

woman worker

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New paper gives a lead to women's fight against Tory attacks



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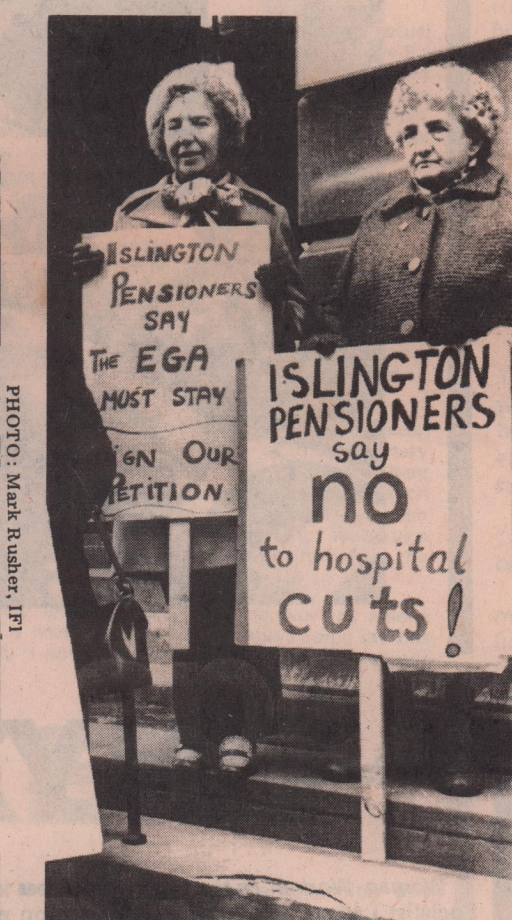
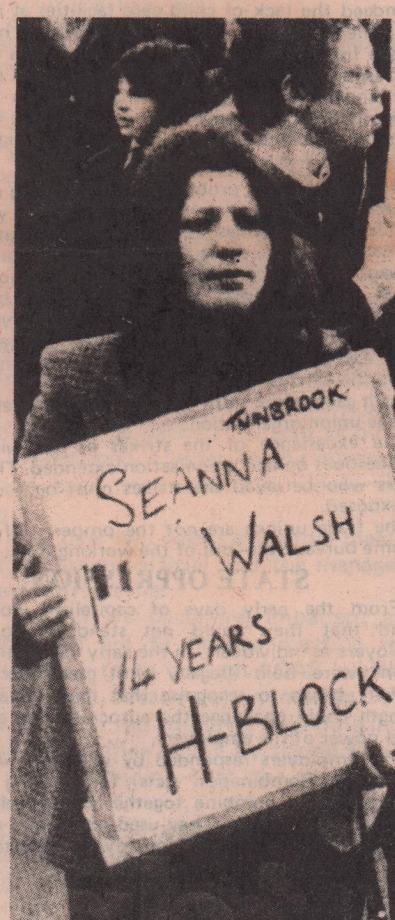


PHOTO: Mark Rusher, IFL



PHOTO: Mark Rusher, IFL



Thatcher's Tory government has only been in office a few weeks. But already working class men, women and children are feeling the impact of their attacks.

***PRICES:** The Tories have scrapped even the pretence of controlling prices, by abolishing the Price Commission. Already increases in milk, bread, gas, electricity, fares and postage have been announced. But this is just the tip of the iceberg.

The Tory budget will raise tax on virtually everything you buy in the shops. The Common Market will add still more to food prices.

And the huge increases in oil prices will send petrol prices and the prices of all goods and services rocketing upwards in the next few months. Tight family budgets will be stretched beyond endurance.

***JOBS:** Tory policies have already begun to boost unemployment, with the axing of 22,000 jobs in the Civil Service and the freezing of jobs in local authorities.

The spending cuts still to come in the public sector will fall with particular violence on women workers, large numbers of whom work in these areas.

As the recession grows, and smaller firms and factories are closed down or "rationalised", thousands upon thousands of women will find themselves driven out of the workforce and into the isolation of the home.

***CUTS:** The Tory budget will proceed ruthlessly to step up the Labour government's cuts in spending on education, nurseries, health care and other essential public services.

