

woman worker

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5p



On February 8 the Tory government will almost certainly force through Parliament Corrie's Bill, which will drastically restrict women's right to a legal abortion.

The Bill will limit legal abortions to one-third of present figures, and force thousands of working class women to decide between backstreet abortions or unwanted children.

It will put at risk of legal prosecution doctors and other health workers who do go ahead with abortions.

The upper time limit for an abortion will be reduced to 20 weeks from the present 28, many charities now providing free abortions will be forced to close, and the criteria concerning risk to the mother's health will be interpreted extremely strictly. But in fighting this new legislation and its implementation, women need in no way fight alone.

Corrie is by no means the only Tory carrying through vicious attacks on the working class. His Bill is merely one part of the Thatcher government's determined policy to restore the profits of the British capitalist class at the expense of workers' jobs, rights, living standards and social services.

The most recent evidence of this policy is the government's *refusal* to increase child benefits in line with inflation. Yet they have deliberately increased the price of gas by some 20% saying that it is "too cheap" compared with oil and coal.

Tory offensive

Similar policies have been carried out ever since Thatcher was elected: the Tories' first moves were to increase pay for the army and the police, while announcing massive cuts in health, education, social service and DHSS spending.

These first steps have been followed by mass sackings in the Civil Service, British Shipbuilders and British Leyland, and now by Sir Keith Joseph's contemptuous handling of the steel workers.

Not content with announcing steel plant closures and the loss of 50,000 jobs, he then proceeded to offer a 2% wage increase (with inflation currently running at over 17%)

So incensed were the steelworkers at this that Bill Sirs, right wing leader of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation was forced to call the first national steel strike since 1926.

As the strike has developed, he has struggled desperately to contain the vast energies of the workers on the picket lines and the supporting actions of railway, transport and other workers.

Yet despite the Tory offensive and the willingness of workers to fight back, the Welsh TUC's call for a general strike against the closures of steel plants has not been taken up by Murray and the TUC leaders.

A general strike would be able to combine all the struggles of the working class against the attacks on their wages, jobs, services and democratic rights such as abortion rights, and direct towards the main question—*bringing down the Tory government*.

Women must play an important part in fighting to prepare and mobilise such a general strike and in the councils of action which must be built in every locality to link together all the wages, jobs and cuts struggles. Resolutions must be tabled in all trade union branches and labour movement bodies calling on the TUC to take up the Welsh TUC's proposal and call a General Strike to demand the removal of the Tory government.

Defend abortion rights, steel jobs, social services CALL A GENERAL

STRIKE!

Women fighting for abortion rights must join this movement which offers a real chance to bring down Thatcher.

Take up the demand for strike action to be called by the trade union movement on February 5 to lobby parliament against Corrie.

Pledge your union (particularly health service unions) to take action in support of doctors or other health service workers prosecuted for carrying out abortions.

Remind your Labour Party ward that Labour Party policy is for "Free abortion on request" and call for a three-line whip on Labour MPs to vote against Corrie and for a commitment for the next Labour government to repeal all anti-abortion legislation. Women workers should spread the call for strike action against the cuts on February 18 called by the South Yorkshire Trades Councils into a national strike call. Resolutions to this effect should be put to union branches and trades councils immediately.

Socialist Policies

Bringing down the Tories will not however solve the problem unless the Labour government which replaces it is called upon by the working class to implement *socialist* policies.

Socialist policies must begin from the needs of the working men and women: wages to increase with inflation; a socialist planned economy to provide full employment; health and education services under workers control; the withdrawal of British troops from Ireland; and the guarantee of full democratic rights such as abortion rights and the repeal of the Immigration laws.

Experience under the last Labour government has proved that there is no chance of the present right wing Labour leaders even attempting to carry out such policies. They must be removed and replaced: but who by?

The Labour 'lefts', too, have a sorry record of capitulating to the Callaghan-Healey leadership. But many workers still see them as a 'socialist' alternative to the right wing.

We must therefore demand that the 'lefts' campaign now for the removal of the right wing leadership and that they mobilise the working class to carry out socialist policies. We say 'no' to another Callaghan-Healey government: 'yes' to a workers government that will carry out policies in our interests.

Insofar as the 'lefts' will fight for such a perspective, we offer them support, and demand they go further. But at the same time *Woman Worker* will fight to build a revolutionary, Marxist leadership in the working class that is able and willing to expose, challenge and remove the 'lefts' at the point they retreat.

Meccano women fight closure

In the best traditions of old "family" firms, Meccano Ltd of Liverpool sacked their entire workforce on November 30 1979.

This staunch supporter of "law and order Tories" chose to ignore a particular bit of legislation which they didn't like and refused to give the statutory 90 days notice of redundancy. They showed the workforce that the only "family" they were interested in was the family of capitalism and big business, not the men, women and children who relied on Meccano for their weekly income.

