality were scrapped until 1934.

And a great beginning was made towards freeing women from domestic toil. Communal kitchens, laundries and creches were established.

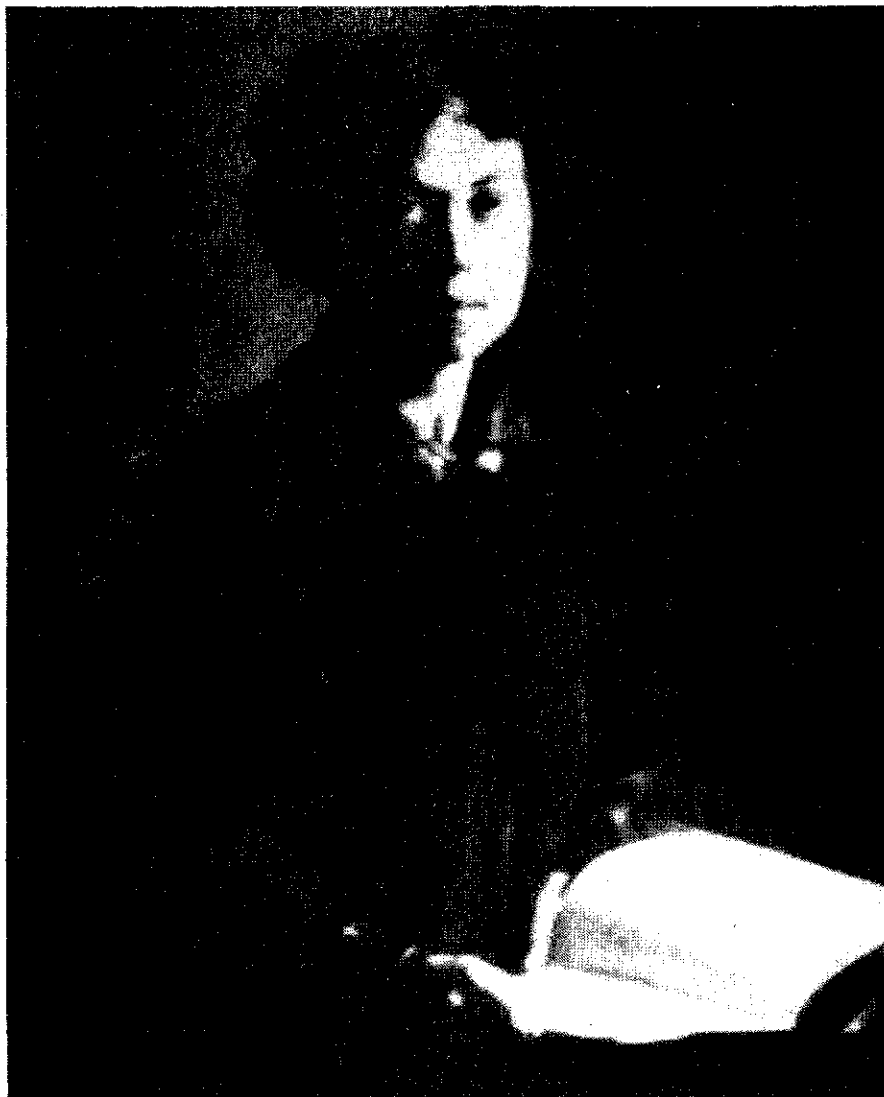
But these facilities were always far from adequate both in terms of quality and quantity. Trotsky wrote:

"Moreover, the existing creches, even in Moscow, Leningrad, and the other centres, are not satisfactory as a general rule to the least fastidious demands. 'A creche in which the child feels worse than he does at home is not a creche but a bad orphan asylum', complains a leading Soviet newspaper. It is no wonder that the better-placed workers' families avoid creches."

The same applied to other facilities. The communal dining halls left much to be desired when compared to "home cooking". The laundries did virtually everything but return your laundry clean and fit for use. None of this is particularly surprising, if we think about the nature of the Soviet Union at this time — a materially backward country, with a predominantly peasant economy, where the First World War was followed by the revolution and then civil war in defence of the revolution.

Trotsky warned that only "our children and grandchildren will realise this aim" of women's full emancipation. Some Bolsheviks, however, went in for doctrinaire fancies.

"The sequence of war, revolution and civil war had produced many of the same unpremeditated and disintegrating effects on family and sex relations as on



Alexandra Kollontai

other aspects of social life. Here too, 'war communism' marked a specific period; and here, too, what in other conditions would have been treated as the unwelcome result of chaos, confusion and licence was now retrospectively, justified in terms of socialist doctrine." (EH Carr, 'Socialism in One Country', Vol 1., p.27).