All these attacks hit women in particular—whether by throwing them directly out of work or by forcing women in the home to carry an increased burden of childcare, and nursing the sick and the elderly for whom no state facilities

are available.

The cuts are intended to lessen the taxes paid by big business and top managers and enable them to cream off fat profits at the expense of working class men and women.

But while the Tories—a government of businessmen, bankers and speculators—rush on with these attacks, what alternative are workers offered by the Labour leadership?

The main reason Labour lost the election was because under Wilson and Callaghan, the last Labour government had carried out similar policies and cut the standard of living of nearly every working class family.

They fought tooth and nail to make private industry profitable at the expense of the workers that put them in office. They imposed three years of wage controls; they threw 1½ million onto the dole; they allowed prices to double in five years; they cut the public services.

Now Callaghan comes along and announces that the Labour Party will oppose any section of workers that fights to prevent the Tories carrying out their attacks.

And the trade union leaders, one after another, announce their wish to talk to Thatcher and 'discuss' the Tories' plans to bring in new laws against the unions.

When these so-called "leaders" talk in these terms they are not speaking for their members. The huge series of pay strikes throughout the winter, in which hundreds of thousands of men and women took action and eventually destroyed Callaghan's pay limits, show that the working class is ready to defend its living standards, its jobs and its basic rights.

The last Tory government, under Heath, was brought down by the working class in 1974. Thatcher, too, must be brought down.

This requires the building of an entirely new, socialist,

leadership in the trade unions and the Labour Party—a leadership that will start out at all times from the *interests of the working class*, and not from the profits of the employers.

Women workers—whether their work be in the factories, in offices, or in the home—have a crucial role to play in the struggles ahead.

But for them to play that role it is first necessary to break down the old notions and prejudices that have kept so many women so far isolated from the organised workers' movement.

This is why *Woman Worker*, women's paper of the Workers Socialist League, has undertaken the task of fighting for a programme of demands on which women can struggle alongside men to build a new leadership. We say:

*** Defend living standards!** Wage increases must be protected against inflation through cost-of-living clauses giving automatic rises in line with a prices index drawn up by trade unionists and housewives.

*** Defend all jobs!** Occupy to stop redundancies! Demand work sharing between the whole workforce without loss of pay. Open the books of the employers to elected trade union committees to prove the case for *nationalisation* without compensation under workers' management.

*** Defend the health service, education and nurseries!** Strike action and occupations to halt the Tory cuts and fight for a sliding scale of public spending to protect the public services against inflation.

*** Defend the unions and democratic rights!** Repeal the Immigration Act, the 'SUS' laws and the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Withdraw British troops from Ireland now!

*** Build mass action to bring down this Tory government of employers and bankers!**

UNIONS vital for working women!

Despite important advances over recent years, particularly in the public sector, the bulk of working women remain outside the trade union movement.

This is certainly not because they need the protection of a trade union any less than men. In fact they need a union even more, since they are doubly exploited—both as women through the family and as workers in production.

So why are they less organised?

The reasons are not hard to find. Women have, with some notable exceptions, been excluded from industry and from those areas where trade union organisation is most developed.

When they have come out of the home, lack of basic childcare facilities, experience and training along with discrimination by the employers have driven them into jobs which are frequently an extension of their servicing role in the home—such as cleaning, catering and caring for the sick and old.

Mostly such jobs offer appalling wages and working conditions.

MALE DOMINATION

Many working class women are also reluctant to attend trade union branch meetings because they lack experience and are intimidated by the male domination and the prejudice they encounter from trade union leaders who lack the slightest knowledge of or interest in problems of working women.

One classic example of this is TUC General Council member Terry Parry—General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union.

When, as chairman of the recent Trades Councils Conference, he was asked about child care facilities he fumbled around, not even knowing the meaning of the word "crèche".

Indeed the lack of child care facilities at most union meetings is a major barrier preventing many women from attending. Many others see it as their sole responsibility to look after children and cook the dinner for their husbands—when in fact husbands have a responsibility to encourage their wives to become involved in union struggles.

