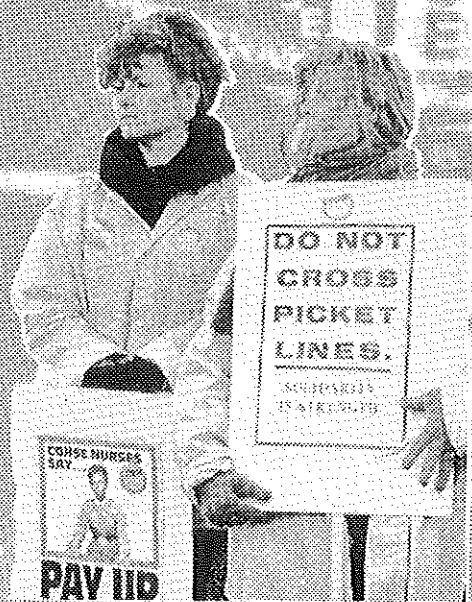


A CHARTER **FOR** **WOMEN** **WORKERS**



**LIVERPOOL, MANCHESTER
AND ROCHDALE LABOUR
WOMEN'S COUNCILS**

The idea for this Charter arose from a discussion among delegates at the North West Region Labour Women's Conference in 1984. The Liverpool, Manchester and Rochdale Women's Councils, the Charter's first sponsors, discussed the draft in February-March 1985. The organisations below sponsored that first edition. 7000 copies were sold. Developments in the workforce and especially amongst women workers have necessitated re-writing of parts of the Charter, and there is also a need to update information. We would welcome further sponsors for this edition. Please see the sponsorship form on page 31.

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Charter For Women Workers

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Introduction

Women are now 45% of the employed workforce in Britain. If the armed forces and over-60s are excluded, they are 60%. In the last five years nearly one and a half million extra women have found paid work. This includes 60% of married women, most of them with dependent children. Yet in spite of the numbers who work, and in spite of the fact that the vast majority will work all their lives with only a short break to have children, women are still discriminated against as 'second class' workers. Under Thatcher's government there has been a brutal attack on the position of women workers. Women even more than men have suffered from job losses. At the same time, they have been hit by the weakening of protective legislation and disastrous cuts in housing, education and social services.

Many of the new jobs have been part-time casual work avoiding legal rights and many of the reforms gained through the struggle of the labour movement in the past. Every aspect of women's lives have been attacked leading to a general feeling of insecurity. Now the Housing Bill and the Poll Tax are for many women the last straw forcing them into active opposition.

Working women have not been prepared to give the Tories and the bosses a free hand to turn the clock back. In the last few years women have shown themselves more willing to fight back than ever before. They have had to fight Victorian conditions, low pay, excessively long hours and for trade unionisation to defend themselves from abusive and arbitrary management.

Women throughout the country were inspired by the magnificent struggle of the miners, especially by the active involvement of the women from the mining communities. The role of women in the miners' strike will undoubtedly be seen as an important milestone for the labour movement. As we go to print, the struggle of the Chelsea Girl strikers in Belfast against long hours and arbitrary management is continuing.

Women workers played an outstanding role in the health workers' dispute beginning with the strike of 38 Manchester night nurses and blood transfusion workers. The strike spread rapidly. On 5th March 1988 about 100,000 workers took part in one of the largest trade union demonstrations since the 1971 demonstrations against anti-union laws. Unfortunately the momentum was lost as labour and trade union leaders failed to organise the tremendous support that existed amongst wide sections of the population. This has prepared the way for further cuts and attacks on the NHS. A golden opportunity to stop the Thatcher government in its tracks was lost.

A survey done by USDAW (the shopworkers' union) in 1988 asked

non-members why they were not in a trade union. Far from showing any hostility to trade unions, the main reply was that no one had asked them. Clearly there is a tremendous reservoir of untapped support. A bold campaigning approach would unionise many millions of women workers.