With the development of a privileged bureaucracy which usurped political power from the working class, all this changed. The Stalinist big lie, that the Soviet Union was "steaming towards socialism" made it impossible to admit that anything was wrong with the position of women. The exodus of the workers from the shoddy communal facilities was answered with the rehabilitation of the family hearth, of motherhood and of the traditional feminine role. Divorce and abortion laws were tightened up. Women were no longer permitted to decline "the joys of motherhood" as "we have need of people". Working class and peasant women, that is. As for the bureaucrats' wives, "they will, as formerly, do what they find necessary under the very nose

of an indulgent judiciary" (Trotsky).

The enormous gains made by women were completely lost, to be replaced by the old slavery of domestic toil. The old family units were reinforced as 'forty million points of support' for the bureaucracy.

What conclusions do we draw from this. Was it simply that material conditions made the advancement of women impossible? Or was it that the conservative philistinism of party men about women overcame their revolutionary principles?

Eurocommunists argue that the experience of the USSR shows that socialism will not bring women's liberation without an autonomous women's movement. But the Stalinist USSR was not and is not socialist. The problem was not the workers' movement excessively dominating women's organisation, but the workers' movement and all independent organisation, male or female, being crushed. The history of the USSR does not show women's position declining while the working class forged ahead — but the defeat of women coming with the defeat of the working class.

The world turned upside down

An account of 'Women Against Pit Closures', first published in 1985

"At a time of unrest and strike action, the proletarian woman, downtrodden, timid, without rights, suddenly grows and learns to stand tall and straight. The self-centred narrow-minded and politically backward "female" becomes an equal, a fighter, a comrade. The transformation is unconscious and spontaneous, but it is important and significant because it reveals the way in which participation in the workers' movement brings the woman worker towards her liberation, not only as the seller of labour power, but also as a woman, a wife, a mother and a housekeeper."

Alexandra Kollontai wrote that in 1920, yet it could be about today. Alexandra was writing a history of working class Russian women with whom she fought, as a socialist and sister, against the Tsarist tyranny. The development and organisation of those women then is comparable to the spirit of the women today, organising in Women Against Pit Closures groups.

The Russian women Kollontai writes of were struggling for basic rights of bread, peace and land. They fought alongside their male counterparts but fought also for their self-liberation as women.

Women Against Pit Closures was much more than a support group of women fighting for the jobs of their husbands, sons, brothers, lovers.

At first, women responded to the strike by providing essential services — organising food distribution, soup kitchens, etc.

Within weeks, women were not just staffing the soup kitchens but organising pickets, rallies, demonstrations, collections and public speaking.

"On early pickets, 2.30 am and 4.30 am, too early to go back to bed. Back in an hour or two or three. Stay up to see the kids up and breakfast. Food parcels to go out 11 am — 3 pm. Back for the kids coming home. Tea time. Meeting, social security problems to sort out. Someone needs shoes for the picket line. Someone is depressed. Fund-raising needs organising. Provisions need buying for the food parcels, and parcels need making up, 500 of them..."

The list of tasks is endless and gruelling. Most women doing this have kids, some like Ann from Kiveton Park have jobs to do as well. Some like Mary from Wales have to stop a husband and son going back to work.

Clearly the strike could not have got



this far if it were not for the dynamic, forceful organisation of women in the pit villages. The level of solidarity they have provided has been unrivalled by any other section of the organised labour movement.

Crusty socialists still maintain that the self-organisation of women is by nature divisive and what is more, working class women just don't do it. Really?

Women Against Pit Closures have turned such arguments on their head.

"It was as though women had been asleep for hundreds of years. We awoke to a new awareness, a realisation of what we as women could do. It is only comparable to the suffragettes. Do you know, I believe we are a part of history being made" (from South Yorkshire).

The aspirations raised by women involved in the strike can only take us forward. Women have gained much by breaking their isolation, having childcare more available and collective eating. We must now organise around such demands as 24 hour, free nurseries, a woman's right to choose and collective facilities.

"After the strike we will keep ourselves together and do you know what we'll do first! We'll have a campaign against low pay because it hits women — and we'll start with the women in the canteen and bar staff — get them a pay rise, something the NUM should have done" (from South Yorkshire).

In a traditionally male dominated set-up, many men acknowledged the contribution of women and learnt to respect

their need for independence. A sense of equality was reached far greater than at any other time of our working class history.

At the same time, women witnessed in themselves changing consciousness and political awareness which made them say "We cannot go back to the status quo".

Kids ate better in the collective soup kitchens, shopping had a whole new meaning — it was collective or non-existent because it was distributed, shared and some days you didn't have to do it at all.

