RED RAG
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Declaration of Intent

RED RAG is a magazine of liberation and in particular of women’s liberation.

We stand for a revolutionary change in society, for ending capitalism and establishing socialism.

We challenge whatever and whoever denies the right of women to be free—from economic inequality and from the tyranny of the role forced upon them in our society.

Our aim is to help build an alliance between women liberators and the working class movement.

The organised labour movement—that is the trade unions, the co-ops and the left political parties—is the decisive force in this country for social progress and for socialism. Its wholehearted and active support is essential for the success of the women’s liberation movement. And that support will be all the more forthcoming to the extent that women themselves state their claims and demands and organise and fight to win them.

For all its strength, the working class movement cannot win, cannot achieve its aims without the active support of millions more women. It will not gain that support, it will not win the allegiance of women’s liberation fighters, unless it champions the women’s cause.

In many respects the working class movement already accepts the principles of women’s rights. But accepting principles is one thing and doing something about them is quite another.

Generations of women’s liberationists have grown old and died since the TUC passed its first resolution on equal pay. Yet only now is there an Equal Pay Act and a pretty grotty one at that.

Millions of women workers suffer low wages and vicious exploitation, but less than a quarter of them are organised in the trade unions, although every experience of struggle demonstrates the indomitable fighting spirit of working class women.

The trade union movement is virtually silent about the discrimination which excludes women from many jobs.

The growth of unemployment will create even greater problems and hardships for working women and discrimination against them is likely to increase. We demand the right to work—for women as for men, the right to equal educational opportunity, training and apprenticeships and to equal pay for work of equal value. This is an urgent issue, not only for women, but for the labour movement as a whole and especially for the trade unions.

It is argued by some that there is no need for a women’s liberation movement, that any issues of concern can be dealt with by the movement in general.

But 'in general' we’ve been getting trodden on for a very long time!

We will offer in RED RAG our Marxist explanation of why women are oppressed and how that oppression can be fought and overcome.

We will make propaganda for the struggle against the Tories, for a new government pledged to fundamental social change and for socialism.

We will explain the immense benefits of a socialist society for working people. We shall also explain the necessity, now and under socialism, of a continuing struggle to root out all those old ideas, habits and prejudices which stand in the way of total liberation.

We are in no mood however, to wait for socialism to bring us liberation. We are interested in liberation now and in wrenching from capitalist society every advance we can get.

There is in these days a ferment of discussion especially amongst younger women, about liberation, about the need for a new society, for a change in life styles, in family and personal relations. RED RAG is for them.

It is for all women who work—in factories, shops, offices, schools and in their homes. Without them, without their active participation and solidarity, there can be no success in current industrial struggles or in the fight to transform the world we live in.

We extend the hand of friendship to all working women—inside and outside the liberation movement—to Marxists and non-Marxists, to the political and non-political. We join them in discussion and action.

We ask for your co-operation and help. Write to us with your views, send us letters and articles; win more readers for RED RAG; help us with donations of money, small and large gifts will be equally welcome.

This is a brief outline of our intentions in launching RED RAG. It will be amplified, argued out and explained in articles in this and future issues.
‘Women’s Role’ in the Labour Movement
Florence Keyworth

During the Women’s Liberation march through London on International Women’s Day last year, a girl in a trouser suit, in an overflow of enthusiasm, danced a fandango down the Haymarket.

As she whirled down the street, clashing a pair of saucepan lids, her companions on the march gave her an amused cheer.

But two older men standing on the pavement muttered ‘Silly bitch!’

Where does the working class movement stand in relation to Women’s Liberation? Is it too standing on the sidelines muttering insults?

Perhaps not. But it is often displaying an attitude of hostility or disparagement.

Let’s examine some of the objections. We can, of course ignore the guffaws of the male chauvinists and concentrate on genuine differences of view.

What is Women’s Liberation?

First it is necessary to establish what Women’s Liberation is about. The girl with saucepan lids and 2000 others like her were marching in support of five main short-term demands.

These are: equal pay; equal opportunity in education, training and at work; free contraception on the National Health Service; free abortion with the woman herself making the decision; provision of 24-hour child care centres.

These are the things women must have if they are to take hold of their own lives and develop as independent human beings instead of being prisoners of the family and half-pay wage slaves—pushed into unskilled jobs and forced to stay in them.

There is nothing in these five demands with which any trade unionist, any Labour Party member or Communist need disagree.

Labour movement hostility

Why then does the mere mention of Women’s Liberation arouse opposition from some people in the working class movement?