Increasingly women workers have seen the need not just to organise but to look in more detail at the policies and strategy for achieving solid gains. Justifiably critical of existing organisations and the failure of the trade union leadership to fight effectively for their members' interests, more and more women are looking for bold policies and a leadership to carry them out.

The labour movement must be committed to fighting for a job for every woman who wants to work, for equal pay and for decent conditions. This is why we need a Charter for women workers.

This Charter is not just another document to be added to the hundreds already produced bemoaning the position of women. It has been drawn up as a campaigning document, to be discussed and fought for by women workers and incorporated into the work of the Broad Left organisations within the trade unions.

The battle for women's rights is an integral part of the struggle of the labour movement for a socialist society. Significant gains will be made only through the struggle of male and female workers together in opposition to the bosses and their government. This places a responsibility on women to join the battle to transform the labour movement. It also imposes a responsibility on the labour movement to take the issues and demands raised by women seriously and to advance their struggle. In this way we believe that many more women will be drawn into struggle to transform the trade unions into democratic, fighting organisations, which will base themselves on the socialist aspirations of the labour movement and unite male and female workers in a common struggle against the bosses and their system.

Equal Pay

For every £1 that a man is paid, women are paid only 75p. If overtime, shift and bonus payments are taken into account, then women's gross earnings fall to 66% of men's. Most women workers are segregated into the kind of jobs which are invariably low paid. This reflects the disadvantage in the labour market that the majority of working class women face from carrying the main burden of caring for children and looking after the home. Moreover, many women's jobs consist of the same kind of work as they do in the home, like cooking and cleaning and caring for others.

The increase in women working has done little to break down job segregation. Secretaries, typists and sewing machinists are completely female jobs, while women account for 90% of nurses and 70% of shop assistants. However, women make up only 12% of workers in metal manufacture, 15% in mechanical engineering and 19% in transport and communications. But segregation is not just a question of being concentrated in certain industries. Where women work alongside men they are still concentrated into the lowest grades. For example, in 1985 the financial sector employed 1,075,600 male workers and 1,028,600 full-time women workers, plus 272,800 part-time women workers.

Technically there is equal pay. But according to one survey in 1986, in a major clearing bank, 62% of full-time women workers and all part-time workers were on the two lowest grades. Only 4% were on administrative or managerial grades compared with 44% of men. In the non-industrial Civil Service women form 77% of the lowest grade but only 4% of the most senior grade.

In some areas, particularly where trade unions are weak, bosses try to use divide-and-rule tactics by paying unequal rates on a racist basis. Following a study of the West Midlands, the Low Pay Unit reported that numerous women had 'written to us about their plight and described how English girls are often paid more than their West Indian or Asian counterparts.' The trade unions must vigorously oppose unequal pay on racist lines.

1984 ended with the strike of the 263 sewing machinists at Fords. Their battle against low grades for recognition of their skills led to the laying off of 10,000 hourly paid workers and £2 million production losses. A strike over the same issue in 1968 was instrumental in pushing through the Equal Pay Act. Yet 16 years later the Ford women still had to fight to achieve equal pay. As a result of their action this time, an enquiry vindicated their claim to be treated as skilled workers, recommending in April 1985 upgrading and an increase in basic weekly pay from £129.87 to £136.15.

Following a ruling by the European Court that Britain had failed to

comply with the 1976 EEC directive on equal pay, the Tory government was forced in 1984 to amend the Equal Pay Act to incorporate 'equal pay for work of equal value'. It then took several years and two test cases, Pickstone and Freemans, to plug the gap where employers could get round the provision by employing a token man in an otherwise all-female department.

Perhaps the best known case is that of Julie Hayward, a cook at Cammell Lairds, Birkenhead. She won her case at a tribunal which awarded her an increase in her weekly pay of £31. This brought her pay up to £130 a week, putting her on a level with skilled manual workers. The employers appealed and argued that Julie Hayward was better off than the craftsmen because she was classified as staff and therefore got better sick pay, two days longer holidays and a free meal in the canteen. The employers claimed that this not only wiped out the differences in basic rates but made her £11.27 better off than the men who didn't get staff conditions.