Women got out more, went off on flying pickets, went to meetings or even got away to parties...organised by support groups. Women met other women in struggle, from Greenham Common, from Barking and South London Hospitals, from Namibia, from Ireland.

Women do not want to return to the status quo. That means we have to take up women's demands and fight for them here and now. Women fought alongside their men in the NUM because they realised that if the NUM is smashed then our hopes of equality and liberation will be that harder to fight for.

Working class women, normally isolated and alienated in the home came out, got together and organised with determination to win.

Though circumstances were the most materially severe and repressive they had ever experienced there has been a sense of freedom gained. It has cut across much of the mythology of women's "natural" role, leading them to question their former selves.



Stop clause 28!

Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill prohibits local councils undertaking the 'promotion' of homosexuality. 'Promotion' means, presumably, the policy of some councils which have attempted to show that homosexuality is perfectly 'normal', and as valid a form of sexuality as heterosexuality.

In fact, for the right wing bigots behind Clause 28, it means any mention of homosexuality at all that is not accompanied by warnings of an eternity spent in the flames of hell. In practice, what it means exactly will depend upon the interpretation of the courts.

Lesbian women will be deeply affected by this new law. It is the first step towards the criminalisation of homosexuality, and although lesbianism is not covered so explicitly in existing law as male homosexuality, life has not been a bed of roses up to now.

Society frowns very deeply on lesbianism, and lesbians face widespread discrimination and persecution. The traditional image of 'butch' dykes who threaten 'ordinary' women is still extremely common. As a random example, the Sun of 18 January, reporting on the sentence of 25 years hard labour for a British woman in Egypt put top of the list of endurances ahead of her 'ATTACK by lesbian prisoners'. Lesbians, you see, all ATTACK 'innocent victims'

By Liz Millward

(and, moreover, as they are all likely GBH convicts, **ATTACK** will be the operative word).

Stereotyping is only one of the problems lesbian women have to put up with. Being sacked from jobs connected with children is one form of discrimination (as well as **ATTACKING** children, lesbians also **CORRUPT** them.

If the children are their own, lesbian mothers find custody often difficult to keep. Lesbians are supposed to make bad mothers.

The new law threatens to destroy what positive changes have been made over the last 20 years. Where they exist, local authority-funded lesbian and gay centres could be axed. Polly Tonybee in The Guardian recently commented that it is "offensive" for lesbians and gay men to be subsidised on the rates — although why we shouldn't see some of the rates we pay used directly in our own benefit she didn't say. In fact, lesbian and gay centres/helplines and so on are a vital resource for us. Their abolition would be a return to the Dark Ages. Pubs, clubs and discos could lose council-provided licences. Equal opportunity clauses (where they exist) could go

out the window.

Within schools the effects will be particularly drastic. Lesbian and gay teachers will be forced back into the closet. How can a lesbian or gay teacher answer questions from students about sexuality without 'promoting' their own? How dare anyone suggest that they should not 'promote' their own?

With a clampdown on *positive* images of lesbians and gay men, lesbian and gay youth — or screwed up youth who are not sure yet — will have less chance of avoiding a miserable adolescence. A young woman with lesbian feelings who can't identify with her 'role-models', or who is terrified of what she feels, will have no one to tell her *not* to be terrified, *not* to be disgusted by her own feelings, that she is *not* sick, *not* mad, *not* abnormal.

On the other hand, without a challenge to prejudice, other kids will grow up to indulge in that popular sport of 'queerbashing'; and women 'queers', of course, also get bashed.

We live in a world where there is always the danger of a police raid (for no reason at all) on a lesbian disco, where bigotry is everywhere. The so-called 'promotion' of homosexuality — that is, challenging bigotry — is the only way to make the future better. Clause 28 promises to make the future horrible.

Women and AIDS

By Georgina Smith

The initial media coverage of AIDS in Britain focused upon gay men. Only after the first government campaign was based on the slogan 'AIDS isn't prejudiced' ('gay or straight, male or female, everyone is at risk') was there any real consideration of the ways AIDS affects women.

There have been relatively few cases of AIDS in women in the UK (24 by the Autumn of 1987) — although there must be considerably more women who are antibody positive. But Britain is a long way from New York. In a recent survey, nearly 1% of babies born in New York State were found to be HIV positive.

AIDS is now the main killer of women aged 25-29, and the second most important cause of death in those aged 30-34.

Whilst the early expectations regarding a forthcoming 'epidemic' of AIDS amongst women have not been realised, it is impossible to predict what will happen in the future.

Heterosexual transmission of the virus seems to occur at different rates in different groups of people, which may reflect co-existing infections (by sexually transmitted diseases and others), nutritional status and general health.

However, women can definitely be infected by male partners, and certain sexual practices (especially anal intercourse) seem to be more likely to pass on the virus than others.