LEADERS SELL-OUT

On top of these problems many working class women drawn towards unions in the past few years have found themselves immediately sold out by top leaders who supported the government policies of wage restraint; who refused to fight vicious private employers; and who have turned a blind eye to the massive cuts in the social services.

This led to the resentment and frustration which exists strongly in the public sector unions today.

Such frustration must not lead to a weakening of trade union organisation.

The experience of the strikes of last winter must be built on and unionisation extended. Those leaders who betrayed the strikes must be fought and exposed.

The trade unions are *not* the property of the full-time bureaucrats—but of the working class.

STATE OPPRESSION

From the early days of capitalism workers found that they could not stand up to the employers as individuals. In the early 19th Century unions were built illegally with great sacrifice. Workers began to recognise that their collective strength could challenge the autocratic and dictatorial power of the employers.

The employers responded by making it *illegal* (Under the Combination Acts) for working men and women to combine together collectively to defend their interests. They used police and army violence, jail sentences and even deportation

against trade unionists.

The employers have not changed. They *still* use the police and the state machine and the legal system as the guard-dogs of their interests.

George Ward at Grunwick used the notorious thugs of the police Special Patrol Group to break the unionisation strike. He is no different to the employers resisting unions at Garners Steak Houses, Sandersons and in the Hotel industry as a whole.

TORIES ATTACK

Now the Tories want to smash the strength of the working class through attacks on basic trade union rights.

They plan attacks on the closed shop, to outlaw "secondary" picketing and to stop social security payments to strikers' families.

They forget that in the 19th Century the first unions were built *despite* the weight of legal repression.

And this century has seen a huge spread of unionisation, putting great potential power in the hands of the working class. No power station, tube train, state school, local or national government department, TV station or hospital can function without the consent of the unions.

CORRUPTION

But what was the response of the employers to their failure to stamp out the unions at birth? They set out to corrupt the leaders of the unions, to suck them into the apparatus of management, to strengthen their illusions that capitalism can be "reformed".

It was crude but effective. Today trade union leaders are remote from the shop floor. They consume sumptuous meals with the employers and government ministers whilst supporting wage controls for their members. They have huge salaries and value their close links with the ruling class.

Jack "Year of the Beaver" Jones is a Companion of Honour and Hugh "Keep Working at all Costs" Scanlon is in the House of Lords.

Once trade union leaders reject a *revolutionary* perspective—the ending of capitalism through the mobilisation of the working class and establishing socialism—they quickly accept capitalist thinking.

They start from the problem of the employers, such as keeping their plants profitable, rather than the interests of the members they are supposed to represent.

Thus the problems of the working class is the problem of *leadership*. The workers have the strength to challenge capitalism but are held back by their leaders.

CHALLENGE CAPITALISM

This power can only be harnessed and used to improve and defend the living standards of the whole working class if a leadership can be built that is dedicated to ending capitalism and establishing socialism.

Women workers must be brought fully into employment alongside men and play their full part in the unions in the struggle for this leadership.

We must press that those women 'tied' and isolated within the home have the right to join the trade union of their choice.

At the moment women can join the TGWU branch for the unemployed (which they should).

Pressure must be put on other unions to take up the question of women's oppression, unemployment, cuts and childcare facilities.

We must build in the unions a leadership capable of defending the rights of both men and women workers and mobilising the strength of the working class in the struggle to end capitalist exploitation.

Woman Worker examines the problems facing women joining the trade unions which are caused mainly by their corrupt leadership, which must be replaced in order that the massive strength of these unions can be used to end the exploitation of workers.



WHY WOMAN

Woman Worker is the women's paper of the Workers Socialist League, a Trotskyist organisation which is seeking to build a Marxist leadership in this country and internationally which, starting from today's problems and today's consciousness within the working class, will lead workers in struggle to grasp the need for socialist revolution.

Women play a major role in the struggle of the working class to overthrow the shackles of international capitalism. Women—in workplaces and in the home—are doubly oppressed by capitalism and the present crisis affecting the whole working class attacks women disproportionately.

Women's wages, in spite of the Equal Pay Act are still very low, the abolition of the Prices Commission and subsequent price rises in gas, electricity bread and milk etc., sharpen the ever present contradiction between the family wage packet and the bills.

