

TROTSKYISM TODAY



THEORETICAL SUPPLEMENT
TO SOCIALIST PRESS

No. 13. 16th February, 1977.

Price 5p.



Cuts not only cause unemployment among women, but by removing social provision for child care increase the oppression of the family.

PERSPECTIVES FOR WORK AMONG WOMEN

We reprint below the text of the resolution on work among women which was adopted at the First Annual Conference of the Workers Socialist League held on December 4th and 5th 1976. The three preceding editions of Trotskyism Today have carried the broader perspectives document adopted at that Conference.

INTRODUCTION

Capitalism in crisis, in the imperialist epoch, is no longer able to progress economically, is no longer able to develop and fulfill humanity's economic needs. Yet its crisis is not merely economic. Economic crisis and chaos is allied with social and political crisis — a social crisis which puts all social strata into turmoil and rots the fibre of all social relations.

The bourgeoisie, in order to survive this crisis must seek to crush the organisations and living standards of the working class. These attacks, involving unemployment, wage cuts and attacks on democratic rights, education and welfare spending, produce a tension not only in the organised labour movement but in all sectors of the working class. Employed, unemployed, youth, blacks all are hit.

The family too is riven by the increasing tensions and burdens of attempting to deal with the capitalist crisis. But the crisis bearing down on the entire working class creates conditions for women to be drawn from the confines of the family to play an active part in the class struggle.

SHARPEST POINT

For, as Trotsky points out, it is only in conditions of the sharpest social crisis that the mass of the oppressed will come forward with their own demands:

"The deepening of the social crisis will increase not only the suffering of the masses, but also their impatience and pressure. Ever new layers of the oppressed will raise their heads and come forward with their own demands. Millions of toil worn little men, to whom the reformist leaders had never given a thought, will begin to insistently pound on the doors of the workers' organisations. The

unemployed will be drawn into the movement. The agricultural workers, the ruined and semi-ruined farmers, the oppressed of the cities, the women workers, housewives, proletarianised layers of the intelligentsia — all these will seek unity and leadership."

(Transitional Programme).

While the social crisis creates the objective conditions for the mass of the oppressed to be drawn into the class struggle, this in no way means that the process is an automatic one. In the absence of a revolutionary leadership prepared to lead these struggles on a principled programme, the struggles of the oppressed may well be dissipated or come under the domination of the right wing.

In the case of women, far from drawing them from the confines of the family, they may be driven back further into the family unit and their subordination is increased.

POLITICAL BASIS

This is why in today's conditions of crisis the responsibility to develop the demands of the transitional programme to further the struggles of all the oppressed strata of capitalist society rests with the WSL, both to lay the political basis of unity within the working class, and to win these sections to the struggle for state power.

The development of class consciousness among workers demands that a consistent fight be waged in the interests of all the oppressed whose needs are daily ignored by the labour and trade union bureaucracies. Those tendencies in the labour movement who restrict in practice the activity of the working class to the economic struggle chain the working class to the rule of the bourgeoisie.

Only when schooled in the struggle for the fullest democracy for all the oppressed and exploited will the working class free itself from the fetters of bourgeois society.

The WSL sees, not merely in words but in deeds, that the fight for women's equality is an integral part of the development of the class struggle and places on the agenda the task of the emancipation of women from the shackles of the family.

THE CRISIS AND THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

The attacks upon the working class, the speed-up, redundancies, state controlled wage cutting, coupled with rising prices and massive cuts in welfare expenditure, as well as the cancelling of subsidies to the nationalised energy industries do not exist in a political vacuum or because the working

class is weak and defeated. These attacks are only possible because of the crisis of leadership of the working class.

All these attacks are being carried out on behalf of capitalism by the Labour government, with the active collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy. The £6 wage limit of 1975 was entirely engineered by Jack Jones of the TGWU and is now followed by the 4½%. Both these and other anti-working class measures were bureaucratically forced through the unions with no democratic discussion, all under the pretext of keeping the Labour government in office at all costs.