One reason is that until now the movement has acted on the assumption that women can best be brought into mass action in traditional ways—through the tenants’ movement, the peace movement, parent-teacher associations and so on. The injustices women suffer because they are women have been under-emphasised.

Those of us in sympathy with Women’s Liberation reject this restrictive view.

Of course the tenants’ struggle, the campaigns for better education and other social services are all vital. But they are the province of men and women equally.

To see them as the special interest of women arises from the bourgeois notion that woman is always a relative creature—someone’s daughter, wife or mother—never herself.

Women, run this philosophy, are mothers. Therefore they feel deeply about peace and education—for their children’s sake. Women are confined to the home by circumstance. Therefore they are interested in the cost of living.

If they are truly womanly they are self-sacrificing. ‘She was a typical working class numm—selfless’ said a recent article, ignoring the fact that no-one is selfless and that only through self-fulfilment can we relate to others in a healthy way. The halo of the sacrificing mothers are paid for by the children’s guilt feelings.

No, it is time for women in the working class movement to rebel against this view of themselves as merely daughters, wives and mothers and declare their right to be regarded as people.

This is easily said but the doing will be difficult. Let’s not kid ourselves about this. Our movement is male dominated and habits of thought and action die hard.

Some of the most militant sections of the movement are based on industries where the working force is entirely male—the miners, dockers, building workers . . .

The miners have demonstrated magnificently just how splendid a lead the workers of these industries can give to the entire working class. But the attitude to women in these all-male industries is, to put it mildly, firmly traditional.

To bring new habits of thought to these sections of the workers, the working class movement itself must develop a new, militant ethic of sex equality. Only then, can we expect a real challenge. We are all fighting for socialism—but what will socialism mean for the relationship between the sexes and for the whole family?

Do we believe that under socialism men should take equal responsibility with women for the care of young children and that men and women should play a genuinely equal role in the world of work? I do for one.

If this is our aim, then let us say so. Let us say that one of the great hopes for the future is that the cash nexus between the sexes will be abolished and that eventually men and women will work as free and independent human beings. Thereby their relationship will be transformed.

Some of the hardest adjustments to sex equality will have to be made by men because the giving up of male privilege is involved.

But women will have to adopt a new ethic as well and for them too adjustment will be difficult. For centuries we have been conditioned to accept dependence on men as natural. So we expect to have the privileges which go with that situation and these will sometimes be hard to renounce.

The ideas of Women’s Liberation therefore challenge the personal equilibrium of both men and women. This, I believe is why they sometimes arouse such fierce hostility.

The five short-term demands sound like simple justice, as indeed they are. But they are also revolutionary and we stand not a hope in hell of achieving them without the help of the organised working class.

I have been in the movement for over 30 years and I suppose I had lost hope that sex equality would become a burning issue in my lifetime. I feel a sense of gratitude to the young women who have achieved this renaissance.

What we need now is a period of frank discussion within the working class movement during which we can all discuss these challenging ideas without inhibition.
The major Marxist formulation of the theory of economism was completed in 1902 with the publication of Lenin's 'What is to be Done?' It was presented as an attack on Bernstein's 'volte face'. (Bernstein was a leading member of the German Social Democratic Party who had denounced the class struggle in favour of the achievement of socialism by parliamentary reforms.) His school found parallels in Russia as it did in almost every other country among the so-called 'legal Marxists' and was accompanied by a turn to economism in the labour movement led mainly by the newspaper group 'Rabochaya Mysl'. (This whole development had taken place much earlier in England.) An understanding of the specific critique Lenin made of this tendency is not simply an antiquarian exercise... had we laid the ghost of economism we should also have dealt the death blow to capitalism. The bearing this has on the women's movement will become apparent.

Economism & the question of women
Mary Davis

Concerns only intellectuals and having little relevance for the working class.

Politics obediently follows economics' is the watchword of the economists... the economic struggle is the key, all other forms of struggle are at best peripheral, at worst, diversionary.

It will at once be apparent, even from this inadequate survey, that many echoes of this tendency are to be found in the women's movement both inside and outside. That is to say that there are many socialists and communists included, who see the women's struggle, as they see the struggle of other non-class groupings like students and black people, solely in terms of the fight for a better economic and legal status. This is presupposing that any interest is taken in these struggles in the first place... through bitter experience we know that very often it isn't; for a characteristic feature of economism is that it refuses to recognise any movement other than that of the organised working class. In this connection 'Iskra' was continually attacked by the economists for supporting the student movement on the grounds that such a tactic constituted a desertion of the class struggle.

So far nothing is new. Most women are well aware that even the bare economistic bones of our cause (especially the demand for equal pay) has been conveniently forgotten by the labour movement for a hundred years, and would probably be shelved for another hundred were it not for an increasingly militant women's movement.