The previous cuts in health, education and social services—begun in 1973 by the previous Tory government and pressed on with relentlessly by Callaghan and Healey will now fade into insignificance besides those threatened by Thatcher and Howe.

These cuts always attack women twice over—it is mainly the jobs of women—as ancillaries in hospitals and in schools for example—that are cut and it is women who traditionally are expected to stay at home and care for the sick who have no hospital beds and the young children who have no nurseries.

Woman Worker seeks to give policies and programme—a way forward—to women who are oppressed by this capitalist system. We believe that the leaderships of the traditional organisations of the working class—the Labour Party and the trade unions—are not at this time—and never will be—acting in the interests of the members they were elected to serve.

The Labour Party leadership for example has just presided over a five year period in government—a period when the working class experienced the biggest cuts in its wages, and the worst unemployment, since the 1930s.

A period when women were given the paper rights of Equal Pay and the Sex Discrimination Act with one hand—and their jobs, hospitals, nurseries and abortion facilities threatened with the other. Women are now 28% of the trade union movement—3 million

trade unionists and the numbers are

But what have Len Murray and trade union leadership—led by Jack Britain—betrayed the whole movement, controls, and agreed to the Labour Party—which meant cuts. In conference bureaucrats like the Labour Party cussions and votes on the real question wages and jobs. On the specific record was even more appalling delegates trying to raise questions of

Yet *Woman Worker* insists that trade unions and the Labour Party.

Housewives, isolated in the home, the petty questions of the day to day are ideal targets for reactionary forces, potential strength of the organised

The right to work is a basic right, much as for men—and the rights to as nurseries, education, health are class over decades of struggle—as is

However, even these basic rights are bureaucracy at this time—the unions, the THF hotels and now the Garnier because of the refusal of the leadership of the companies and suppliers

Equally the defence of hospitals, closures has been sold out by union verbal support to isolated occupations of their unions in supporting

Woman Worker calls upon women to lie ahead. We believe that trade unions prepared to fight to improve the defend their jobs and social services

The block that stands in their way is the leadership in every trade union

Woman Worker calls upon its members to places and union branches, to combat policies such as demanding a 'sliding rate' increases, whereby wages go up inflation every month. This in turn



Scab crosses a picket line

on the shop floor

This has been shown in factories like IPC (cardboard packing boxes) where the prospect of getting a better paid job in the factory became something for the women to strive for.

In this particular factory heavy work and big machinery was used by management as an excuse to prevent women being put on better graded jobs which meant they continually had the low paid positions.

This was contested by a group of women who demanded equal rights and opportunities which had been brought in by legislation (Equal Opportunities Act). They demanded to be given trial periods on these jobs.

The unions were forced to support these women. Management and some men workers opposed the move by these women. The

men's opposition was from a different stance than management and a struggle had to be taken up against their view, which ranged from "you can't work with women" to the reactionary view "the women are taking our jobs from us".

The success of this action by the women brought them closer to involving themselves with the question of equal rights for women outside of the factory.

The final outcome was these women won the right to work the big machinery and have the same rights to drive stacker-trucks and train on jobs previously considered men's jobs. Consequently their grading was changed and they received higher pay.

These two articles dwell upon two women and their struggles for equal job opportunity—one in the IPC box factory in Winsford, Cheshire, and the other a bus driver in Oxford.

The question of nightwork has been a contentious issue for a long time. It seems by the views of the women in factories that they should be allowed to work nights alongside male workers and if necessary 24-hour nursery care should be made available by employers for all the workforce who need it.

The relationship between the male and female workers are strengthened by this equal struggle in the factory.

They both learned many important lessons.

Ideas such as women are stupid or weaker than men and they should really be at home caring for the everyday household tasks were

shown to be false conceptions peddled daily by the mass media in books and adverts and only serve to hold back the working class against the oppression of the capitalist class.

Then of course some women hold the view that men are the oppressor. This joint struggle shows that the pressures of work and the oppression of the home are not exclusively one or the other but a joint problem.

These struggles can be used as a stepping stone to taking these questions outside the individual factory and bringing in the wider issues of the class war as the standard of living comes under attack more and more with the crisis capitalism finds itself in.