Their excuse for the closure was the claim that the factory had made a loss of £920,000 in the last six months. But this was dwarfed by the fact that over £1 million in interest payments had been made to the banks in the same period, and £2 million in grants had been swallowed by the parent company, Airfix.

The workforce was justifiably sceptical and demanded the books be opened to them for proof.

The managing director of Meccano, a man called McNeice, arrived last May, boasting of smashing the union at another factory belonging to Airfix at Sunbury.

The Meccano factory at Liverpool was the last remaining unionised plant in the group. Could it be more than coincidence that McNeice was moved to Merseyside to preside over its closure?

The workforce however didn't take the news lying down. Shocked at being given half an hour's notice that they, too, were to join Merseyside's massive dole queue, they began an immediate sit-in.



Huge Corby demonstration opposes closures

Continued back page

Wom still

A review of "Women in Russia", edited by Dorothy Atkinson, Alexander Dallin and Gail Warshofsky Lapidus and published by Harvester Press at £12.50.

The Communist Parties throughout the world are fond of claiming that women are totally liberated in the Soviet Union. *Women in Russia* examines this claim, and provides us with a well-rounded picture of the real lives of these women.

The strongest conclusion that emerges from the book (although this is not fully recognised by the authors) is that formal, legal, equal rights for women is only a small part of women's liberation.

Legal equality

Soviet women enjoy complete legal equality. 85% of them go out to work, and equal opportunities in education and jobs are far advanced. Half the student population are women, as are two-thirds of doctors and teachers. There are even more women engineers in the Soviet Union than in all other countries combined.

And yet women remain oppressed. Why? Because the responsibility for child-care and other domestic tasks remains firmly on the shoulders of individual women.



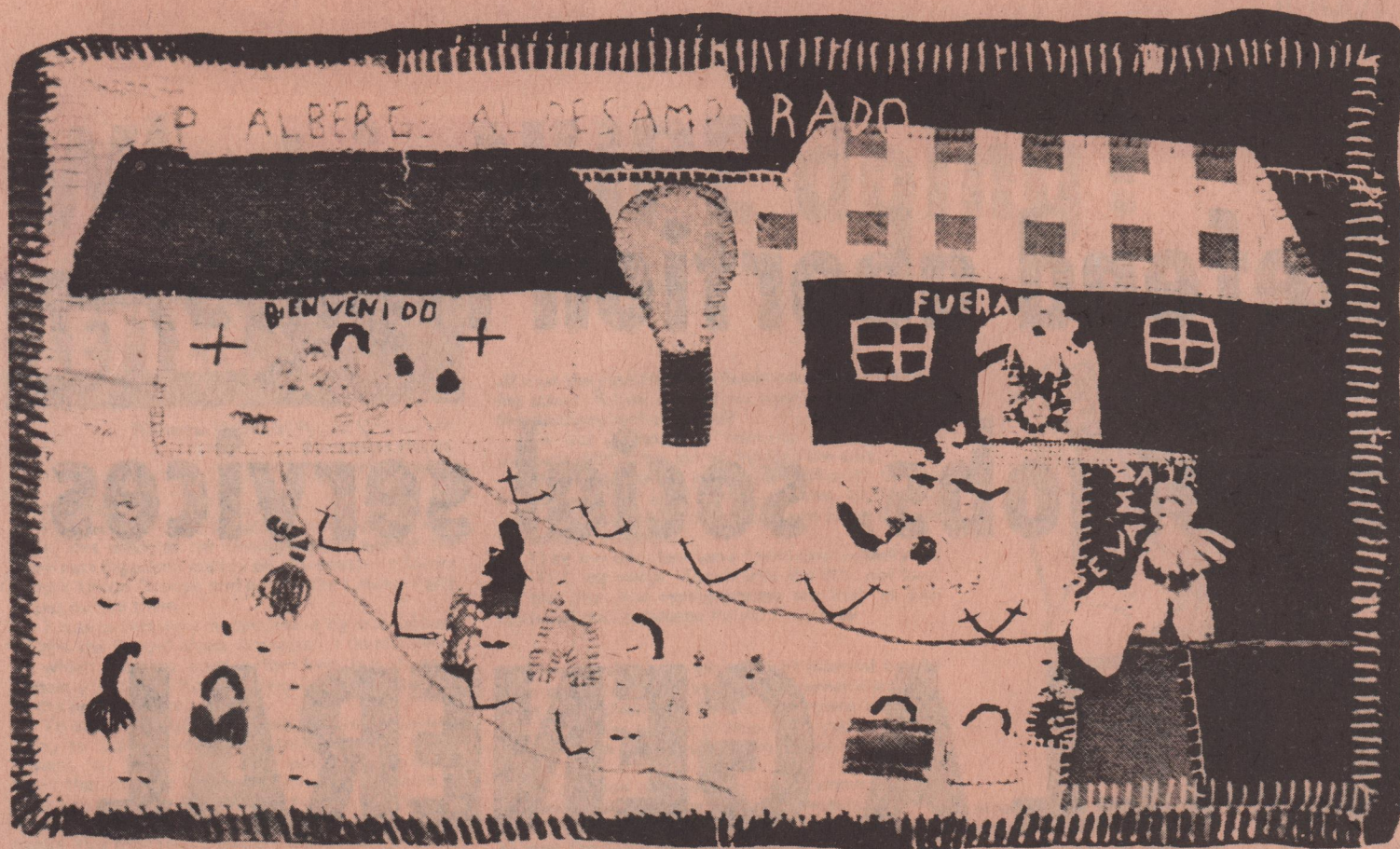
Russian doctor examines young woman worker on