Women & economist ideology

In such a situation it's hardly surprising that the reality of women's oppression is treated as a middle-class 'notion' to be ignored, laughed at or solved on an individual basis. What has to be understood, however, in dealing with this is that such attitudes among advanced sections in the labour and socialist movement (who ought, at any rate, to know better), is not an accidental aberration peculiar to a particularly chauvinist collection of males, but rather the product of the ideological grip of economism which holds back the liberation of all of us.

We must cease to be surprised that such attitudes to women prevail... for how could it be otherwise when the dominant sector in the labour movement rejects socialist theory (often implicitly rather than explicitly). In this regard Lenin re-iterates the point that the working class is faced with a choice between bourgeois ideology and socialist theory, there can be no middle path.

But workers cannot arrive at socialism independently simply through T.U. work - for on its own this is tantamount to an acceptance of bourgeois ideology. The bourgeoisie has vast resources and opportunities to make its presence felt among workers and its ideology readily imposes itself upon their consciousness. The most difficult, but at the same time the most essential function of the vanguard party is to combat this. Unless it undertakes this, the dominant ideas of the ruling class (predominantly male) on women as on everything else, will remain the ruling ideas and women's oppression, never having been recognised, will never be countered.

Revolutionary Theory

This means more than just a recognition of economic and juridical inequality. A serious attempt must be made using the method of dialectical materialism to develop a critique of dominant notions of a woman's role and function. This is a task not easily solved by referring to the relevant text of Marx, Engels or Lenin. Such writings do not exist except in a scattered and fragmentary form. But a firm conceptual basis has already been laid by these latter for such a work. Without it the change in consciousness and hence in attitudes to women will be slow in coming, even after the revolution.

There can be no revolutionary practice without a revolutionary theory.

Left economism

It was during the first world war that Lenin recognised and exposed a new trend in economism (viz. 'The Nascent Trend of Imperialist Economism'). Although in appearance very different from the solid commonsense notions described earlier, this brand is in essence the same. The
later 'leftist' economism, born during the imperialist war of 1914 appeared ultra revolutionary. It argued against the fight for democratic rights, asserting that they were unachievable in that period; the only meaningful demand that could be advanced was for socialism. Anything else was pure mystification.

In essence such a formulation leaves the workers prey to precisely the sort of opportunism (that is to say, the grasping at short-term victories even if it means abandoning, or worse, deviating, from the long term goal) these new economists are most anxious to guard against. (On this occasion the Bolshevik minimum programme containing immediate democratic demands was attacked as laying the basis for Kautskyite revisionism.)

Waiting for Socialism

Again there are those who inspired by the same economism today would have the women's movement abandon its struggle and wait for socialism to give them even the rudiments of equality. They see the fight for such things as 24 hour nurseries, equal pay and free abortion on demand as unachievable under capitalism and hence diversionary—the major struggle is for socialism, it is opportunist to attempt to win allies by fighting on a 'liberal' democratic platform rather than a socialist one. Lenin gives us the 'Marxist solution' to this problem. It is 'for the proletariat to utilise all democratic institutions and aspirations in its class struggle against the bourgeoisie in order to prepare for its overthrow and assure its own victory...to fight opportunism by renouncing utilisation of the democratic institutions created and distorted by the bourgeoisie of the given capitalist society is to completely surrender to opportunism.'

To assume that the fight for reforms as contained in a minimum programme constitutes reformism, is to completely misunderstand the true nature of reformist economism...the crucial point is not the demands in themselves, but whether they are presented in a revolutionary way i.e. in the context of the class struggle against capitalism. It thus becomes clear that the fight for the minimum demands of the women's liberation movement is essential. To abandon such a fight would be to surrender to the arms of the bourgeoisie.

Fight for Marxism-Leninism

Whilst economism, whether left or right, reigns in the labour movement, the question of women's liberation will be ignored or misrepresented. The fight against economism and for marxism-leninism must link the women's movement to that of the working class. Without such an ideological struggle there can be no way forward for women or men.

Women are particularly and unfairly oppressed by our capitalist system; that is an observation that few who call themselves revolutionaries would deny. This easy unanimity appears to crumble, however, when those same revolutionaries are confronted with the possibility of an imminent assault against aspects of this oppression: some, it appears, are less than enthusiastic at the prospect.

Theory & Practice—the real divide

This seeming contradiction between theory and practice can be seen in the trade unions' lack of mobilisation on the equal pay issue, it can be seen in the low numbers of women in leadership positions in labour organisations, and it can be seen in the ambivalent attitude the labour movement as a whole displays to the Women's Liberation Movement—the only part of the left to take on aggressively the whole spectrum of women's grievances.