Jones

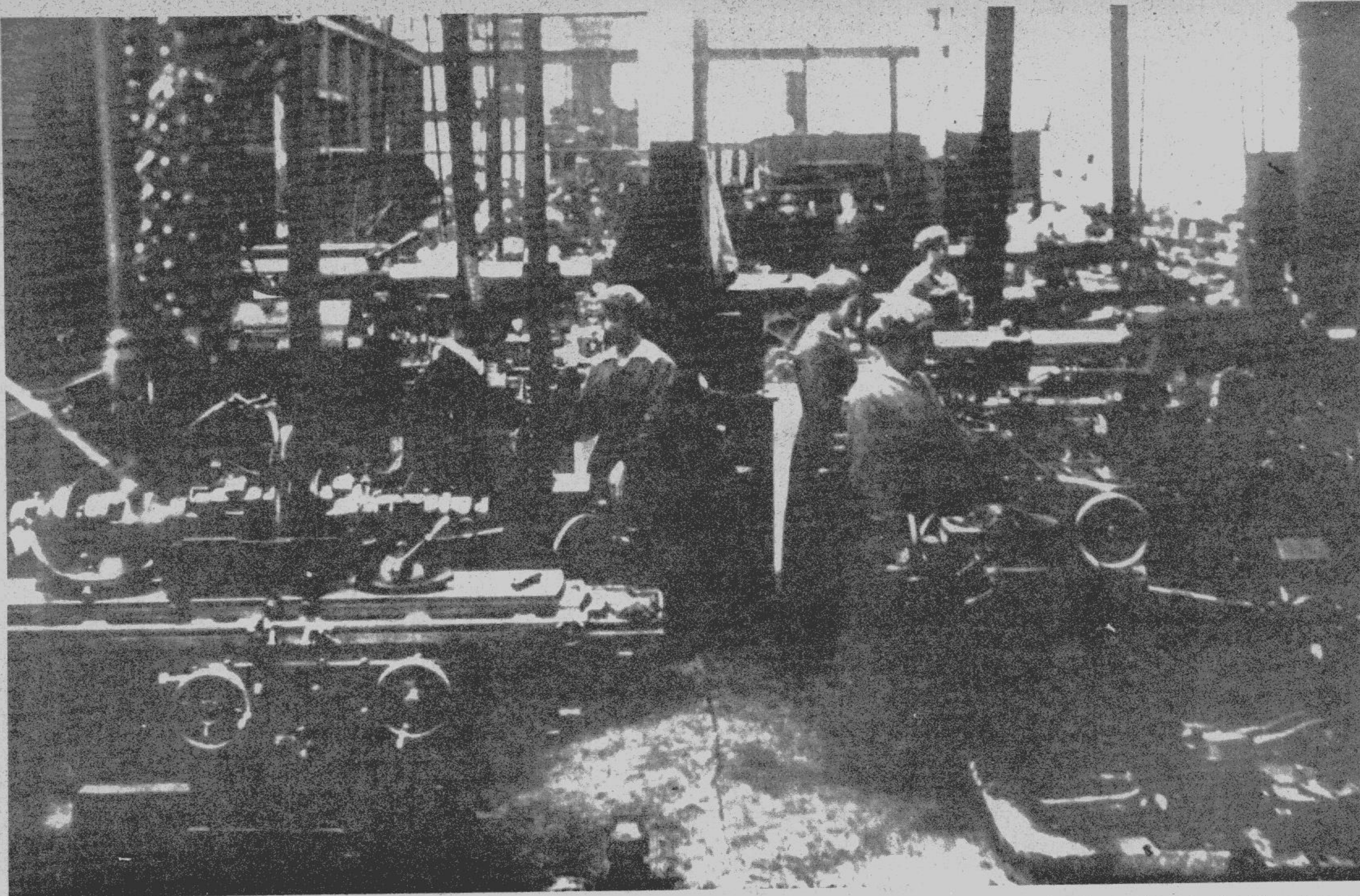
We now see the continued acquiescence of the trade union leaders in further slashing cuts in government spending on the social services, through which the government appeases the international financiers.

The position of the so-called 'left' MPs and trade union leaders now is that industry (which means profits) must come first. As Leslie Huckfield (MP) says:

"Britain should put factories before hospitals — for the time being we cannot do justice to both. We have to expand our industry's manufacturing base so that we can afford all the social improvements to which the Labour Party is pledged."

Here Huckfield lines up entirely with Foot and Benn who refuse to jeopardise their Cabinet positions by speaking out against the cuts. These people will never challenge capitalism as they see the road to socialism as shuffling along, gradually winning important positions in the Labour Party for the 'left'.

They entirely separate the questions of the attacks of capitalism now, and our defence against them, from the future



Capitalism has on occasions dragged women out of the home - into war production, as here in the 1914-18 war.

socialist society which is far off and hazy beyond the horizon.

It is these same Labour and trade union leaders who are the main betrayers of women. It is *they* who have attempted to throttle the demands for equal pay and equal opportunity and who are responsible for such toothless legislation as the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act, and who obstructed the victory of such struggles as Trico, where they failed to enforce full blacking of the windscreen wipers. (They failed also, however, to defeat the strike by these tactics, and future equal pay struggles have been strengthened).

As the crisis of capitalism worsens, this crisis of leadership of the working class is heightened. It extends down to convenors witch hunting militants and onto the shop floor where stewards are sucked into class collaborationist 'participation' schemes to lend credibility to the employers' efforts to impose wage-cutting, speed-up and redundancy.