Health education information has never pointed out that lesbians are at very low, if any, risk of contracting AIDS from sexual contact. There is apparently only one documented case of AIDS having spread between a lesbian couple and other factors — intravenous drug use and sexual practices involving blood contact — were involved.

The main way in which women feature in writings about AIDS is in discussions regarding prostitutes. Prostitutes are seen as a major threat to their clients — it is not mentioned that the prostitutes themselves are in danger, especially since men might spread the virus more easily than women. A survey in early 1987 carried out in a London sexually transmitted diseases clinic found low rates of HIV positivity in female prostitutes — less than 2% with most of these being intravenous drug users.

But prostitutes fit nicely into the media categories of AIDS sufferers as 'guilty' — gay men, intravenous drug users, Africans (categorised as promiscuous and engaging in odd sexual practices) and prostitutes; or 'innocent' — haemophiliacs, people who have received blood transfusions. Initially

male and female heterosexuals were seen as innocent, but last year's campaign 'Don't die of ignorance' changed this: ignorance is seen to be a culpable offence, and the punishment is death.

The current health education recommendations regarding safe sex focus on condoms. The responsibility for avoiding unwanted pregnancy has been seen to be with women, and most methods of contraception have been aimed at us. Therefore the focus of the government safe sex campaign on condoms — a 'male' method of birth control — may seem to threaten this status quo. But carrying and insisting on the use of condoms has now become a woman's task: publications from *Cosmopolitan* to the *Sun* delight in such slogans as 'smart girls carry condoms'.

The safe sex campaign reinforces the view of penetrative sex as the only 'real sex', and has avoided challenging this assumption by exposition of non-penetrative forms of safe sex. (Penetration is often incidental to female pleasure but is, seemingly, pivotal for male sexuality).

The response to the advent of AIDS has been shaped by (and may in the future shape) the way society conditions power relationships between men and women, both inside and outside of marriage and long term relationships.

The threat of HIV infection and AIDS becomes an additional violation in cases of rape. In the USA HIV-positive rapists have been charged with attempted murder; but increasing the severity of sentences is as unlikely to be any more effective in dealing with this new threat as it is in dealing with rape in the first place. What needs to be dealt with are the reasons men rape, and how this reflects the relative positions of men and women in society generally.

Encouraging women to take responsibility for safe sex ignores the existence of domestic violence and rape within marriage — situations in which women are often literally powerless.

Even outside these situations, advocacy of safe sex is not unproblematic: within long term relationships the suggestion of safe sex is implicitly an accusation of unfaithfulness. Carrying condoms might seem to imply promiscuity and 'being easy' within a society which privileges and moralises around marriage and monogamy.

Safe sex is, by necessity, infertile sex. The impact of AIDS on reproduction has not been discussed much, however, since people in the 'risk groups' — gay

men, intra-venous drug users, prostitutes — aren't seen as people who have children — a false assumption.

The best estimate of the rate of infection of foetuses carried by HIV positive women is 50%. Whether breast milk can transmit the virus is uncertain, and is currently the subject of EEC-sponsored research.

It has often been assumed that pregnancy speeds up the progression of AIDS or facilitates the transition of HIV positivity into the full-blown disease. This seems unlikely because the immune system is suppressed in pregnancy, but there is as yet no conclusive evidence for this. There have already been calls for screening of pregnant women — accompanied by pressure for abortion and sterilisation of anti-body positive women.

Clearly AIDS will become increasingly used as a justification for regulating fertility as well as sexuality.

Many women may view HIV positivity as a reason not to have children, adding an additional trauma to the diagnosis. Since there appears to be no risk of HIV transmission by household contact, fostering and adoption should be an option here, although it is likely there would be bigotted resistance to this.

AIDS also has implications for reproductive technology — HIV has been transmitted by artificial insemination, and it seems women in American lesbian self-insemination groups have become infected in this way.

The fact that it is difficult if not impossible for declared lesbians to be accepted at insemination clinics means that they are not protected by the screening of sperm carried out at such clinics.

AIDS has already exposed some of the iniquities in the relationship between men, women and the state. Notably the advent of AIDS has led to the mass dissemination of safe sex propaganda. But cervical cancer kills far more women than AIDS has in the past, and will in the foreseeable future. For years it has been known that cervical cancer — and pelvic inflammatory disease which can cause severe symptoms and infertility — could be prevented by the same safe sex practices that are advocated for the prevention of HIV transmission. But no action was taken until the arrival of AIDS, and only then when it became a risk for heterosexual men. The safe sex literature makes no mention of exclusively female health problems even though cervical cancer is at present the sexually transmitted disease causing the most deaths.