This clear absence of wholehearted support is rationalised in several ways. Some in the Labour Movement, perhaps over-trustful of reports in the bourgeois press, attack the mythical bra-burning tactics of Women's Liberation. Others, perhaps solely concerned with issues that can be won today, question the reasonableness of such extravagant demands as 24 hour child care centres.

Male chauvinist piggy

If one is a supporter of the Women's Liberation Movement, it would be tempting to dismiss these criticisms as further manifestations of male chauvinist piggy. But they are more than that. For too often under such superficial criticisms lies the generally unstated, but much more crucial belief that Women's Liberation is at best irrelevant, and at worst a diversion from the working class struggle. And this last belief cannot be ignored by socialists in the women's movement who are not content with protesting the injustices of the world, but who also want to see the working class in power, and who thus must examine any suggestion that the immediate struggle is a diversion from the long term goal.

At first glance there may seem to be some reason for this suggestion. At a time when patriots are jailed without trial in Northern Ireland or shot down for opposing the sell-out in Rhodesia, when the level of prices at home is only matched by the level of unemployment, is it not possible, even given the fact that women are oppressed, that the liberation of women must wait until these more crucial problems facing the working class are solved—until we have socialism and everyone can be liberated.

But however reasonable and comforting this assumption might seem to some, the assumptions behind it are interesting. It assumes, as a matter of course, that the struggles of the male worker are intrinsically more important than the struggles of women. It assumes, as well, that the acquisition of socialism will in itself end the special problems of women. And most importantly, it assumes that there is no relationship between the fight to establish socialism and the struggle against the oppression of women—that this socialist system can come about in Britain without any prior significant change in the role and status of women.

It would certainly be possible to challenge this assumption on the grounds that the fight for the extension of democracy, in whatever field, is intimately tied up with the winning of socialism. Thus the struggle for women's rights, like the struggle for comprehensive education or
Thus the most reliable weapon of the bourgeoisie is not their army, or their police or their laws or their political institutions, but rather their hold over the minds of ordinary men and women through their power to convince those they oppress that they deserve their oppression. Whether the specific weapons used are racialism, anti-working class propaganda, or male chauvinism, the strategy of the bourgeoisie is to split common people one from the other and then to convince them that not only are they inferior and worthless, but helpless and impotent as well. The success of this strategy in Britain can be measured by the extent to which people put up with unbearable living conditions, depressing working conditions and appalling low wages.

But nowhere, however, has this strategy been more effective than with women. If men’s initiative, self-confidence and potential have been dampened by our society, then women’s have been snuffed out. Our society is not content with giving women the worst education, jobs and pay. It also attempts to convince each woman, through every institution in society, that she is not an individual with the ability and responsibility to take actions that could improve her life, but rather a passive, dependent object waiting for some Prince Charming to come along to slay the dragon for her. It is only in her sex-determined role as mother and wife that a woman is really allowed to seek her identity. Women are told they are not creators, but pro creators, not producers, but reproducers. For a woman to look elsewhere—to a job, or a political movement—for fulfillment is to show she is not really a woman.

Isolation of women

Thus even though women are particularly oppressed and should be drawn into organisations pledged to put an end to their oppression, it should come as no surprise that their conditioning should instead turn women away from involvement in political activities. Only two out of every nine women workers belong to a trade union; only one third of the membership of the Communist Party are women. And with the isolation and insecurity of so many women their often hostile attitudes to political change is readily understandable. What does a strike mean to a housewife whose husband has never discussed his union with her, but less money coming in. What does a political meeting mean to a woman who rushes home from work to put dinner on the stove, but that she will see even less of her husband.

It can be seen, then, that the role women play in society is not only a result of our capitalist system, but also a product of the preservation of that system. As long as housewives feel isolated from the outside world and view their problems as the result of personal failings, as long as women workers see their primary role as homemaker and thus will not fight for better conditions on the job, as long as girls seek their own identity through the exploits of their boy friends and thus will not demand the right for fulfilling lives for themselves, as long as women’s definition of their own role does not change radically, the bourgeoisie will have little to fear from a working class so badly crippled.

Women’s Liberation—a necessity

The Women’s Liberation Movement, far from being a diversion in such a situation, is rather a necessity. And the efforts of this Movement to raise the consciousness of women, to help women understand the nature and effects of their own oppression, and to demonstrate that women do have the ability to bring about changes in their own situation must be supported by all who want a truly united and powerful working class in this country.
What the Women's Movement Means
Brenda Jacques

The Woman's Liberation Movement has provided an important stimulus for a discussion of the woman's role in capitalist society. As a starting point for a discussion of the aims and character of the movement, I would like to raise the way in which, in my own experience, discussion and participation in the Movement has been relevant.