The only way these attacks can be fought and the emergent struggles of women broadened and given political direction is if these bankrupt leaders are exposed and a new leadership, basing itself on principle and programme is built.

THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN IN THE FAMILY

If the working class is to lead the mass of the oppressed in the struggle for state power, it must not only be able to resolve the economic crisis in the interests of the working class, but it must answer the social and political problems thrown up by capitalism.

A working class leadership has to answer both the problems of women workers economically as part of the working class, and as women *socially* oppressed within the family.

The bourgeois family is the most basic social unit of capitalism, and is the central institution for the oppression of women. The material basis for women's oppression stems from capital's inability to socialise domestic labour or guarantee full employment. As a consequence women are denied full equality in public production.

From capital's inability to consistently develop the productive forces, to overcome the historical anachronism of the family where labour is individual and private instead of social and collective, stem all the bourgeois notions and prejudices of a woman's 'natural' place in bourgeois society.

The most devastating social and political consequences flow from the material confinement of women to the family. They permeate all the pores of capitalist society. Driven from full participation in public industry women are confined socially within the family where their life is fixed in the narrow arena of personal relations.

OBSTACLES

The material obstacles which prevent the majority of women from playing a part in the political arena of class struggle will increase as the state attempts to throw more and more social functions back onto the family.

The exclusion of women from political life not only deprives the working class of a potential ally from its own ranks, but also strengthens the position of the bureaucracy, who are allowed to turn their backs on the

mass of the oppressed.

Capitalism demands that the worker be available for work each day, fed, clothed and housed; also that a future generation of compliant workers be raised. It achieves this dual task within the family and with woman as the lynch-pin of the family, the child rearer and domestic worker.

Even in cases where women too are workers, habit and history give her a dual burden, a dual work-load, and thus dual oppression. The other oppressions of women, their lack of equality at work, before the law - their dependent status, their use as a sex object - all derive from this core oppression.

SUBORDINATE

It is because women occupy an economic and socially subordinate position in the family that they are treated as of secondary significance in other areas.

Capitalism is incapable of providing the communal kitchens, laundries and socialised child care which alone can free women from domestic drudgery; the struggle for women's emancipation is therefore inseparable from the struggle for socialism.



Trade Union banners prominent in US suffrage march, 1913.

Despite its inability to fully socialise domestic labour and its commitment to the preservation of the family, the bourgeois state has been forced, by the logic of productive development and pressure from the working class, to supplement the family with provision of education, health and welfare facilities.

But in providing these facilities the state seeks to preserve the family and the subordination of women in it. Insurance, social security, pensions, taxation laws concerning children, even medical operations all define women as dependent on and the responsibility of her male partner.

Now these services, always paltry and in no way planned to fulfill the *needs* of the working class, are being savagely slashed in the deepening economic crisis. More and more is thrown back on the family and on women.

The ruling class actively tries to promote an individual solution to the crisis. Hence the ideological barrage in the media, exhorting women to 'shop around', 'save it', 'make do'. The purpose of such a campaign

is to divert away from a class solution by lessening the effects of declining living standards at the expense of increasing the domestic burden on women within each family unit.

In conditions where women experience greater pressures and frustration, and where the Labour leadership blocks these problems from being solved by the mobilisation of the working class, women can succumb to the hysteria whipped up by racists and fascists.

Despite the social crisis, women will not be automatically driven into struggle on the side of the working class; they can easily fall prey to the forces of the right.

The question of work amongst women therefore is not an optional extra for the WSL. It is of decisive importance in the WSL's struggle to resolve the crisis of leadership within the working class.

It is this crisis of leadership which must be solved if women are to be drawn into struggle. The development of the working class as a revolutionary class, building its organisations to exert its rule, demands that women be drawn out of the home to take an active part in the class struggle.

Social provision is the class solution which frees women to engage in the class

struggle, whilst the family as it now stands acts as a barrier to women in struggle.

The drawing of working women and housewives out of narrow family circles onto price committees, into active trade union involvement, factory committees, etc., not only undermines the bourgeois state, but challenges women's position of subordination in the family by showing the importance of the organised strength of women to the organised strength of the working class as a whole.

WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND THE CRISIS

At present women are 40% of the total employees, and two-thirds of these are married women. Women workers are concentrated in a very few industries and services - over two-thirds of employed women work in the service industries alone. 70% of teachers are women, along with 70-80% of all health workers.

The majority of cooks, cleaners and

clerical workers in the public sector are women. Such concentration on the public sector means that women workers as a group are especially hit by the cuts.

Because capitalism is unable to socialise child care and housework, the majority of married women work part-time. Part-time workers, men and women, are in a weaker position than full-time workers - generally not unionised, with low rates of pay, and no entitlement to fringe benefits or redundancy pay.