Rather than this being an argument for holding down her wages or dismissing future claims for equal pay, trade unions should demand that 'staff conditions' should be extended to all workers. In fact, the bosses were afraid that either the manual workers would justifiably claim 'staff conditions' or, as the Employment Appeal Court put it, that a ruling equalising take-home pay would result in leap-frogging pay claims.

It is estimated by the General and Municipal Boilermakers Union (GMBATU) that the bosses save £15 million a year due to discrimination against women. It is no good appealing to 'fair play' when profits are at stake. Recently there have been some setbacks at tribunals which have been the main tactic pursued by trade union officials. For example, the Manufacturing, Science, Finance Union (MSF) has just lost a tribunal case claiming equal pay for speech therapists with pharmacists. The tribunal ruled against equal pay on the grounds that the pharmacists could leave the NHS if they were not well paid and find higher paid jobs in the private sector. The speech therapists did not have the same 'market value'. The tribunal concluded that even if sex discrimination were established, the argument of 'market value' was more important!

Undoubtedly, at the back of their minds was the fact that the NHS is the biggest employer of female labour in Western Europe and to give any encouragement to equal pay claims in a sector already seething with discontent would not be in the interests of the Tory government.

Only one in four of workers winning equal pay or sex discrimination cases through tribunals feel they have been properly compensated, according to the Equal Opportunities Commission. Some referred to the awards as insulting. More than 40% of all known pay rises ordered under the Equal Pay Act were for £8 a week or less.

The EOC's survey reveals, 'Fifteen applicants felt their cases had improved fellow employees job conditions...Ten applicants said conditions for other workers...had worsened, including a few who said fellow workers



who had assisted them had been victimised. And fully nineteen applicants said conditions for other workers had simply not been affected.' Now the CBI are raising the scrapping of the equal value clause. It is quite obvious why it is being opposed. Not only would its full implementation end the use of women as cheap labour, but it would raise questions about the whole pay structure in manufacturing and service industries, as well as the public sector. Legislation can undoubtedly be a useful lever in advancing the position of women. But the lessons of the last few years is that substantial improvements for the majority of women can only be won through organised action by the trade unions.

Taking industrial tribunal cases for individual or small groups of women does not absolve trade union leaders from also using negotiation backed up where necessary by industrial action to secure gains. We call for a concerted campaign for:

- ★ **Equal pay for work of equal value.**
- ★ **Solidarity action by male workers. No pay deal or grading scheme to be agreed which discriminates against women workers.**
- ★ **Trade union control of grading schemes.**
- ★ **Trade union monitoring of promotion to make sure no irrelevant criteria are used and to encourage women to apply and to undertake training.**

Low Pay

The struggle for equal pay is part of the fight against low pay. Bringing in a wage is a necessity for the great majority of women. According to the Low Pay Unit, in one in four households the main breadwinner is a woman. These include households where:

- ★ There is a single woman, sometimes with dependent relatives (one in eight women look after an elderly relative);
- ★ There is a single parent bringing up children on her own (one in ten households are headed by single-parent mothers);
- ★ Women are the sole earners because of the unemployment of partners.

In a recent survey it was found that 45% of women working full-time were single parents or living alone. Women's earnings played an essential part in the improvement of working-class living standards in the post-war boom. But for the earnings of married women, four times as many families would now be living in poverty. Under the Tories more and more workers have 'earned their poverty'.

Forty per cent of the workforce, nine million workers, earn less than the EEC decency threshold. Women fare even worse, e.g. 97% of checkout operators earn less than £126 a week. One fifth of women manual workers (300,000) earn less than £80 for a basic working week. The Tories are pushing through ruthless wage-cutting measures. Thatcher's government has abolished the Fair Wages Resolution, cut the Wages Inspectorate and undermined sections of the Employment Protection Act.