The concern of women within the Women's Liberation Movement to articulate and understand the nature of their social experience and thereby to explore the many aspects and forms which their oppression takes in our society has brought a personal recognition of the ways in which my own experience is related to theirs. This does not necessarily lead to the posing of individual solutions to the constraints and inhibiting factors which women experience in their development as individuals. In the absence of a wider perspective for social change or where there is no immediate prospect of a social solution to these problems, a variety of compromises and experiments will and must emerge of an individual character.

At the same time, discussion as to the nature of a woman's role shows the extent to which every problem posed in its social context demands a social solution. This has reinforced an understanding of my part and I believe for others, of the need for a socialist perspective.

Solidarity

The importance of the Woman's Liberation Movement for my own development came through the actual emergence of the movement itself. Essential to this was the extent to which I was able to see my own experience as a student and a woman, in solidarity with other women with some of the same experiences.

As a student, my reading of marxist literature and my 'academic' studies in the context of the discussions that were taking place generally amongst students at university, raised a number of questions as to the validity of study along the lines generally laid down by the university. Participation in the protests against the Labour Government policy on Vietnam, disillusionment with the general policies of Right-wing Labour and the resulting solidarity actions with all those fighting against the forces of Imperialism was the background to an increasing awareness by many socialist students of the contradiction within the university between the need to pose as purveyors of truth and disinterested study, while at the same time providing a servicing role for the needs of capitalist society.

The need expressed within the student movement to present a marxist alternative to the analyses presented by the University and to develop a marxist critique and understanding of the role of the university through discussion and political action was a formative influence for my own ideas. However, while these concepts were obviously directly relevant to my position as a student they didn't obviously relate to my position as a woman.

A woman's experience primarily equips her for the personal and emotional aspects of life. The concern with the emotional and social are her special responsibility. These qualities within the context of the family and the relationship of men and women are seen as essentially supportive and secondary. They provide a poor basis for an active role in a wider social context. If a woman does succeed in creating an active role it is not based on her experiences as a woman but by copying and extending the ideas of others—those others being men.

Two alternatives

There are two alternatives for a woman in this position. She can either deny the importance of the essentially different social experience which is hers as a woman or she can accept the secondary and supportive role which this social experience fits her for. In this latter role, women can be found typing and distributing leaflets, providing refreshments, making posters, rarely speaking in meetings and then often only in an organisational capacity. In the former role, a woman is often engaged in political struggle while at the same time ignoring the social reality which leads women to seek the other alternative. She will be often found disparaging these others as being petty, frivolous or only concerned with sexual ambitions, thereby ignoring the often essential fact that it is her ability to make herself attractive to men that is essential to her success as an activist. She may of course deny her sexuality completely and appear as a man's equal.

These experiences have a long history. A crisis of confidence can make even these alternatives impossible for many women. Others through experience have rejected them as failing to provide adequate guidelines for their own personal and political development. This retreat and rejection has its roots not merely in the individual psychology of women but in the wider social context of a society divided against women on the basis of class and sex.

Social oppression

These social developments I can only raise briefly. The disillusionment with a capitalist ideology within the universities expressed in the student movement was bound to place a question mark beside the woman's role within the family for many women. In a wider context, women benefitting from the progress of consumer society have been released in varying degrees from the drudgery of housework. The need to work has resulted in the sharing of some tasks in the home between men and women. At home, at school and at work women are offered a greater freedom of choice. This is a mirage. Women in going out to work and in seeking work face a position where any special consideration is denied them and
through economic discrimination are forced to accept a dependent role not of her own choice. Thus the experience of oppression is a social reality. The emotional feeling of defeat and the crisis of confidence is also there.

For those women already involved in political struggle the raising of these questions in open debate was not possible as she was by the constraining influences of the two alternative roles I have mentioned. As many women found, the articulation of their problems often involved a crisis of confidence as to her own position. The emotional experience of many of these problems could find no place on an agenda determined by men. Neither were women able to PRESS their social and therefore political importance by the very fact of being conditioned to performing a supportive and not a leading role. Insofar as questions relating to the woman’s role were discussed they were seen as personal and emotional and therefore up to individual men and women.