WHY WO

Woman Worker is a revolutionary working class newspaper which takes up the struggles of women against their economic and political exploitation at work and at home, and fights for these problems to be taken up as part of the struggle to build the international revolutionary party to take the whole working class forward to a planned socialist society.

Women have a necessary role to play in the struggle against capitalism. Socialism will never come about without the involvement of 50% of the population.

The past decade has seen the limited democratic gains of the Equal Pay and the Sex Discrimination Acts threatened by cuts in jobs, hospitals, wages and the worst unemployment since the 1930s. Not only have women had to face the organised threat from the Tory government and the employers but also within their own ranks in the unions there is much work to be done in bringing questions which affect women to the fore.



Postcard showing one of the tapestries made in shanty towns near Santiago
Text reads: "TO GIVE SHELTER TO THE HOMELESS. Get out!—Where will we go—Welcome!"

CHILEAN WOMEN FIGHT BACK

Woman Worker interviews Maria from the Chilean Liga Obrera Bolseviq (LOB), a Trotskyist organisation affiliated to the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee—of which the Workers Socialist League is also a member. This comrade is living in exile in Paris.

Maria, could you start by summarising the events which led up to the 1973 coup?

Well, very briefly, Allende's government of Popular Unity was a coalition between the Socialists, Communists and Radical parties, a popular front which carried with it the inherent treachery of this particular variant of Stalinist class collaboration.

This government started out with limited reforms, nationalisation of copper, increased public spending and wages. However, because this was all done through the rigid confines of Chile's constitution, this peaceful road to socialism led to taking away gains won by the working class under previous regimes and inviting military figures into the government.

Reactionary strikes took place as well as strikes which represented the independent interests of the working class. The USA led the imperialist onslaught with massive CIA aid to reactionary forces as well as economic sabotage.

How did the Stalinists respond to this?

They actually opposed the cordones industriales (factory committees) which were embryo soviets. We fought alone for the building and arming of these committees, correctly arguing that only armed workers defence squads could stand up to the attack which was so clearly on the horizon.

However, we did not have the forces to carry this policy far enough and after a mock coup in July which tested the strength of resistance, the final blow was struck on September 11 1973.

The Stalinists then blamed the workers for not coming out to be massacred by the tanks while we called for a retreat under those conditions, and put the blame on the shoulders of the advocates of the Popular Front who had paved the way for bloody repression.

What role did women play during this period?

The proletarian workforce in Chile has been entirely male by tradition and there is a lot of 'machismo'. The extended family system is deeply rooted. Women have lived within that framework having perhaps ten or fifteen children. This means that women often played a reactionary role in the early period.

Is this also true in the militant mining areas?

Yes. Husbands worked and were militant but it was not unusual for their wives to vote for the Christian Democrats. However, I wouldn't like to give you the impression that Chilean women are subservient or constantly assaulted physically like their Mexican counterparts who are similarly weak economically. For example under Frei's government the women in the mines once forced the men to stay out on strike until their demands were met by refusing to cook for them.

How did women begin to break away from this continued role?

I would say this happened during the reactionary lorry drivers and small business people's strike. You see Chile is so long and narrow and has so few ports that trucks are essential for the distribution of basic necessities.

This strike was broken by superb working class organisation at factory and neighbourhood level. The unions organised hampers of food by exchanging commodities between different factories and warehouses.

Non-factory workers and those in, for example, the print unions organised through neighbourhood committees. It was primarily women who negotiated bulk supplies through the local unions and distributed them at the street level.

People worked voluntarily after work hours and food was actually cheaper during the strike.

This seems to contradict reports we heard of an "empty saucepans" demonstration where angry women took to the streets waving empty pans.