There are currently more women dy-

AND FIVE HOURS
LATER HE WAS STILL
GOING THROUGH HIS
SEXUAL HISTORY...

FORGET IT



ing of it each year than there are men
and women dying of AIDS. Whilst

AIDS appears to be a new disease, the
social attitudes and structures which

have shaped the response to it have been
here seemingly for ever.

Child abuse

Angela Fraser examines the difficult issue of child abuse, and argues that the answer must lie in society becoming responsible for caring for children, rather than them being their family's property.

THE LAST two to three years have seen an increase in the number of reported cases of child abuse — both physical and sexual.

The ages of children treated by paediatricians, psychologists and psychiatrists range from infancy to adolescence. A spokesperson for the National Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children recently announced that babies as young as three months old can be victims of sexual abuse.

Abused children not only suffer from the actual abuse itself, but can also suffer further physical and health problems such as VD, drug and alcohol problems, and severe psychological problems.

Childline, with all its faults and limitations, receives eight to ten thousand calls a day. This helps to support the NSPCC's claim that three or four children a week die from child abuse, but because of misdiagnosis it goes unnoticed. In July 1987 NSPCC announc-

ed a 137% increase in reported cases of sexual abuse.

It is clear that child sexual abuse in the family is far more widespread than the sex exploitation, like child prostitution and pornography, that the media has always tended to highlight. Sexual abusers are nearly always portrayed as predatory lunatics hiding in alleyways, whereas in actual fact most sexual abuse takes place within the home and the family.

The Cleveland affair shows just how adept the media is at taking away attention from one issue and making another issue paramount. In this case, it has made individual social workers and doctors look incompetent and overzealous, and child abuse within the family, a small problem.

The media chose to ignore the fact that, since the Jasmine Beckford Report, 16 extra social worker posts for specialists in child abuse had been created in Cleveland in the last year; that those workers set about clearing a backlog of suspected cases; and that, as everyone knows, the harder you look for something the more likely you are to find it.

For most of the children involved there were signs of sexual abuse. The really worrying thing, though, is that the most common forms of sexual abuse are fondling, masturbation, and oral sex, which leave no outward signs. This would suggest that, in reality, the Cleveland workers have really only uncovered the tip of the iceberg.

Taking children into care can be very damaging in itself — even if the child is a victim of abuse. Those children are usually scapegoated by their families, who deny and cover up their own emotional and sexual problems. The child blames itself for the problems — otherwise why have they been taken from the family home?

Taking children into care can then be seen as a form of abuse in itself. Clearly it is better for children to build on rela-



Dr Marietta Higgs — witch-hunted for trying to protect abused children

tionships they have got, rather than break up families, but what are social workers to do?

It is ironic that on the very day that Greenwich social worker Martin Rud-dock faced an inquiry as to why Kimberley Carlile had not been removed from home sooner, Teesside social workers were being accused, in the courts, of intervening too soon in suspected child sex abuse cases. Nothing illustrates more clearly the dilemma facing social workers.

The fact of the matter is that taking children into care is used as a form of punishment for those erring families who happen to have been found 'lacking', instead of care being seen as a service to which families and children are entitled. Many families actually ask for their children to be taken into care, hoping to protect them, only to find that they are unable to get them back afterwards.

At the moment, social workers are faced with the dilemma of choosing the lesser of two evils — whether the effects of taking a child into care outweigh the effects of abuse.

Personally, I think we have to argue for the care option. But as socialists we have to raise the issue of free state care being a right to which all families are entitled, to use as and when they feel they need it — not, as now, a form of punishment to families.

At the moment the public has tended to focus on the more serious cases of sexual abuse. But there is a danger, amidst all the public curiosity, fanned by the media, that even ordinary physical interactions in families will become suspect — bathing with mum and dad, for instance.

All children are sexual beings, and parents need to respond to this fact. Most mothers will have experienced the young male toddler proudly showing off his erect penis, or the young female's curiosity of dad's penis. All this is quite natural, but there's a danger that with the increase in publicity normal responses to children may be mistaken for something more sinister.

How parents react to their children's sexuality is not only a personal but also a cultural thing. In some societies mothers are encouraged to regularly stimulate their daughters, from birth, endeavouring to ensure a good sex life in adulthood. Other societies use the gentle stroking of an infant's genitals to soothe and pacify fretful babies. In our society both things would probably be seen by many as fondling, and thus be construed as child sex abuse.

The furore created by Cleveland provides the ideal arena for warring neighbours to get back at each other, and for the moral right wing and for radical feminists.

For the crusaders of the moralistic



A mother weeps on the steps of Middlesborough General Hospital

right wing, the family has priority and has to be defended at all costs. Promiscuity and 'abnormal' sexual practices (i.e. gay and lesbian sex) will come in for a battering, with calls for a return to traditional patriarchal values.