The Woman’s Liberation Movement has changed this situation for many women. Within the movement, I have found that the discussion of the role of the family, the care of children, education etc. brings into political perspective the position of women in our society. Within these discussions the everyday concerns of women from the cost of living to their relationship with men and therefore their image of themselves as individuals are revealed not as ‘social’ and emotional problems but as the result of the oppression of women divided by class and sex. At the same time the informal democracy of the discussion groups has encouraged women to speak and therefore develop as activists.

Socialist change

In this way, the Women’s Liberation Movement poses the need to develop the widest possible solidarity amongst women if women are to play a formative role in changing society in the light of their own needs. By raising the everyday experience of women to a political level it has brought in my experience an increased recognition of the need for socialism. It has made the perspective for socialist change a fully meaningful part of everyday activity and by so doing it has pointed the way for the increased participation and solidarity with those struggles which seek to build a democratic society on socialist principles.

Most of us are, in one way or another, gluttons. Whether we express our greed through three-piece suits, kitchen equipment, or illuminated manuscripts, we strive to acquire, collect, possess. Very few people are free from this sickness, which might well be viewed as one of Society’s worst.

What’s at the root of it? Insecurity maybe; but possibly it goes deeper—to the centre of each person’s existence and experience: could it be that our gluttony is just the result of hunger, we have to find ourselves, the selves so perfectly kept from us by the system in which we live.

Possession fetishism

It is true that our collecting needs quite often take relatively harmless forms. Who can fault a good Chagall print, a Martin guitar, or a rock collection?

But when we look at the pit of human inter-relations we look at the area in which our acquisitive reflexes operate in dangerous and damaging ways. In the belief that we act out of ‘love’ we tend to regard one another as articles of possession rather than as people, and tend to force (or try to) our needs and fears on to the objects of our affection.

That section of Society most vulnerable to this particular manifestation of imperialism is composed of people with virtually no legal rights or civil liberties. These are the people who have not reached the age of 18.

Even the best of us revolutionaries are just about expiring for want of a good theoretical run-down on the reasons for the oppression of children, as well as the true nature of that oppression.

This is a very difficult thing to set about, because: those of us who have given birth to, or are raising, kids are so emotionally tangled up with them as to make objective thinking difficult; those of us who do not live with, or have any close contact with them tend to regard co-existence with children as a state highly undesirable.

But if the working-class is oppressed,
if black people are held down and women reviled by the rules of our society, what must children go through in the process of learning to survive?

Victimisation of kids

Kids are, virtually, sacrifices to that authority upon which the stability of all present societies depend; victimised more than any other sector despite the hypocritical lip service paid their needs. Children fall from the womb into the hands of (often well-meaning) tyrants. From the first hour a child is regimented, institutionalised, slotted.

As with life in other sectors, the initial regimentation can take several forms. One of the more extreme can be found—for instance—in any big-city hospital located in a working-class area. In a place like this, under-staffed and overcrowded, the infant is introduced to the atrocity of the three-hour or four-hour feed; nurses cluck and frown at the audacity of any baby who simply refuses, out of need, to accept this.

(It should be pointed out, of course, that this sort of timetable outlook affects most children whose mothers are bottle feeding. Since there is still much pressure on women to breast feed—thus binding themselves to child care—the timetable could almost be seen as punishment.)

The Home—hallowed sanctuary of bedtimes and nursery rhymes—is of course the seat, the very heart-beat of oppression. This is patent enough even for those households whose youthful chattels were 'planned'.

The crux of the problem here is, as Grace Berger points out, that so many of today's (and yesterday's) most loving parents regard their children as 'theirs': appendages rather than people.

By a selight-of-hand involving a basic misunderstanding from the beginning of the parent-child situation, devastating damage is done to a newly arrived human being.

Children as possession

The misunderstanding, put into words, reads like this: 'that which our bodies produce belongs to us'. The countless lives that may never have been really lived as a result of this thinking are horrific to reflect upon.

It is not just the child who is rendered helpless by this sort of outlook; parents' existences become tortured, painful, especially as 'their' kids reach adolescence. Countless agencies over hair length, company kept, dope smoked, eaten or injected, result from the possession complex.

We raise 'our' children to behave to the world at large in a manner which will reflect well on us—never mind what or how they feel. We force upon them behaviour patterns which suit our existences, and punish them when they attempt to exercise their inherent sense of self-determination.

'Kids must be guided!'

At about the age of five, they enter school, and institutionalisation becomes the dominant factor in their lives. School, as presently constituted, is the hammer used to pound securely into each child's brain the acceptance of authority already inserted by the nuclear family. But in 'education' we see an authority more demanding and far more frightening because it is dispensed without the love which makes so many family situations bearable.