Well you see, if you didn't organise through the unions it didn't matter how much money you had because shops were empty. Workers and peasants had plenty to eat, only the bourgeoisie complained and they had stockpiled food anyway!

I went down to that demonstration to see for myself. In Chile the division of wealth is so sharp that you can tell a working class woman at a glance. All these women were magnificently dressed and waving new pans about. In fact there was a lorry distributing new saucepans at the end of the road!

Did this radicalisation continue after the coup?

Yes, it accelerated. Most of those imprisoned and killed were men and the majority of the relatively low number of women taken were students.

This meant that women had to assume economic responsibility for their families and organise campaigns for the release of their companions and relatives.

We've seen pictures of those beautiful patchworks they make.

Exactly. These are made by women from the workshops for the organisation of relatives of disappeared and imprisoned people. They provide a source of income and also a focus for campaigns and the organisation of collective child care facilities which have become necessary.

Economic independence has led many women to question sex roles and understand how the institution of the family has held them back politically. There has also been a very high incidence of separations amongst couples in exile because of the threat posed by the fact that it was often easier for women to find manual jobs such as cleaning because of the language barrier.

'Machismo' still persists, even in the left parties, but it is being challenged.

Is there a bourgeois feminist movement in Chile?

No. This movement doesn't really exist anywhere in Latin America. There was a Women's Congress recently but the resolutions passed were along class lines.

Maria, what are the immediate objectives of those of you in exile and your comrades in Chile?

Our main slogans are 'Down with the dictatorship' and 'For a sovereign constituent assembly', (as distinct from one convened by butcher Pinochet). However we also fight for factory committees and other independent working class organisations to form the basis of further mobilisation towards a workers' and peasants' government.

Can the LOB work openly in Chile?

Our comrades work under difficult conditions, selling the paper clandestinely and organising underground with the constant threat of death and imprisonment hanging over their heads.

Women in Russia- oppressed

The social policy of the ruling bureaucrats is not aimed at relieving women of this burden—in fact they make it even heavier. They are concerned because the population of Russia is not growing fast enough, and they attempt to remedy this by encouraging women to have more children.

However they do not do this by building more nurseries, providing for longer maternity and paternity leave, or building more housing with communal dining and other facilities—in other words, not by making child-rearing a joy instead of a burden.

Mother's Day

Instead they give medals to mothers of large families and make "Mother's Day" into a national event. They obstruct the use of contraception: the pill is virtually unobtainable, and the main form of birth control is abortion which is legal and available although officially frowned upon.

Husbands are not expected to share responsibility for cooking and cleaning: in fact this book emphasises how strong sexist ideology is in the Soviet Union. This is brought out in this poem, quoted from a book used in Soviet schools to teach children to read:

"I love grandmother's hands . . .
Oh, how many wonders do these hands create?
Now they are ripping, now sewing, now sweeping,

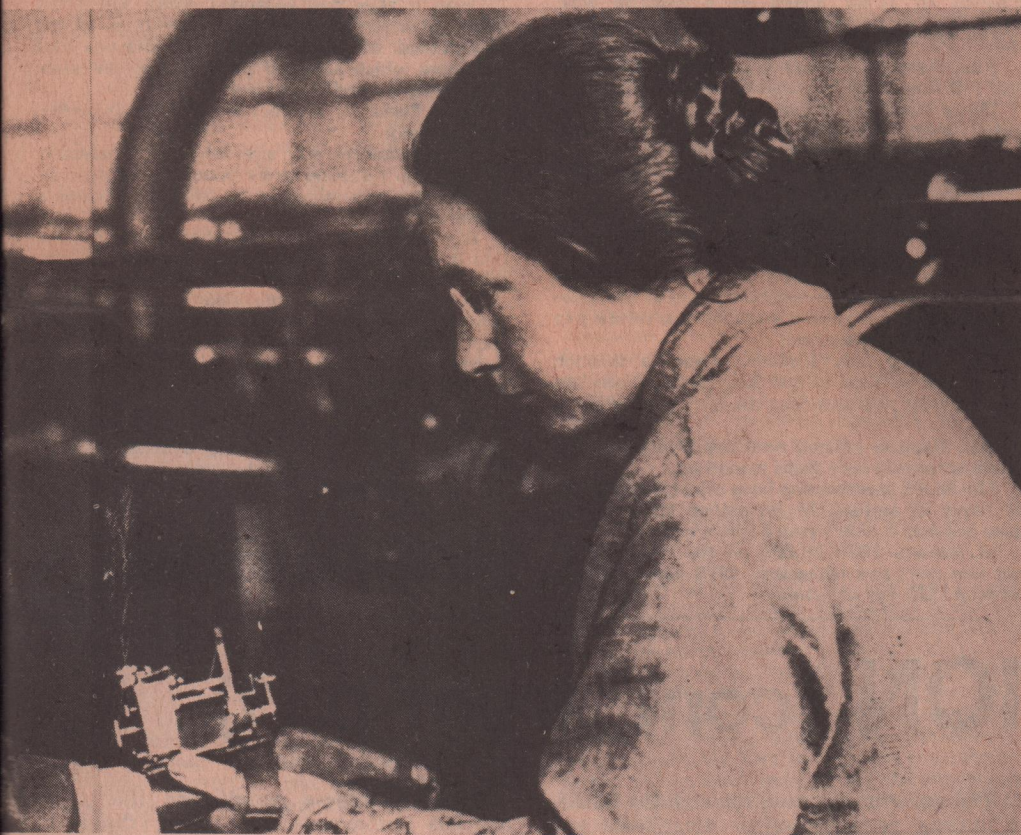
Now making something.
How tastily they toast the bread!
How thickly they sprinkle the poppy seeds!
How roughly they scrub the steps!
How tenderly they caress!