The failure of the trade unions to fight to recruit and organise these part time workers or take up the fight to improve their conditions allows the employers to use them as a convenient casual labour pool, and they are the first to go when the axe is wielded.

Unemployment among women is difficult to estimate fully because many married women do not register since they are not eligible for benefits. However, even the official statistics show a relatively greater increase in women unemployed over 1975 than for men workers. (A government report states it as "an encouraging factor" that increased unemployment is hitting women harder!)

CHEAP LABOUR

While unemployment among women workers is increasing, it is difficult to forecast accurately if this trend will continue. In times of crisis there is often a counteracting tendency for male labour to be replaced by cheap female labour.

Although this happened in the 1930s the bourgeoisie was able to implement this policy because it imposed it on an already defeated working class after the 1926 General Strike. This is not automatically possible today, when the working class as a whole remains strong and undefeated.

What it does demonstrate is that an attack on female employment today creates the conditions tomorrow for a wholesale attack on jobs and conditions. It shows that the basis for a united fight against redundancies must be a programme that appeals to the material interests of both men and women.

The cuts in the social services affect not only women workers who work in these services, but also women as consumers of the services. For example, 50% of mothers with children under 5 years work outside the home, and these women are affected by the cuts in nursery facilities and play centres.

The decreasing standard of care provided by the health service means inevitably that women must stay at home to care for sick children, the elderly, etc. Maternity care and abortion facilities are also being curtailed and thus threaten women's health and ability to work outside the home.

HOW THE REFORMIST LEADERSHIP IGNORES WOMEN

"Opportunist organisations, by their very nature, concentrate their chief attention on the top layers of the working class and therefore ignore both the youth and the woman worker. The decay of capitalism, however, deals its heaviest blows to the woman as a wage-earner and as a housewife. The sections of the Fourth International should seek bases of support among the most exploited layers of the working class."

(Transitional Programme)

The crisis will bring women into struggle both in defence of their jobs and as consumers of the social services, and because of the extra strains put on them as mothers and housewives.

They will not necessarily, however, turn





A young striker addresses a mass meeting of the thousand girls on strike at Morton, Motherwell, in 1914.

towards the labour movement because the trade union leaders have not attempted in the past to break down the sexist attitudes both in women and men workers that "woman's place is in the home". In this way the role of leadership, as in racialism, is very significant.

IDEOLOGY

Just as the bourgeoisie uses racialism to split the working class and turn sections against each other, so sexist attitudes, in the role they play in maintaining the bourgeois family, are a powerful tool in the weaponry of bourgeois ideology.

In both cases it is not enough for working class leadership to profess themselves opposed to racialism and sexism, but instead they must see their role as that of helping to create the conditions whereby the bourgeoisie is unable to exploit these backward tendencies.

Racialism emerges from the frustration felt by the working class in a situation of capitalist onslaught on their jobs and living standards, and where the labour leaders not only fail to give a lead, but actively collaborate with the government in the interests of international capital.

Sexism — which demands, for example, that women be sacked first because they "only work for pin money" — is equally divisive.

Whilst women are ignored by the trade union leadership and left outside active struggle in or out of work, they will remain backward and prey to right-wing anti-working class forces.

Women's membership of trade unions has increased in the last decade, but still constitutes only 27% of the entire membership (as compared with 20% in 1964). When we consider that women are 40% of the workforce, we see that women are still

relatively under unionised.

This stems directly from the fact that the bureaucracy rests on the privileged layers and has consistently refused to take up any fight on improving the conditions and pay of women workers. It has failed also to take account of the problems women face in attending meetings where they also have family responsibilities.

Vast areas, like the textile industry, are still very low paid, traditionally female labour, and yet the only solution the bureaucrats offer is lobbying MPs to demand import controls to defend jobs against cheap foreign labour!

We hear frequently of attempts to build the union by groups of women in these industries, attempts which are completely frustrated either by the lack of response, or even by active betrayal of the union leaders.

For decades the principles of equal pay and equal opportunity were enshrined by the Labour Party and the TUC, but it took the struggles of the late 60s by workers at Fords, Dagenham and other factories, and the protests of the Women's Liberation Movement to force finally the Labour government to pass the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act — with Barbara Castle in 1970 giving employers five years to 'make preparations toward equal pay'.

JOB EVALUATION

This meant introducing job evaluation schemes and gradings so that at best the jobs done by women were defined as similar to the lowest grade of male jobs, more often defining them as lower, and bringing all the evils of job evaluation along behind.

Our task is to fight for the introduction of equal pay for equal work, to be under the control of workers' committees; to combine this fight with the struggle to maintain living standards through the sliding scale of wages; and to defend all jobs, including part-time ones by the fight for work sharing on full pay.