The Tories have decimated the Wages Councils which set the minimum wage rate for 2.5 million workers. Four out of five workers covered by the Wages Council are women, two thirds of them are part-time. Minimum rates currently range between £74.44 and £92.82 a week. In spite of such low rates, since 1979, 88,174 workplaces have been found to be committing the criminal offence of illegal underpayment — only 56 were prosecuted! Nothing makes clearer the Tory practice of 'one law for the rich and another law for the poor'.

Some of the worst hit are young workers. About one in three found their first jobs in low-paid shopwork, hairdressing and catering. One in five of all young people in work used to be covered by Wages Councils. In 1986 youth were excluded from Wages Councils. Two million young people now have no protection. According to the Manchester Low Pay Unit, 69% of the wage rates advertised for young people in what were formerly Wages Council jobs were paying less than they would have done under the Wages Council. Junior hairdressers were being offered 82p to 87.5p an hour compared with £1.64 under the old system. It is now proposed to extend this slashing of wages to adult workers.



Asian women workers on strike for union recognition and against low pay in Birmingham, 1982.

Black and Asian women, in particular, face exploitation in low-paid jobs. A much higher than average proportion of black and Asian (apart from Muslim) women go out to work. In the public services, like the NHS, where there are strong trade unions, some have skilled and supervisory positions. But generally, among female workers without qualifications, only 29% of West Indian women and 22% of Asian women have non-manual jobs, compared to 42% of white women. In other words, most work in low-paid, unskilled jobs.

Black and Asian women are also the most threatened by rising unemployment. Undoubtedly some women from the ethnic minority groups – for instance, older Asian women who do not speak the language – are among the most atrociously exploited workers in the country. For example, 76% of bosses in the clothing industry, a major employer of Asian women, are underpaying their workforce. Fear of trouble or arrest for infringement of the immigration laws, whether justified or not, is also exploited ruthlessly by the sweat-shop bosses. People who come to Britain without proper work permits are mercilessly exploited by bosses, knowing they will be unable to claim their rights.

In restaurant and catering a quarter of employers underpay illegally. The labour movement must defend the interests of black and Asian women, fight racism which is the bosses' weapon to divide workers, and unite black and white in action to improve the conditions of all workers.

Pressure from the rank and file, whose lives are being made unbearable by poverty wages, has pushed some of the trade unions and now the Labour Party to support the call for a national minimum wage. However, it must be made clear that a national minimum wage should not be tied to wage restraint, i.e. better organised workers holding back on wage claims. There is no mechanism in capitalist society to transfer higher wages forgone by relatively higher paid, better organised workers into the pockets of the low-paid. This simply adds to the bosses' profits. We want a redistribution of wealth not a sharing out of poverty.

The Labour Party must be committed to bringing in emergency legislation under the next Labour government. However, as the history of the Equal Pay Act shows, legislation by itself is not enough. In any case, workers cannot afford to wait until the next Labour government to fight poverty wages. Campaigns to recruit many more women workers into the trade unions (at present only about one fifth of part-timers are organised and very few home-workers) and organised trade union action are the key to achieving any real improvements in wages and conditions.

There must now be a campaign for:

- ★ **the recruitment and organisation into trade unions of the low paid, including part-time workers and home-workers, around the demands for:**
- ★ **a national minimum wage of £150 or two thirds the average wage, with pro rata payments for part-timers. It is only through effective trade union organisation and action that a national minimum wage can be implemented.**

Therefore we demand:

- ★ **the right of trade unions to inspect firms suspected of not paying the minimum wage.**
- ★ **open books so that workers can see the real position of firms and what happens to the wealth created by the workforce.**
- ★ **total opposition to any attempt by management to recoup wage increases through cutting part-time hours. Many of the low-paid work for major multinationals such as Lonrho, Grand-Met and Trust House Forte.**

We demand:

- ★ **the next Labour government nationalises, under workers' control and management, any major firms which refuse to pay the minimum wage.**

However, many low-paid workers work in small sweat shops with antiquated and dangerous buildings and machinery. Whilst many such workers could improve their position, in some cases the bosses would close down rather than pay the minimum wage. But we cannot accept that sweatshop workers should continue on poverty wages. In any case, small inefficient firms will disappear or be forced out of business as bigger companies move into their markets. Many women workers would not even

consider working for such firms if they could find alternative work.