Grandfather knows many true stories and fables:
About the moon and sun, about wild beasts and birds,

I ask him different questions:
Where? What for? Soon? How many? Why?
My grandfather can answer any question."

So, women remain oppressed in the Soviet Union, by a double burden of career and domestic work, and through sexist ideology. The revolution of 1917, which immediately granted women legal equality, and started to provide communal facilities to replace the work done, unpaid, by women in the home (dining rooms, laundries, creches), has been usurped by a regime more interested in bolstering its own authority. The family, and the role women play in it, provide the stability this bureaucracy needs.

Women in Russia will not be accessible to the majority of *Woman Worker* readers. For one thing it is expensive (£12.50) and its style is dry and academic: but if you do get hold of a copy it is interesting and useful, despite the limited perspective of the liberal-minded authors.



shop-floor

WOMAN WORKER?

The bankrupt policies of the labour and trade union bureaucrats has serious implications for women's fight against oppression. Forced to stifle the struggle for policies which will actually win disputes and begin to challenge capitalism, the bureaucracy has pushed women's rights questions into the background.

In some cases the forcing of women out of employment and back into the home has been fostered by trade union leaders as a solution to their male members own problems.

Woman Worker is published by the Workers Socialist League as part of the fight to mobilise women together with the working class in the international fight against capitalism. As Trotskyists we are fighting to reconstruct the Fourth International—the world party of socialist revolution—to lead the struggles of the working class.

Our programme, based on the Transitional Programme, is directed towards linking women's struggles for democratic rights and against economic oppression, with the need to overthrow capitalism.

*Women to take on positions of leadership within the unions in order to fight for these policies.

*Joint price committees of trade unionists and housewives to organise the fight against inflation.

*For a sliding scale of wages on top of flat rate increases: for wages to be linked to price increases as assessed by elected price committees.

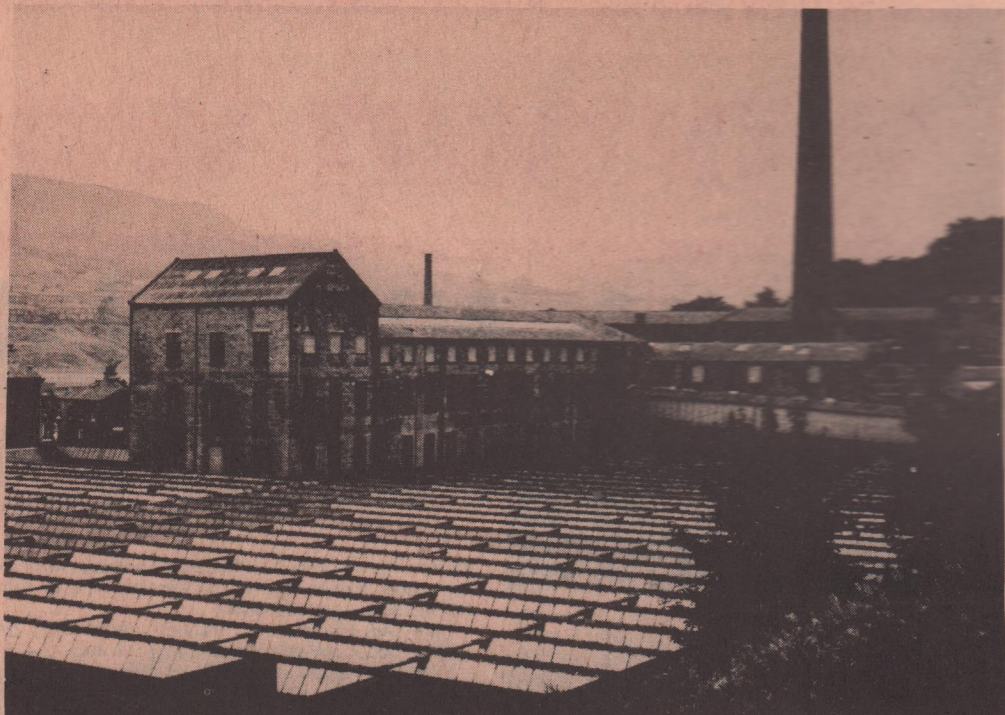
*For strike action and occupations to defend the health, education and social services and threatened factories.