The years since 1968 have brought the largest increase in women joining trade unions, with increases of 143,000 in 1969, 136,000 in 1970, 153,000 in 1972 and 172,000 in 1974. This is the response of women workers to the apparent attention being given at last to questions of equal pay and opportunity.

We must make clear that these are but paper rights and that the bureaucracy diverts women away from organised struggle into encouraging the futile attempts by individuals to win solutions through tribunals. The Trico victory drives home this point.

THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT AND STALINISM

During the boom period, women were drawn into employment and thus into partial freedom from narrow family drudgery. The conditions were ripe for the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement.

The boom had sown the illusion in some middle class women that they could achieve equality by removing certain legal and social impediments. For them, women's oppression did not stem from the fundamental nature of capitalism, but was something that men did to women.

Therefore, their focus was on changing

personal relations rather than focussing on the underlying question of capitalist class relations. The movement based itself on the common 'sisterhood' of all women rather than on the class divisions between them. Basing itself on the cross-class alliance of 'sisterhood', the women's liberation movement was only able to throw up demands for democracy and equality.

A movement based solely on such demands is inevitably composed of and led by, middle class women. And because such a leadership is devoid of an independent class perspective it must inevitably compromise. Such was the case with the middle class suffragette movement which, unlike its working class wing, was prepared to accept property qualifications in its struggle for the right of women to vote.

LINKED

Democratic demands can only be successfully achieved if linked to the struggle for socialism under the leadership of the working class fighting around an independent transitional programme.

To believe that without overthrowing capitalism democratic rights can be guaranteed is a reformist illusion. It is not enough however simply to offer women the demands of the Transitional Programme. We have to relate to the particular needs of women if we are to win women to the struggle of the working class.

In the workers' movement we must be in the forefront of all struggles against state oppression and legal restrictions on women's rights — denial of freedom of contraception and abortion, harassment of single parents, dependent legal status, etc. — always pointing out clearly that capitalism, far from guaranteeing democratic rights will engage in increasing attacks upon them.

The fight for the maintenance and extension of rights is inseparable from the fight against capitalism and for the victory of the working class — and it is this which the Women's Liberation Movement does not grasp.

Democratic rights alone will not in any event radically alter the social subordination of women, based on their position in the family. Formal legal equality is not social equality. As Lenin points out, it is impossible for democratic reforms to abolish social antagonisms:

"Marxists know that democracy does not abolish class oppression. It only makes the class struggle more direct, wider, more open and pronounced, and that is what we need. The fuller the freedom of divorce, the clearer will women see that the source of their 'domestic slavery' is capitalism, not lack of rights."

(On the Emancipation of Women).

By combining the struggle for democratic demands of the Transitional Programme our aim is not only to show the insufficiency of bourgeois democracy in the struggle for women's emancipation, but to demonstrate concretely that to limit the fight solely to a struggle for democratic demands bases the movement on the terrain of bourgeois society and fosters illusions in the bourgeois state.

CONTROL

By struggling for democracy through the fight for workers' control we link the

struggle for democracy to the struggle for state power in opposition to the Stalinist theory of stages — first the struggle to extend democracy, then the socialist revolution. The struggle for organs of power, contains not only the seeds of a new democracy, workers democracy, but the embryo of a new state — a workers' state.

Only by linking the fight for women's emancipation to the struggle for workers' control, the core of the Transitional Programme, can we raise practically the question of what type of democracy and state can create the social conditions for their liberation.

It is the recognition that the involvement of women in organs of workers control can begin to undermine their social subordination in the family that distinguishes our analysis from every left posturing current in the workers movement. And it is through this fight that the Stalinist 'stages' conception of struggle, and their hangers-on in the IMG with their 'single issue' campaigns can be defeated in practice.

EXPOSE

By struggling for democratic demands we must bring the mass of women to see that even the fullest bourgeois democracy cannot abolish their oppression, and we do this by linking democratic demands to the demands of the Transitional Programme.

As well as focussing on democratic questions, the feminist notion of 'sisterhood' leads to the position that women should organise and struggle in separate organisations from men. But as Klara Zetkin said, the tasks of men and women are one:

"The tasks and goals of male communists are our tasks, our goals. No separatism no doing your own thing, which would in any case lead to splitting the revolutionary forces and diverting them from their great goals of the conquest of political power by the proletariat and the construction of communist society."

The communist women's movement means nothing other than the planned apportionment, planned organisation of the forces, men as well as women, in the communist party, in order to win the broadest possible masses of women, for the revolutionary class struggle to overthrow capitalism and for communist construction."

(Theses to the Congress of the IIIrd International, 1921).

"SISTERHOOD"

The cross class 'democratic' 'sisterhood' appeal of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) discussed above makes it an ideal stamping ground for the Stalinists of the Communist Party, who argue:

"The WLM has helped to unleash a potentially new force, linking different sections of women, which can be mobilised as part of the broad popular alliance against monopoly capital."