Life on a one-woman bus

I have been working as a trained bus driver since September last year, after nearly five week's training, and one failed PSV test.

There are now five women and around 200 men drivers in the garage—two of the women have been driving buses for quite a number of years. The shift system means working as early as 4.45 am in the morning—at other times as late as 12.30 at night.

We work a 'guaranteed' 45-hour week although the basic week is supposed to be 40 hours, and the top rate of pay is roughly £1.40 an hour.

Each working week is either 6 or 5 days, usually 6, and with a child allowance I take home anything in the region of £50 to £65 a week. Wages vary according to whether you are ill or not—if you take a day off because your child is ill, you lose a day's pay. I have had to leave my daughter in bed at home and go off to work.

There are several 12-hour duties starting at 5 in the morning, and finishing at 5 in the afternoon, with maybe 2 hours' break during the day at different times—most of the breaks are unpaid. They only pay you for the hours and minutes you actually drive buses.

You are allowed to work 10 hours of actual driving in any 24, and you are allowed to drive 5½ hours in the cab without a break. EEC regulations for drivers working beyond the 36km range of the home garage have these hours shortened, and UK regulations will fall in line during the next few years.

Twelve hours on a busy road, taking perhaps £100 in fares, not exceeding 30p each fare, selling 600-plus tickets as well as driving, leaves you so tired and dizzy, the day feels like an all-out effort that can never be repeated. But next day you get up at an unnatural hour and do it all over again.

I didn't imagine anyone could be expected to work so hard, to the full stretch of their mental and physical ability, for hours and hours on end for a low basic rate of pay, for the whole of their working lives.

Drivers die young of heart attacks and ulcers. They put on weight because of the sedentary position of work, and if they have an accident they are in the front seat for injuries. They work such long overtime in the summer when coach excursions overburden the workload for the service bus drivers that they have to take time off in the winter to get over it.

They are a cheerful lot, and working among them is heartwarming and friendly. Some say bus driving is not a woman's job, but they still go out

of their way to help any new driver, man or woman, if they need help.

They watch carefully for women drivers' trying to skive off the full shift or the full workload. They do not think women are weaker than men—well, most of them don't.

A full bus weighs 12 tons and less than half our buses have power steering. It takes every ounce of strength I have to get the wheel round a corner with a full load on and stiff steering.

What surprised me was not that I could do it, but that I have never had to use my full strength for anything at work before, so I didn't know what it was.

It is a job of high tension, and skill which becomes automatic with experience—and accuracy with money—for if you are short at the end of the day, you pay it out of your wages. Into this position of acute tension steps the passenger, who blames the driver as the front line, man or woman, for all the faults of the bus company.

Who accuses you of drinking tea at the terminus when you have been working flat out for four hours without a break (because schedules are so tight for time you often have to drive 30 miles or so—say to Aylesbury and back at 50 mph in a double decker bus along country roads, and turn round and come straight back again).

Drivers work 60, 70, 80 hours a week and more, and compare wage slips at the end of the week. Marriages break up and there are several men

bringing up children on their own. Their commitments require they work overtime and they cannot afford not to. I seldom do, but I live in a shared way, and it is cheaper.

SET APART

I find it hard to get over being treated as some kind of pet mascot—acceptable because doing an equal job, but forever different, set apart, someone not to be sworn in front of. Swearing in front of women seems to be a big issue. Once I said "fucking" while quoting another driver, and the man I was talking to blushed—so did I, of course.

I was nominated for road steward, but I declined regretfully because I am not sure how long I shall be able to work. Driving has dragged arthritis into my hands where it was not there before.

There is some discussion of union affairs and national politics, but much apathy, as well as actual great difficulty in attending union meetings, which are only held quarterly.

The conditions of work (there is nowhere to hang your coat. If you arrive wet to work, you stay wet) and the shift system makes family life difficult.

Many drivers do not want to go home. Their exciting life is in the garage, playing cards in the canteen with their mates, doing a useful job, however undervalued.

fighting low pay

Shortly after the election victory of the Tories on anti-trade union propaganda, women are coming forward to join a union because of the appalling conditions, and exploited wages they've endured under suffrage for years.