Yes, but! says the sceptic: children are so dependent, so incapable of sorting out their own lives. They must be guided (a familiar refrain, also used in pulling down people who are not male or not white), 'streamed' through the younger years. Well, it is true that human infants come into our hands blind and helpless beings and it is true that the helplessness of our young is longer-lived than that in other species. But do we not too often confuse this initial helplessness with dependencies, needs, which we feel will last throughout childhood, and do we not act accordingly, bearing down on their development with what we think is parental love, but which humankind's future history may show as mindless cruelty?

If we operate on the premise that children are people, doesn't it seem right that they should develop as people? Have parents, or a less benevolent authority, the right to legislate, from the beginning, in any areas of experience other than those directly concerned with health or safety?

It's certainly worth talking about.

The nuclear family

It is very difficult, in examining the areas of children's oppression, to avoid severe criticism of the nuclear family as it now operates, especially in Western Europe, Britain and the United States, where technocracy is at war with humanity.

There are numerous 'happy' family set-ups to which each of us might point as arguments in favour of this institution. But for each of these, there are thousands of households which serve as little more than units of consumption and emotional battle-grounds.

It does seem, in fact, that the nuclear family as we know it epitomises isolation and alienation. The fact, too, that there are so many unhappy marital set-ups points to our need—and inability—to find ourselves.

When we argue about the family—its merits, its problems—there is a distressing and highly unscientific tendency to judge the institution by our own experiences only.

In so doing, those of us who are happy within the nuclear-type arrangement close our eyes to what is glaringly obvious to anyone who looks: the family, concerned only for itself and with itself, does not lend to human growth. To care for 'your own' as opposed to caring for 'everybody'—which is the humanist choice?

And, of course, those of us complacent behind our own front door tend to forget what a huge percentage of babies come, unwanted, into one or two-parent families. The corner in which many single mothers find themselves does no credit to those who scorn alternatives to the nuclear family.

The alternative

For those of us who think in terms labelled Marxist, Socialist, Humanist, there is an attitude worth exploring. It is one which regards all the community's children as 'ours' and which bends the community's collective energy to provide for the needs of all, not merely for those emerging from one particular body.

This is not an easy thing to do; so many psychological barriers exist to such an approach. But surely, for those of us fighting for a happy, human, human race it is the only thing to do.
Most women workers in this country suffer unequal pay, and those few who nominally enjoy the same rates as their male counterparts are generally penalised when it comes to fringe benefits, pensions and promotion.

Women can’t be blamed for wondering how it is, that although the Trades Union Congress has been committed to support equal pay since 1888, we’re still nowhere near getting it.

And the prospects may be even worse. The Equal Pay Act comes into operation at the end of 1975, but we’ll have to fight to defend its very limited provisions, in the face of blatant opposition from the employers and blunt indifference from most male workers.

The trade union movement has clearly not been won for equal pay, and the lack of forceful organisation among Britain’s 8½ million women workers could mean that we’ll have to pay a heavy price for an inadequate law launched in a sea of male complacency and femal confusion and frustration.

It’s arguable whether women themselves have been won for the principle—how many fear that they will not get a seat on a bus, have doors opened for them, or drinks bought for them, simply because they get the rate for the job.

What are the facts?
Half Britain’s women go out to work—many of them only part-time. Only about 20 per cent work in industry, and a very small minority are in the professions, although the proportion of professional women is declining. The rest are relegated to mainly unskilled service jobs.

Women’s average earnings remain about half the male average, both in white-collar and manual jobs, and although some marginal progress has been made in reducing percentage differentials, the cash differences have actually increased recently.

When it introduced the Equal Pay Bill, the Labour Government granted the bosses seven years’ grace, against the wishes of its main supporters, the trade unions.

This has given the employers ample time to exploit the Act’s many weaknesses, and to either eliminate women workers altogether or to prise apart those men and women doing the same jobs, and so eliminate the possibility of women claiming the same rate as men.

This is already happening in factories up and down the country. Women are being confined to ‘women’s work,’ and are being moved off jobs and replaced by men.

Were it to happen the other way round, of course, there would be a strike. Rem-
Remember the women who wanted to be a bus driver.

Another device proposed by a nationwide laundry company will be to allow women equal pay, then pull the men off the job gradually, given the probability that the women's rate will decline relatively, as time goes on because of the weakness of trade unionism among women.

It has been pointed out often enough that women will not get equal pay without strong trade union backing—the very thing they lack. Only 2 million women workers are union members.

And too often, even in factories where they are organized, they don't get the backing they need from the men.

All this may not be so surprising in view of women's minimal representation at official levels in the trade unions.