(Marxism Today, Nov. 1975)

We see in their work in the WLM all the hallmarks of the Stalinist conception of the Popular Front, with its notion of achieving socialism along the peaceful road of democratic rights gained through parliamentary means, and the consequent abandonment of a class perspective.

The editorial in the Winter edition of Link (CP women's journal) calls for:

"a campaign to make the new laws [Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination] a



Women at Ford Dagenham mass meeting

reality by increasing the services which will back them up".

Hewitt, in the same edition, says the laws can be used as a weapon which "can strengthen the organisations of women and further the demand for radical change". This offers no perspective for united class action against inequality!

It is the very betrayals by Stalinism in the Soviet Union which have led many feminists to conclude that social revolution cannot transform the position of women. But after the victorious Russian Revolution, a whole series of measures granting women legal and economic equality were passed.

EFFORT

Despite the ravaged economy, a real effort was made by the new Soviet state to provide the basis for actual equality between the sexes by creating those communal services which would free women from the family. Because limited resources meant slow progress in this direction, the formation of such services 'from below' was encouraged:

"A certain advance towards the new family is possible even now. It is true that the state as yet cannot undertake either the education of children or the establishment of public kitchens that would be an improvement on the family kitchen, or the establishment of public laundries where the clothes would not be torn or stolen. But this does not mean that the more enterprising and progressive families cannot group themselves, even now into collective house-keeping units."

Under Stalin these experiences were brought to an end and the old bourgeois family was restored as part of the process of political counterrevolution which used the old authoritarian family to ensure the rule of the bureaucracy.

As Trotsky wrote later on:
"The most compelling motive for the present cult of the family is undoubtedly the need of the bureaucracy for a stable hierarchy of relations and for the disciplining of youth by means of 40 million points of support for authority and power."

The betrayals of Stalinism in the Soviet Union force the British CP to capitulate completely to the feminist elements in the WLM who blame women's oppression completely on men.

In a discussion of Engels' *Origins of the Family* in the *Morning Star*, Irene Brennan is forced to concede that "Soviet women, like British women, still do many more hours housework than their men do, even though they work full-time outside the home". She concludes that this is a problem caused by a time-lag between theory and practice and explains that Soviet sociologists are discussing the problem! The problem, as she sees it, is Soviet men, who are not doing their share of the housework within the individual family:

"Many men would prefer not to change but to wait for some startling technological innovation which will make shared work and responsibility in the home unnecessary. That is just a utopian dream..."

We must make public our disagreement with the CP that this situation is unavoidable or "sociological", and we must confront CP and other feminists with the nature of the betrayals of Stalinism concerning the position of women in the Soviet Union and the workers' states, and its complete contradiction to the materialist position put by Trotsky in *Revolution Betrayed*.

PROGRAMME

"The Bolshevik-Leninist stands in the front-line trenches of all kinds of struggles, even when they involve only the most modest material interests or democratic rights of the working class."

(Trotsky, *Transitional Programme*)

Because we see women as one of the most oppressed sections of the working class, the WSL fights for the democratic rights of women. We say that every woman has a right to a job, and that full employment must mean full employment for women as well as men.