The women work at Selected Toys in Didcot, Oxfordshire, which produces dartboards for export.

The rates of pay are 40p an hour which means full time workers are only taking home, after a 40 hour week, just over £20, even with bonus payments!

All that was needed for interest to be sparked in unionisation was a woman worker who couldn't believe her first and subsequent wage packets.

She took individual action at first, complaining to management, and then said to others that enough was enough and were any interested in a union.

The response was overwhelming. Out of a workforce of 30 only a few have declined. Management hearing of the workers turning to a union at first were patronising, saying all they had to do was ask to see them if they had problems. Then they started approaching the workers individually with the threat of closure.

A meeting was arranged where a shop steward was elected. The women at this meeting gave vent to years of their exploitation and one after another told their own horror stories.

A week later the official from the Trans-

port and General Workers Union District Office in Reading attended a meeting where the workers gave vent to their emotions and dropped their wage packets in front of him.

The official said a letter to the management had been sent but they could be ignoring it.

It is now over two weeks since that meeting and the union official and the management have still not met.

The women are becoming impatient at this stage and are to hold a meeting to discuss whether to go through ACAS (which the official has already set in motion) or whether to force the employer into noticing the existence of their union by taking some action and demanding that the employer meets their official.

(Employers can totally disregard ACAS as it has no basis in law as can be seen from the lessons of the Grunwick recognition strike).

Not only has this firm been exploiting men and women in the factory but has in the past sent work out to women in the home for a pittance.

Women tied to the home because of lack of nursery facilities for children are only too pleased to take in work in the home and management like that at Selected Toys are all too willing to exploit them.

All that is needed to begin to fight them is someone prepared to say enough is enough as in Selected Toys and to get women organised in the trade union movement.



WORKER?

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must be removed—the bureau-and the Labour Party.

nders to organise in their work-mit the membership to fighting scale of wages' on top of flat automatically increase with will necessitate the union branch

establishing a cost-of-living committee which will monitor price increases.

Other policies will include the commitment to occupations and strike action to defend factories, hospitals, schools etc., from closure.

Woman Worker would like to see its readers giving a lead to women—and men—workers in their places of work by becoming shop stewards, branch officers and conference delegates and thereby extending this fight for programme throughout their unions and against their union leadership.

Similarly we would like to see our readers taking our fighting policies into the Labour Party and supporting our call for the removal of the right wing leadership of Callaghan and Healey and their replacement by a leadership prepared to fight to improve the lot of the working class.

Woman Worker will stand in the long traditions of the international Bolshevik movement's work among women. We will be publishing theoretical articles, not to promote an abstract debate but to broaden and deepen our understanding of the politics of Marxism, Leninism and Trotskyism and the sharp programmatic tasks we will need to undertake to build the world revolutionary Party to bring about the overthrow of capitalism on an international scale and the establishment of socialism.

These tasks will inevitably bring us into conflict with the feminists of the "Women's movement" who are so blinkered by their conviction that "autonomy" for women will bring about their liberation—by building autonomous women's groupings in the unions—that they refuse to confront the key questions of leadership and programme, arguing even at times that leadership equals dictatorship and oppression.

It is these false positions which allow the feminists to co-exist with the Stalinists of the Communist Party who play a leading bureaucratic role in every country in the world in keeping down the working class.

This bureaucratic role is of course most obvious in the Soviet states themselves. Woman Worker supports Trotsky's call for the political revolution in these states to overthrow the bureaucracy and bring about true proletarian democracy, while arguing for the defence of the economic gains of the Bolshevik revolution against imperialist attack.

WHEN IT LOOKS LIKE THERE'S NO WAY OUT



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woman worker

Islamic reaction oppresses women

One of the great boasts of the butcher who was Shah of Iran, was that he "westernised" his country in the face of reactionary Islamic nationalism.

As part of his "White Revolution", women, he claims, were "liberated".

By this he means that women were allowed to vote in the rigged elections, and they did not have to wear the veil.

The reality, of course, was that working class and peasant women were doubly oppressed under the Shah's vicious regime.