*For open-the-books committees to discover the real financial state of the social services, and private companies threatening closure.

*For nationalisation under workers' management without compensation of firms that declare themselves bankrupt.

*Against all anti-abortion legislation—for free abortion and contraception on demand and workers and consumers control of the health service.

*Solidarity with struggles of women internationally against oppression by international imperialism or by the Stalinist bureaucracies in the deformed workers states.



Sign of the times: derelict cotton factory in Lancashire

TEXTILE JOBS UNDER THREAT

Textiles represent the fourth biggest industry in the UK, employing 300,000 workers, 85% of whom are woman workers.

This figure however is 200,000 less than 1951. The change in trends meant that the large based multiples, making heavy clothing, mainly in Leeds and which dominated the industry to that time went into severe decline.

At the same time the light clothing industry grew in importance, which meant an expansion in non-traditional clothing areas, and small sweatshops employing 10-25 workers became the small factories who, with government subsidies, could buy premises and machinery on the cheap.

In the last two to three years, 40,000 jobs were being supported by Temporary Employment Subsidy schemes plus £40 million being allocated to employers for investment purposes.

New-found militancy

As the recession in the capitalist economy begins to bite, the cutting of costs by the high street retailers, Marks and Spencers, Mothercare, etc., is having a drastic effect on the clothing industry.

The announcement by the Tory government that they intended cutting TES schemes produced a flood of closures.

Wages in the industry are amongst the lowest—only catering and hairdressing pay a lower minimum wage.

Clothing workers would need a 36% increase in pay to bring them up to the average pay in manufacturing industries. This situation has arisen because of the traditional badly organised and fragmented nature of the industry with the most anti-union of employers and managers using paternalism to inhibit the ability of many older women to fight for better conditions and wages.

This is now changing due to the influx of younger workers with greater awareness of their own jobs and rights.

The women in 'clothing' are taking on a new-found militancy reflected in massive increases in union membership—the last conference of the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers was described by the full time officers as "the most militant" they had known).

Low wages

However, the women are by no means taking the full part they can, and should play within the union structure, which is almost exclusively dominated by men.

The bureaucracy uses this as an excuse for not improving the low wage system, consistently asserting that "women won't fight for their rights". This, of course, was proved wrong in the now famous Leeds clothing strike in 1970 when a substantial wage increase was won by women strikers even after the betrayal by full time officials.

Although in 1977 profits of £180 million extra was reported for the industry, (the 19 biggest groups recording double average profits with Courtaulds returning a massive £35 million) the investment by these groups was down and they still continued to close their smaller factories and ones they considered unprofitable.

The crisis in the clothing industry is affecting virtually the whole of capitalist Europe. Between 1972 and 1977 employment declined within the EEC by 18%, particularly affecting Holland, which has similar structural problems as Britain with powerful retailing groups which have out-manoeuvred the small and fragmented textile and clothing companies.

Output levels of the Dutch textile industry fell 15% between 1970 and 1976 and have continued to fall since. In the same period British production fell by 6%, West Germany's rose 8% and the EEC average was 7% higher.

The Dutch government have introduced large aid programmes and restructuring schemes such as vertical structuring (from the yarn to the finished articles) with virtually no success. Since 1972 55% of jobs in the clothing sector of the Dutch textile industry have been lost. Mr Wil Verstraeten, textile specialist with the largest trade union federation, the FNV, said recently: "If the trends of the past five years continue then the industry is finished".

Import controls

The nationalistic call for import controls peddled by union leaders in the industry as the solution to the problems is, of course, an excuse used to avoid the real question: Capitalism is moribund and only deserves to be smashed. In fact clothing imports only accounted for an increase of 1% in unemployment in the UK.

Union leaders still persist in the illusion that this Tory government can be shown they are mistaken in their policies. The General Secretary of the NUTGW, for example, said: "There is a role for the government to play in securing a future for the clothing industry". (December 1979).

This, about a government which is viciously attacking workers' union rights, who openly declare their anti-women attitude by declaring that a woman's place is in the home regardless of how they feel about it.

This from a government which is dedicated to maintaining a situation in the clothing industry where workers can still legally receive £25-£35 for a 40 hour week.