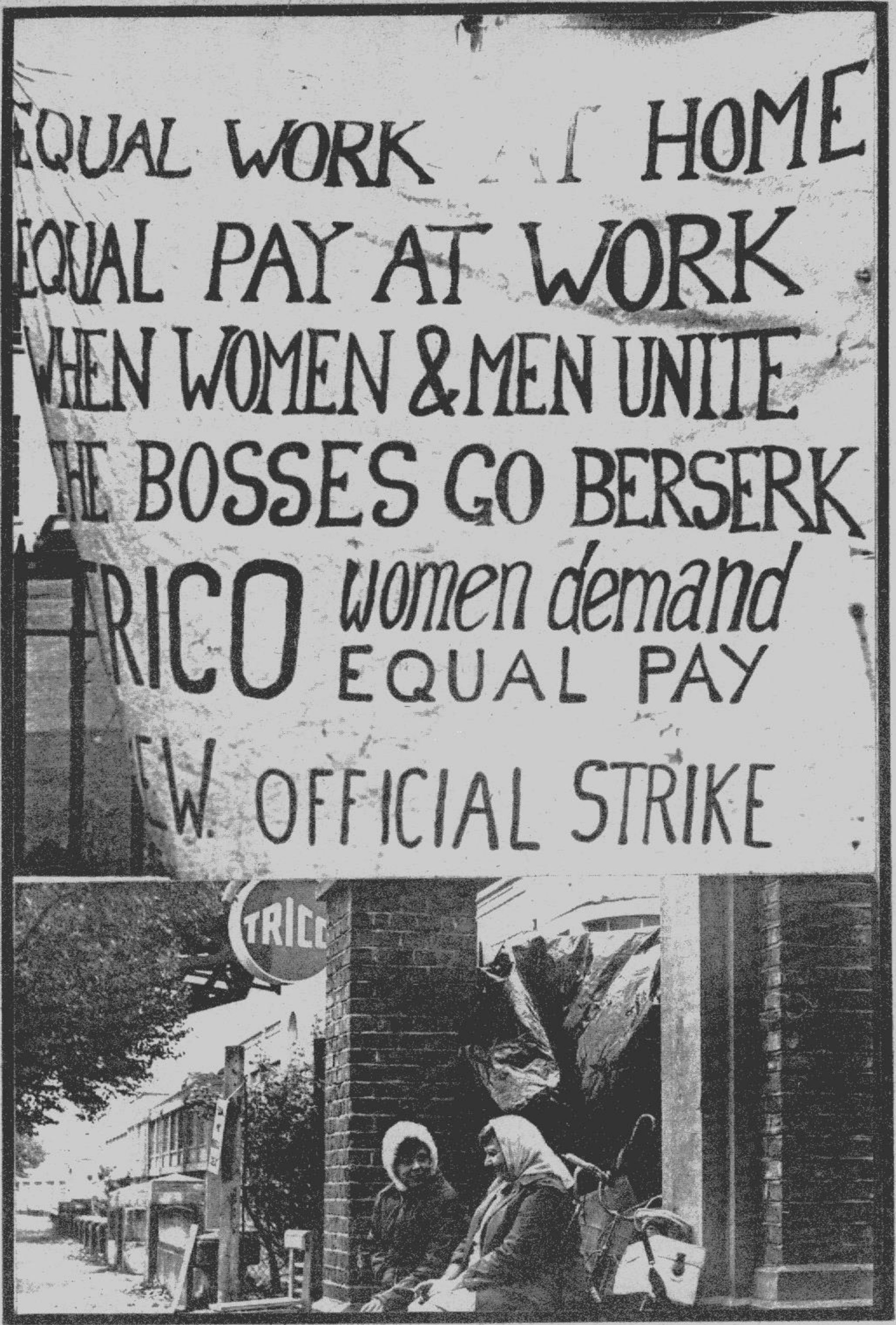
The right to a job must be accompanied by the right to claim unemployment benefits, by full nursery provision for all children under five and adequate paid maternity leave for both women and men.

If women are to participate equally in the workforce they must have control over their reproduction. Therefore free abortion and contraception on demand are vital demands for women in achieving social equality.

UNIONISATION

The trade unions are the principal organisations of the working class for defending job conditions and living standards, and women have been and remain under-unionised. The WSL campaigns for women workers to become fully unionised and represented in the trade union movement.

In the past women workers have frequently met with bureaucratic manoeuvres designed to prevent their unionisation, and a real struggle must therefore be waged by both male and female workers to remove all obstacles to women's membership and participation in trade



Scenes from the Trico 20-week Equal Pay strike.

unions. Comrades in all unions, and especially those in teaching, health and social services, (where the majority of workers are women), must fight to involve housewives and mothers in the struggle against the union bureaucracy.

The demand that the local union leaders should lead public campaigns against the cuts in these services should begin in the trade union branches and then be broadened by building up layers of workers, including housewives and others, (organised, if necessary, into parents' committees, cuts committees, etc) but with the focus always towards the trade union and labour leadership.

Just as the WSL perspective is to recruit all unemployed workers into the unions, so also it must be our perspective to urge women to retain union membership when they leave work, or to join the union appropriate to their training and experience.

We must show the trade union leadership the necessity of this recruitment and their responsibility for it.

Where women workers become pregnant we encourage them to join the fight for adequate maternity leave and nursery facilities. Where they are forced to leave work through lack of adequate provision, they must maintain their trade union membership and fight to direct other women away from the isolation of the home and towards a continuing involvement in the organised labour movement.

UNEMPLOYED

The demands for unions to fight for creches, nursery schools and improved working conditions for women should be raised and broadened beyond the union membership to layers of unemployed women.

In situations of dispute and struggle, especially strikes and occupations, the wives and companions of male workers should be involved in an organised way through the trade union branches.

The WSL supports women workers who demand equal pay and calls on male workers to support their demand just as they do the demands of any weaker section of workers for improved conditions and a decent living wage. The result of these struggles, unifying workers, can only be a strengthening of the workforce as a whole against the employer.

Further, by fighting through these demands in the trade unions, sexist attitudes in the working class are challenged and the need for social provision to replace the family can be raised.

The WSL takes up these democratic demands of workers as a means of bringing about a change in the power relations of the classes to the advantage of the oppressed and

exploited.