SHAH

The Shah's own views on women are illuminating in this respect. In an interview with a woman journalist quoted in the CARL pamphlet "The Iranian Working Class", the Shah proclaimed:

"In a man's life women only count if they are beautiful and graceful and know

how to be feminine... What do you want? Equality? Equality, you indeed! I do not want to sound rude but you may be equal in the eyes of the law but not—I beg your pardon for saying so—in ability... You have produced nothing great. Nothing!"

The whole Iranian working class laboured under appalling conditions, in a situation where trade unions were useless bodies controlled by the secret police SAVAK.

In a country where illiteracy was widespread, Iranian women get the worst of the few educational opportunities.

For the women who get jobs, these were the poorest paid jobs in labour-intensive industries such as clothing and footwear, and maternity leave was almost non-existent.

It is not surprising, therefore, that women, together with the youth and students, were frequently at the forefront of the mass

demonstrations that led to the overthrow of the Shah.

Large numbers of women were among those to die, killed by British weapons supplied to the Shah's army by a British Labour government.

But the Iranian revolution, which ousted the Shah and installed an uneasy rule by the Islamic priests under the Ayatollah Khomeini, has not emancipated women.

On the contrary, Bazar-gan, the nominal Prime Minister, is determined to stabilise capitalist rule.

This requires a return to conditions of exploitation at work, to preserve the profits of the oil companies and other capitalist firms.

But the oppression of women in the Moslem state that Khomeini is trying to set up, goes far beyond exploitation in the factory.

One of the first proclamations of Khomeini, in his capacity as unofficial head of state, was to order all women to return to wearing the chador: the all envelop-

ing black garment that is symbolic of the subordinate position of women under Islam.

This reactionary move, which was to have ushered in a whole range of oppressive measures, was met with huge demonstrations of women in "western" dress, supported by left-wing, militant men. These women were attacked and abused by fanatical Khomeini supporters, but the Ayatollah was forced to partially back down: he declared that his proclamation was not to be interpreted literally—he only meant the chador "in spirit".

This partial victory is far from enough to guarantee equal rights for women. The position of women in other Islamic states shows the road that Khomeini wishes to travel.

In Pakistan, the law provides for "adulterous" women to be stoned to death.

Yet husbands have a free rein to be as adulterous as they choose: women have



Iranian woman wearing the chador, with only one eye unveiled

no right to even divorce them.

Women are shut away and cannot do anything that their "owners" do not sanction.

In Algeria and other Islamic states, a woman can be put in jail for bearing an illegitimate child, or may be killed by her father or brother for disgracing the family—even if the child is the outcome of a rape.

Abortion and contraception are virtually unknown.

GAYS SHOT

Already homosexuals have been shot by "revolutionary courts" in Iran, for offending "public decency".

The full emancipation of women and the right to free sexual expression will never be won in the Islamic state of Khomeini.

Just as the working class remains exploited by capitalism, women remain chained by the reactionary ideology of the Koran.

VITAL ROLE

The task for the Iranian working class, including the women and youth who played such a vital role in ousting the Shah, is to push forward with their revolution.

They must depose Khomeini and his supporters, seize the factories and drive out the capitalists and build a secular state, controlled by the working class and peasantry, with an economy planned to satisfy the needs of workers and peasants.

Only in such a socialist state will sexual oppression be eliminated.

FIGHTING FOR NURSERY

Equal Pay Act, Sex Discrimination Act, Employment Protection Act, better maternity leave conditions etc., are all fine words giving democratic rights which remain paper thin while the facilities women need are not only thinly provided but are even being cut back by successive government cuts programmes.

A woman with children cannot begin to take up her rights for a job, decent wages and working conditions until her children are cared for. School for most children does not start until the age of 5 and even then the school hours are shorter than most working hours.

State nursery facilities exist for the very few and these are being reduced year by year.

In 1978 a TUC working party produced an important document on the Under Fives which was later adopted in a limited form by the TUC Congress and reprinted as the "TUC charter on Facilities for the Under 5's".

The original report took a principled stand on the question of women's right to work, as well as children's and parents' rights to state-provided nursery education and care.