This union leadership will *not* fight, indeed it is not capable of the kind of sharp political battles now emerging within textiles. The struggle for their removal is on and must follow these policies:

*Stop the closures in textiles—occupy the factories.

*Maximum cooperation with workers in the supply and retailing sectors. Open the books of the bosses.

*Kick out the shareholders. For a worker controlled and managed textile industry.

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woman worker

What is NUPE doing?

LETTER...

National Union of Public Employees,
Blackgates House,
Bradford Road, Tingley,
Wakefield

Dear Madam,

For the first time, I purchased a copy of your paper last week at the demonstration against the Tory cuts organised mainly by the South Yorkshire Trades Union Groups and not by the Labour Party as put out by them.

I was in fact very disappointed by your article "Fight the School Meals Massacre". I do not know at which location your writer lives but it most certainly is not in Yorkshire nor as far as I can tell, in the rest of the country.

To say that NUPE nationally has not done anything to fight these cuts is not only silly but a blatant lie. I would however support your statement that the last Labour government did little to stop any Council from running down any School Meals Service if they wished to do so but I can assure you that NUPE put as much pressure on the Labour Party as was unionly possible.

Your article also states that the School Meals membership will fight against cuts if given the leadership. Well for the last twelve years, I have been a member of the NUM and was one of those people who brought down the Tories in 1974 and I have attended every NUPE branch meeting in my area for the last six months and talked, told, shown and encouraged both politically and monetary wise, why these members should fight the cuts. The total result on the 28 November was three School Meals workers out of a membership of hundreds!

Whilst I still feel we as a Union could do more to help educate our women members, I feel your paper's attack on NUPE would have been far better turned to give NUPE backing for their plan of action against the cuts but no doubt you do not even know of such a plan, therefore I suggest you contact the Research Department of NUPE in London and find out the amount of time, money and effort that has been spent on this Campaign.

Yours fraternally,
Paul Dainton
Area Officer

OUR REPLY:

Could Brother Dainton be correct? Is there a secret master plan against the cuts in school meals that has unbeknown to all been put into practice

all over the country by officials relentlessly informing school dinner staff of not why but how to stop the rundown and cutbacks?

We did contact the research department on their national campaign on fighting the cuts.

They answered it was "very difficult" to give an account on what actual policies NUPE had nationally put into practice; this was being done in "localised campaigns".

They did say they were "participating fully" in the TUC campaign 'Forward to the 80s, not back to the 30s' and recommended we look at past copies of the newspaper *Public Employee*.

These back issues were full of material on the effects of schoolmeal charges on women's employment and children's health; but there wasn't a single guideline of how to stop these cuts.

There were, however, examples of what didn't work:

"A petition organised by the National Steering Committee Against the Cuts and pressure from the TUC and backbench Labour MPs were not enough to stop the price rise. As expected the result was a fall in the numbers taking the meals of 600,000."

We were not surprised by the Research Office's evasive answer.

They and Alan Fisher have obviously realised that fighting the cuts involves much more than "educating the public", more than petitions, expensive car stickers, posters and badges, more than writing to your local councillors and protesting to MPs.

The fact is that to stop the cuts we are going to have to bring the Tories down; cuts are the backbone of Tory policy.

How is this going to be done? When the Tories are mounting a full scale attack on the working class with heavy artillery it is no good trying to gently tell them to stop being mean and if that fails resort to pea-shooters.

Brother Dainton knows—as do the numerous ex-NUM NUPE full-timers—it requires using the effective weapon of the working class—strike action.

Ah, but Bro. Dainton will reply, 'yes, but the membership aren't prepared to take strike action.'

It is obviously difficult for the membership of NUPE to take industrial action. They provide vital services to the community and therefore are aware they are open to press attacks accusing them of inflicting pain and suffering.

Instead of counteracting this argument and explaining emergency cover for those assessed by strike committees to be in vital need, NUPE



officials enthusiastically use it as an excuse for no action.

The young, ill and aged will suffer far more through the destruction of the welfare state where services will be withdrawn for good than they will through strike action.

But NUPE officers nearly always introduce the question of strike action in a negative way, designed to shatter any confidence in its effectiveness.

Alan Fisher in a directive on 'action against the cuts' (13 August 1979) states on strike action:

"In a situation where public expenditure is under severe pressure, extensive or prolonged strikes might be counter-productive if by reducing wage costs, they provide the employers with the savings they are seeking".

If that was the case, local authorities and AHAs would be desperately attempting to provoke strike action to aid their budgeting!

On the contrary they are terrified of the political power of such militancy and of the independence of an organised working class refusing to carry on providing services.