The radical feminists, on the other hand, will use the issue to break what they see as the male power of patriarchy, which is symbolised by the nuclear family, with all the abuse of women and children by men in general in society.

Neither blunderbuss approach is much use to children at risk. It is crucial that when we raise the issue of child sex abuse it is not done in isolation.

While we need to call for the socialisation of child care as of right, for more resources to be put into providing and training social workers and specialists in child abuse, and for more sex education for children to enable them to understand and to be able to take to adults about what constitutes abuse, we have to be clear that capitalism is the root of the

problem.

Because of the strains, stresses, and antagonisms that capitalist society generates, the family can appear to be a haven from the cruel world outside — whereas, in actual fact, the very 'qualities' needed to 'succeed' in a society based on inequalities and power are learned and reinforced within the family.

Capitalism requires that the family 'cares' and socialises children to be the next generation of workers, ready to submit to the hierarchies in the workplace and in society as a whole.

Children, like women, are tied economically to the family — there is nowhere else for them to go. In fact, adult power over children is so absolute that in a sense all children are abused and all adults abusers.

All the while children are dependent and the property of the family and not the responsibility of society as a whole, child abuse will continue.

Dealing with VDUs

70 per cent of the members of the civil service workers' union CPSA are women. The union faces a crucial test over the health risks of VDUs — one which concerns many other women workers too. Trudy Saunders reports.

Thatcher has sworn that during her current term in office she will "rationalise" the Civil Service and make it "more efficient". What this means in practice is thousands of job losses, the use of Youth Training Scheme trainees, privatisation and casualisation.

Her aim is not only to cut government

spending on the Civil Service to a bare minimum but also to smash the unions, particularly the union of the clerical and typing grades, the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA).

In the DHSS, clerical workers — the vast majority of whom are women — are particularly affected by Tory plans to

computerise the Department. This not only involves transferring all claimants' files to computers, but it also involves bringing in Fowler's vicious social security reviews, which the Militant-led DHSS Section Executive Committee has so far failed to fight.

This increased computerisation will mean thousands of job losses. The Tories maintain that workers will be redeployed, but the numbers are so high that job losses are inevitable.

The Tories are also attempting (and have already done so in a few offices) to bring in Limited Period Appointees (LPAs). LPAs only have a limited contract, no union rights, and can be sacked at any time. Coupled with increasing encouragement of workers to work part-time it is likely that the numbers of clerical workers in the Civil Service who are women will increase.

This is of particular significance in view of the health risks posed by the use of Visual Display Units (VDUs). Due to the computerisation of DHSS, the number of VDUs used will massively increase, and it will be mainly women clerical workers who will be using them.

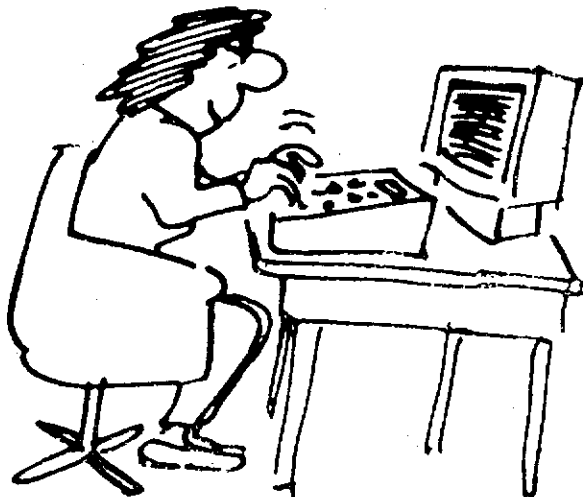
Numerous reports point to the risk of an abnormal pregnancy if a pregnant woman works at a VDU. In one government office where large numbers of women work at VDUs the number of miscarriages and other abnormalities is proportionately much higher than in other offices where VDU use is much less. The current union agreement states that:

"Where a woman who may be or who is pregnant asks to be redeployed away from work with a VDU, management will normally agree to that request urgently."