It quoted a 1974 survey showing that 72% of parents of 2 year olds wanted state day care and 91% wanted facilities for 4 year olds.

Against this the Report examines the meagre actual facilities which exist and looks in detail at day nurseries, child minders, nursery schools and classes, work place nurseries as well as playgroups and mother and toddler clubs.

66% of women have children aged between 0-15 and the vast majority are forced to remain in the role of wife and mother, denied financial independence and social status and contact with the organisations of the working class.



The occupation of the South Oxford nursery class, April 1978

Lack of child care provision forces many women to seek individual stop-gap solutions which conceal the real problem and often impede the social and educational development of the child.

These solutions include child minding and home working—both types of work being usually non-unionised and uninsured.

Over 250,000 women are forced in this way to work alone and paying the costs of using their own homes as business premises.

Where social services departments do provide day nurseries these are means-tested and usually only available for single parents or in cases of some sort of severe deprivation.

The Report shows how the

problems women face due to lack of childcare has driven them into shift working in low paid, ill-organised industries.

In 1967 the Plowden report recommended a policy of universal provision of nursery education as a major educational and social priority.

In 1972 the Tory government White Paper "Education, a Framework for Expansion" proposed massive expansion of the 'nursery education service through to the 1980s'.

Yet over the last ten years the nursery service has declined and children now have a smaller chance of pre-school education than in 1960.

This is because successive government cuts, begun by the Tories in 1973, have cut the nursery budget more savagely than in any other area of public spending.

Many local authorities now do not even take up the meagre government grants for nursery building because they refuse to face the expenses of running and staffing them themselves.

CLOSURES

In many counties newly built classes are lying empty and unused and some councils, such as Oxford, are even closing their existing nursery classes.

The TUC Charter has no recommendations on how these cuts should be fought or on how the trade union movement will bring about the massive expansion in the under 5's service which it correctly recommends.

We say that threatened closures must be met with occupations by the teachers, ancillary staff and parents and supported by the local trade union movement.

This is how the closure of the South Oxford Nursery Class was challenged in March and April 1978—a six-week occupation which attracted immense support throughout the whole county of Oxford.

But occupations are doomed to failure if the parents and workers are left to fight alone.

The leaders of the trade unions directly involved in the jobs lost—such as NUPE, NALGO and the NUT must call supporting strike action to force the local council to change its plans and lift the axe.

It was the failure on the part of these union leaders in Oxford to support the occupation in this way that allowed the county council to send in the bailiffs and evict the occupation.

Time after time we have seen cuts carried out in the health, education and social services against the wishes of all concerned simply by the collaboration of these union leaders whose biggest fear is to lose control of a determined campaign by their membership to stop the cuts.

Woman Worker welcomes the TUC Charter on the Under Fives and is urging all trade unions to take up an active campaign on the question.

We welcome the initiatives taken by the South East Region TUC, Oxford Trades Council and Leicester Trades Council (see details below) in holding

day conferences on the Report. We urge these conferences to adopt the following points of programme:

1) All cuts and closures must be opposed—if necessary by occupations and strike action.

2) All new nursery schools and classes must be opened.

3) The books of local authorities must be opened to elected committees from the labour movement (including nursery campaigns, etc) to expose the profiteering of private firms and banks.

4) No use by the private sector of public funds, premises or equipment.

5) An inquiry by the local labour and trade union movement, together with parents, into the facilities and the needs of parents and children.

6) Unions particularly involved in the service for the Under Fives such as NUPE, NALGO, NUT, etc., be effectively organised and committed to the above policies.

OXFORD TRADES COUNCIL CONFERENCE

The TUC Under-fives Charter
Sunday July 8
OCCR Hall
Princes Street

Speakers from Oxford City Nursery Campaign and the NUT among others

SERTUC CONFERENCE "Care of the Under Fives"

Saturday 30 June 1979
Congress House, Great Russell St, London WC1
Credentials (50p) from Jim Watson, 106 Mount View Road, London N4

Speakers:
Arthur Latham, Chairman, London Labour Party
Reg Race, NUPE
Margaret Cohen, National Campaign for Nursery Education
Chair: Tess Gill, NCCL