Any dinner lady suffering speed-up through cuts would be able to tell Bro. Dainton why we need to fight the cuts. But the crucial question is how.

Bro. Dainton offered one 'day of action'. It is hardly surprising only three turned up.

The NUPE membership have learnt their lessons on 'days of action'. In November 1976 80,000 came out and it didn't stop a single cut.

In January 1979 70,000 on the march didn't end low pay; and November 1978 wasn't even a national TUC day of action.

All these were specifically 'days of action', not even one day national strikes.

Without a strike instruction the school meals staff would have had to take time off, lose pay and be covered by other staff already stretched to capacity.

Even if they had organised strike action the NUPE membership have bitter memories of the effectiveness of selective action of one day here and there which achieved nothing but confusion, demoralisation and loss of pay.

Alan Fisher in a directive to the membership last year said:

"Circumstances may arise where it is necessary to engage in full-scale strike action to demonstrate the union's determination to safeguard members' interests."

Woman Worker maintains that this determination is seriously lacking amongst the NUPE leadership—from Fisher on down.

We would like to see clear evidence to the contrary. Instead all we see is their willingness to back off the fight wherever possible (e.g. the December 28 announcement that NUPE will drop any blacking of pay beds in the NHS).

We challenge Bro. Dainton and other officers in the union to explain to *Woman Worker* in detail any effective action that is being officially led by NUPE anywhere against the cuts; until then, we will be convinced that Bro. Dainton and Co. are simply fiddling while Rome (or Wakefield) burns.

MECCANO OCCUPATION (cont. from p. 1)

There are over 900 people employed in this factory and around two-thirds are women: many of these women are the main wage earners being widows, single parent families, unmarried or with husbands either unemployed or in low paid jobs. They have suffered severe financial hardship.

Despite the mumblings coming from Tories in Parliament that not giving 90 days notice was "not really cricket", this move by Meccano is not unplanned. The Tories desperately want this workforce broken.

This is just the first step in a whole package of Tory proposals to strip the working class of all legislation which protects them in any way from the ruthlessness and greed of their employers.



Inside the occupied Meccano plant

The firm is, of course, using its dirty tricks department to try and split the workforce. In the week after Christmas holiday pay ran out, when most of the workforce would be stoney-broke, they sent out a letter to each of them to tell them exactly how much they were prepared to pay in redundancy money.

A few workers did make further enquiries about this and were told by management they could only have the money if they got their P45 tax forms from the leaders of the occupation. The workers in occupation of course have no access to this or any other tax material and it is merely a ploy by management to make them think that blame lies with the workforce and not the company.

The government, too, through the DHSS, is putting pressure on to demoralise and break the occupation. Women who were single parents and approached the DHSS in the week before Xmas because they were destitute were refused emergency payments and threatened with having their children taken into care.

The workers however refuse to be broken. Rose Hanly, a Meccano worker for 22 years and a shop steward and Ann Noone, a senior steward tell of the high morale that exists there.

They tell of the backing that the women are getting from their families, husbands and children often coming in to help out in the occupation; of women spending more time at the plant now than they did when they were being paid, despite the extra strain this puts on them and their families; and of how young and old alike are enthusiastic supporters of the present action.

Local union branches, too, are giving their support in the form of visits and cash donations to the much needed hardship fund which is for many the only source of income.

At a national level, however, more practical support is urgently needed.

The largest union, the GMWU, is still, six weeks after the occupation started, not paying out hardship money although funds are available from this huge union headed by David Basnett.

There has been verbal support too from Labour "lefts" such as Heffer and Loyden, but care must be taken by the workforce to ensure that there is action as well as words. This plant will not be saved by negotiation or through parliament.

After all, these people and the union officials promised the same thing to Standard Triumph and Dunlop workers on Merseyside if only they'd "leave it to us". But they didn't deliver the goods and thousands lost their jobs even though it was then a Labour government in office.

The workers of Meccano have taken a definite step-towards victory in occupation of the factory. If there is to be a successful end to this occupation the following plan of action needs to be followed.

*The occupation must be continued and extended through national, industrywide strikes. In particular, joint action with Matchbox workers who now find themselves in a similar position.

*Councils of action supported by the whole trade union and labour movement must be built.

*The reactionary argument for import controls should be ignored as it is presented only to divert the workers from a struggle with their own bosses here.

*Continue the call for blacking of all Airfix products or the use of flying pickets to call for this and further support.

The occupation at Meccano is important not only to the workers there but to the whole working class. It should be supported by us all, passing resolutions in union branches and working class bodies pledging physical support for pickets against scabbing and bailiffs and regular financial support.

These workers must win for all our sakes. They have already made great gains in confidence, particularly the women, many of whom have not played an active role in trade union work before. These gains must be built upon and the fight won.