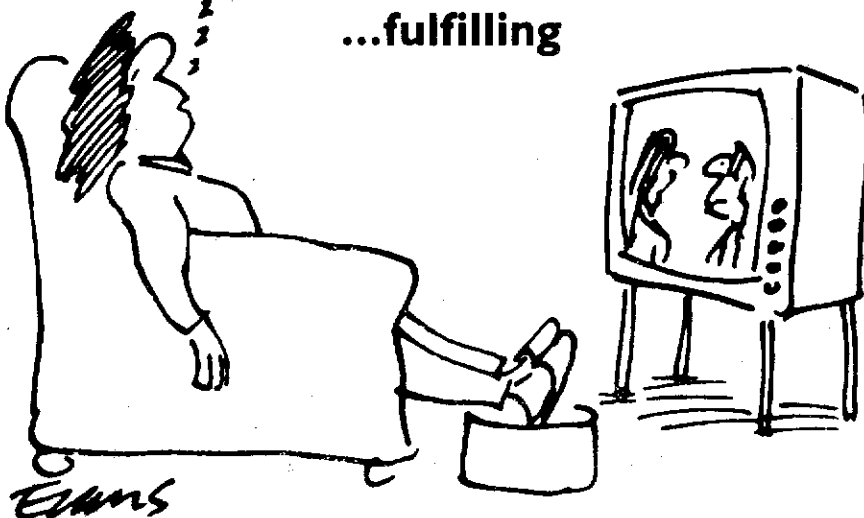
This agreement is fine if the woman in question has a sympathetic manager and if there is somewhere for her to be redeployed, but as VDUs are increasingly used with the computerisation of the DHSS, this part of the agreement will become virtually useless.

Those on the left of the CPSA, namely the Socialist Caucus which includes Socialist Organiser and Women's Fightback supporters, argued at the time

Despite the greater stress, new technology is much more...



...fulfilling



of the agreement that it simply did not protect pregnant women, and that the only acceptable agreement would be one which gave not only pregnant women, but also women *wishing* to become pregnant the *automatic right* to be redeployed away from a VDU. Militant supporters, who took the line of the right wing and argued for the agreement as it stands, are now admitting to the need to change this section of it.

And it is vital we do so, or pregnant VDU operators in the Civil Service will face the choice of risking losing their baby or losing their job.

VDU operators also face a number of other health risks. Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) is a work-induced illness caused by continuous rapid, repetitive finger, hand, wrist or arm movements which can lead to swelling in the muscles or tendons. Assembly line work has been known to cause it and due to the introduction of new technology in offices it is now common amongst keyboard operators.

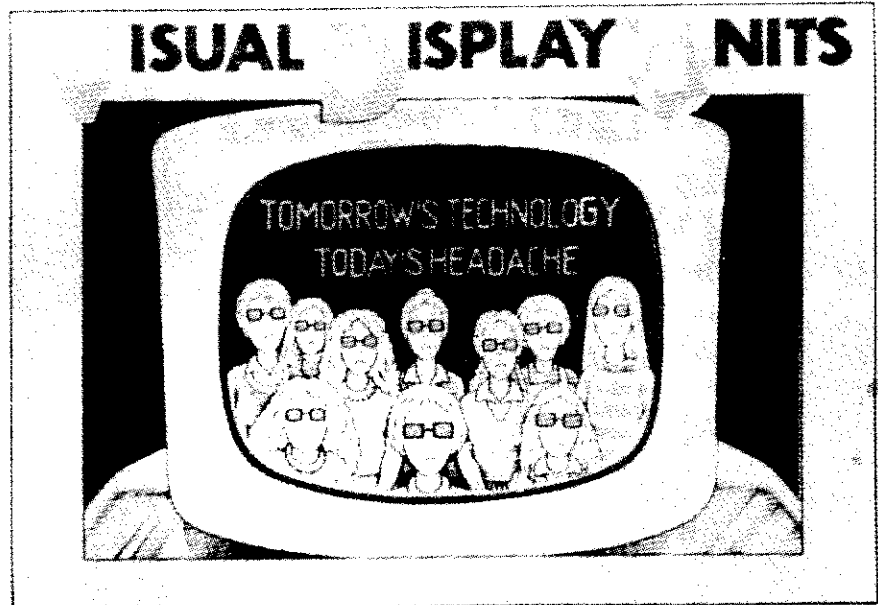
RSI can be avoided by frequent rests from the VDU. The Civil Service agreement states that:

"After any continuous period of 1½ hours they will not be expected to operate the VDU within the next 15 minutes".

However, with the rush to process files when the DHSS switches to full-scale new technology, VDU operators will be under great pressure to work through without any breaks thus risking permanent damage and disability. The threat of non-unionised casual workers will also undermine the union's ability to ensure its members are protected from developing RSI.

Headaches, eyestrain and other related complaints are common amongst VDU operators. According to a recent study by Dr. Arnold Wilkins of the Applied Psychology Unit, Cambridge, imperceptible flickers in tube lighting and on VDU screens can trigger headaches and other problems among office workers. VDU workers in the DHSS are currently entitled to a free eye-test and part of the cost towards glasses if they are needed but these measures in no way combat the problems identified by Dr. Wilkins. Such problems will be particularly acute amongst DHSS VDU operators as their managers pressurise them to meet the deadline set by the government for transfer of files.