Labour MP Jack Ashley (Stoke) complained in the Commons last March about the lack of progress toward equal pay. And when Employment Secretary Robert Carr was asked by another Labour MP, Dr Shirley Summerskill (Halifax) to ensure that the Act was not sabotaged by employers segregating women into jobs with low rates to prevent pay comparisons, he refused. Nor did he agree that this process was already under way.

1 Despite the fact that the employers have already gone on to the offensive, equal pay was not one of the main resolutions at last year's TUC.

Too often women have been left to go it alone or not at all. An equal pay struggle nearly got off the ground in a big Midlands factory, but the women were let down by their male fellow workers who showed no enthusiasm for taking industrial action—even though the women were supported at national level by their union.

One of the equal pay battles that stands out was in Leeds in 1970, when 50,000 women on unofficial strike in protest against a national settlement giving men 5d an hour more, and women only 4d.

They struck it out for weeks, and no one crossed the picket lines. Eventually the women won, and got a 1s 2d hourly rise, and 1s 1d for the men.

In 1968 over 1,000 Ford women went on strike for equality. Their main concern was equal opportunity, as well as equal pay. They won 97½% per cent of the male rate—but they did not, and still have not won equal access to the highest, and best-paid grades. The last controversial Ford deal reinforces this state of affairs by imposing a two-year freeze on wages, conditions and grading.

Nowhere now does there seem to be a really forceful, large-scale equal pay movement, and with the death at the end of last year of the National Joint Action Campaign for Women's Equal Rights, there appears to be no national movement.

But while the Labour movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Male Earnings</th>
<th>Female Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineering, manual</td>
<td>£15.9</td>
<td>(£30.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering, clerical</td>
<td>£16.6</td>
<td>(£30.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food manufacture</td>
<td>£14.5</td>
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<td>Printing (exe London)</td>
<td>£16.1</td>
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<td>Cotton</td>
<td>£14.2</td>
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<td>Footwear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retail Co-operatives</td>
<td>£13.4</td>
<td>(£25.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even those unions with large women membership have disgracefully few women as full-time officials.

The Transport and General Workers Union (13.6 per cent women members) has 600 full-time officials of whom one is a woman.

The Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (11.1 per cent women) has 200 full-time officials. None are women.

Over half the members of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers are women but out of 150 full-time officials only three are women.

Over 28 per cent of the General and Municipal Workers Union members are women. Out of 162 full-time officials four are women.

Even the Tailors and Garment Workers Union with a membership of 65.5 per cent has only nine women officials out of a total of 48.

In many industries women are still receiving little more than half the men's earnings.

These are figures of some women's average gross weekly earnings in April 1972 (Men's gross earnings in brackets).

unemployment among women. Already joblessness is rising among women, and it will be soaring by the end of 1975, when employers, prompted by the equal pay legislation, will have jettisoned many of their female workers in favour of 'rationalisation' and automation.

For generations it has been taken for granted that in times of job scarcity the men have priority.

But we must assert women's right to work if we are to challenge a sexist ideology which insists that a woman's place is in the home, or that during a woman's temporary excursions into the world of 'real' work she should be ill-paid and deprived of skills.

During the current unemployment crisis we must not allow anyone—bosses, the Government, workers—to use women as scapegoats. Just as unemployment will not be relieved by eliminating Jews, or sending the blacks back to where they came from, similarly it will not be reduced by shunting women back to the kitchen sink.

Unemployment can only be fought by demanding the right to work for all workers—men and women.

If and when the trade union movement really gets round to equipping members on the shop floor with the necessary strategic guides in the fight for equal pay, militant should always bear in mind the insidious effects of women's domestic role on their whole psyche.

After all when women's hoizons have always been fixed on the family and the home, it is very difficult for many women to relate to a collective which is wider than the family.

This same experience often leaves women quite mystified by the mechanics of trade union procedures—so clearly there are very substantial problems facing any attempts to activate women.

These problems illustrate the need not to isolate equal pay from the whole spectrum of women's demands. For years the Left has designated equal pay 'the key question', but equal pay will solve nothing other than unequal pay, for it is not the cause of women's inferiority, rather only a symptom of it.

By concentrating the little attention it pays to women almost totally on equal pay the Labour movement and the Left has yet again fallen into the trap of economism—and this may account for the distinct failure to gather round a nationwide movement of working women for equal pay.

We must look profoundly into all the factors which conspire to diminish women, and our subsequent political work must be transformed by new understanding.

Women must no longer be betrayed by those who, in their ignorance, claim to know what's best. Let them listen first to that silent majority—women.