We do not restrict our struggles for democratic demands to the parliamentary arena — on the contrary, we have long maintained that the battle for equal pay will not be determined in the rigged tribunals set out in the legislation, but by class action in the workplace against the employer.

Similarly, while we oppose all anti-abortion legislation we say that the call for free abortion on demand cannot be achieved without an expansion of the NHS under the control of the working class.

CONFLICT

In fact, in the current period any struggle for democratic demands will bring workers into conflict with the bourgeois state, which must now take away democratic rights as it attempts to solve the crises of the capitalists at the expense of the working class. Thus the need is posed for a programme which develops workers' consciousness beyond the limitations set by the bourgeois state, and therefore the WSL fights on transitional demands in its work with women.

A woman's right to a job and equal pay are accompanied by the need to defend these by demanding wage increases automatically with every rise in the cost of living. A cost of living index must be prepared by workers' committees, elected from the bodies of the organised labour movement.

Women workers and housewives elected from tenants committees, nursery groups and other groups thrown up in the struggle to defend workers living standards against capitalist attack, as well as from the trade unions and the Labour Party, can play a crucial role on these committees since in their traditional role in the family they are experts on prices.

The WSL calls for tenant, nursery and cuts committees and Labour Party wards to involve themselves and their women members in cost of living committees.

Similarly we oppose all job evaluation and call for elected committees of trade unionists to decide equal pay. All jobs, part-time ones included, must be protected.

The WSL opposes "positive discrimination", where the employer is provided with priorities for whom to sack first. Instead we oppose all redundancies and demand that the work available be shared out among the workforce at no loss of pay.

VULNERABLE

Work sharing is especially important for women workers, who are less well-organised and whose jobs are therefore more vulnerable. In addition many women work part-

time, and part-time jobs are often the first to be attacked.

Women are particularly hit by public service cuts and so they will logically be drawn into defence of these services. Local trade unions and trades councils should involve representatives from tenants associations, price committees, etc. in opposing all cuts in social services and fighting to open the books of the public authorities and to draw up workers plans for local services based on social need.

Only when drawn into the organised labour movement will women become part of the central task of overthrowing the bureaucracy and building a new revolutionary leadership.

Within the League it is necessary that a full on-going discussion takes place on the subject of women's special oppression under capitalism and that a representative bureau be set up, representing all geographical areas of the League, to guide the work in the areas in accordance with these perspectives.

This bureau should act under the authority of the National Committee. It must be recognised that as Communists we cannot tolerate the oppression of any group, and sexist positions must be fought as a matter of principle, within the League and in our work in the working class.

NAC, WORKING WOMEN'S CHARTER AND OTHER SUCH ORGANISATIONS

The important fight for abortion rights and against the attack of the James White amendment, led by the NAC, in which the IMG plays a leading role along with the CP, has done much to win support for this single issue, particularly among petty-bourgeois layers.

But the failure of the IMG to bring out the differences with its bedfellow in the NAC and to fight for a class perspective led earlier this year to the ludicrous spectacle of a huge demonstration in defence of abortion rights one week followed shortly afterwards by the IMG-dominated NCC demonstration against the cuts in the NHS, attended by less than 500 people.

The growth of the NAC, and similarly, the Working Women's Charter (WWC), show the eagerness of layers of women to fight for their rights; but without a clear leadership directing them along the lines of combined working class struggle, these movements will become demoralised and reaction will set in.



The NCC National demonstration

Where these groups exist locally, WSL branches must consider the potential for interventions to win support for our class perspectives for struggle.

Our clear intervention at the Working Women's Charter conference in April 1976 on the programme of boycotting the industrial tribunals can now be built on with the London WWC's experience in the Trico equal pay dispute: Trico workers refused to be diverted into the tribunals on the basis that — "What is oppressed and dead as a Dodo? A successful applicant to an industrial tribunal." (Strike bulletin).

WSL members must campaign in their union branches for sub-committees, composed of men and women workers, to take up the fight on the special problems facing women workers as part of the overall fight against the employer, including the recruitment of women to the unions.

This may develop through the WWC or some other organisation, or on our independent initiative. We recognise, however, that the only way equal opportunity can be established in practice is through the fight for workers control of manning levels and demanding information of job applicants from the employer to ensure no sex discrimination is being exercised.

In Conclusion

"The decay of capitalism . . . deals its heaviest blows to the woman as a wage earner and as a housewife. The sections of the Fourth International should seek bases of support among the most exploited layers of the working class, consequently among the women workers."

We add to this quote from Trotsky's *Transitional Programme* that among women workers we will also find leadership qualities a determination to struggle alongside men, an acute awareness of the class forces in society and of the degree of oppression of the bourgeois state.

No organisation can build a mass organisation in the working class without serious large-scale work amongst women.