The last year has been a series of missed opportunities for the CPSA in general and for the CPSA Broad Left in particular. In 1986 the New Technology Agreement was agreed on by the members. It gives no guarantee of no job losses and does not protect pregnant women. The Broad Left fought against it. But it was an unintelligible agreement and members voted on the recommendation of the then right-wing controlled National Executive Committee (NEC).



In the DHSS, the DHSS Section Executive Committee (SEC), dominated by Militant supporters, backed down from fighting Fowler's Social Security Reviews. Fowler's reviews have dire implications for claimants and workers alike.

So in 1986 we got the New Technology Agreement and Fowler's Reviews. If that wasn't bad enough, in 1987 the DHSS SEC sold out members who took action against Limited Period Appointees and subsumed the issue into a general staff-

ing campaign, so opening the way for casual staff in DHSS offices.

The implications of casual workers, Fowler's reviews and new technology are in the first instance job losses which we must fight against. In the second instance, in the light of medical research, the health of DHSS workers, particularly women workers, is seriously at risk. The CPSA NEC and DHSS SEC must give a strong lead in ensuring that members' health is not put at risk and that pregnant women's jobs are protected.



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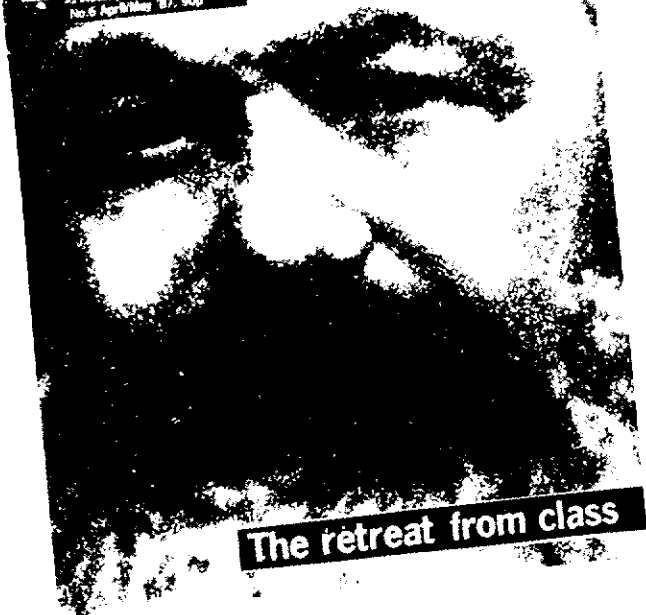
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The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race.

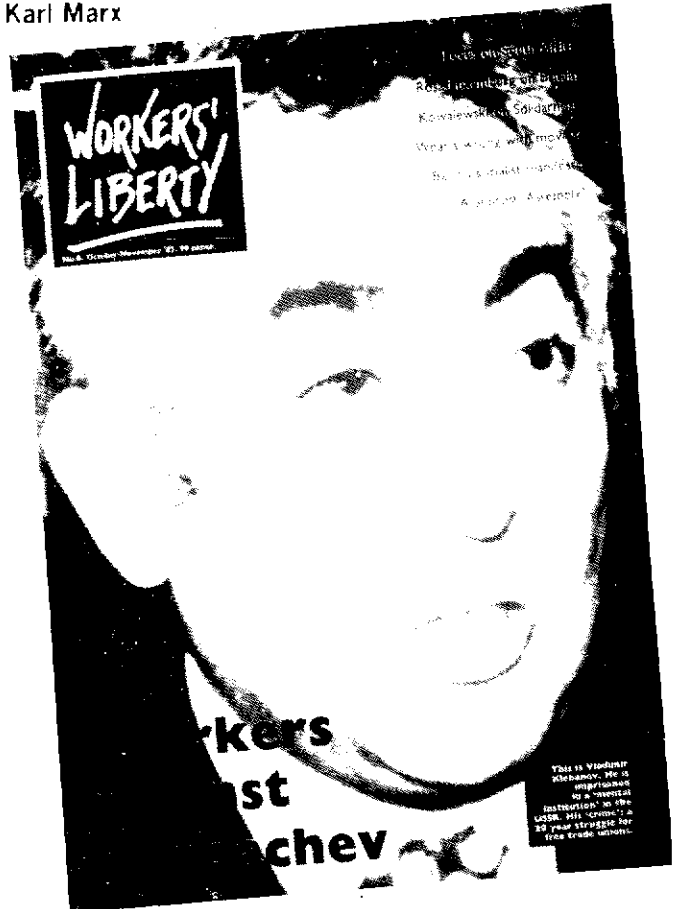
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