There is a responsibility on the labour movement not just to campaign for, and legislate, for a national minimum wage but to ensure it applies to all currently low-paid workers without exception. Sweatshops will only be eradicated by a socialist plan of production, which would develop modern industry offering alternative jobs and training or re-training for those currently trapped in sweatshops.

A high concentration of low-paid workers work in the public services. Thousands of workers in the NHS, for example, have lived for decades in poverty. When they try to improve their position they are blackmailed with the argument that higher wages for them will mean fewer jobs and a cut in services to their patients. In fact, low pay has been accompanied by cuts in jobs and services.

The next Labour government must ensure that there is:

- ★ a massive increase in public expenditure to ensure that public sector workers receive at least a national minimum wage whilst jobs and services are expanded.



Women workers are in the forefront of the anti-Poll Tax campaign.

Part-time working

There has been a rapid growth in part-time working in the last few years. Many women, because of their responsibilities at home, prefer part-time jobs. But accepting more part-time working, frequently at the expense of full-time jobs, is no substitute for fighting for shorter hours and adequate childcare facilities.

The extension of part-time work under present conditions reinforces the double exploitation of women. The bosses take profitable advantage of women's need for an income to survive financially, while the women themselves still carry the main burden of caring for children, the aged and looking after the home. Nevertheless, the trade unions must fight for decent wages and conditions for part-timers.

Between March 1983 and 1988 the number of part-timers rose from 4,845,000 (one in five workers) to 6,211,000 (one in four workers) four fifths of them women. There has been a 28% growth in five years in part-time working compared with 4% in full-time working.

Many part-time jobs are unfortunately not new jobs, but replace full-time jobs. In some case employers have forced full time women to accept a change in their contracts to part-time or even casual terms of employment. Clearly, with a certain growth recently in some industries and services, the bosses have turned to part-timers as a source of cut-price labour. Part-time hourly rates for women are generally lower than full-time rates: £1.60 compared to £1.90 according to a recent government survey.

A GMBATU survey showed that only half of bonus schemes included part-timers (for canteen workers only 20% and for cleaners 27%). Only 25% receive overtime rates when they worked beyond their rostered hours. In one-third of workplaces part-timers were rostered to work 'unsocial hours', yet only 30% got premium payments for this. In addition the majority of pension schemes exclude part-timers.

Only one in five female part-timers are in unions and the bosses inevitably exploit this lack of organisation. There has recently been an increase in the number of part-timers joining unions. NALGO's part-time members have doubled.

Many women understandably favour part-time working given existing conditions. But instead of accepting more part-time, casual work and job sharing, the labour movement must defend full-time jobs and fight for a shorter working week to enable all women and men to spend more time with their children, enjoy leisure, continue education, and so on.

The fight for the implementation of the 35-hour working week, long ago adopted as the official policy of the TUC and major trade unions, must be seen as a first step towards a further dramatic shortening of the working

week and working day. It would be easily possible if new technology were utilised in workers' interests to reduce the working week for everyone to what are now considered 'part-time' hours, 16 to 20 hours a week. This is a key demand for improving the position of working women. At the same time there must be better childcare and other facilities to lift the burden of domestic responsibility from the shoulders of women.

Job-sharing can also appear as a way out for some women, but it nevertheless poses dangers. For the employers job-sharing reduces labour costs and increases productivity in a similar way to part-time working, and is a cheap alternative to child-care provision. A few higher paid professional and white-collar women, in particular, have taken up job-sharing as a solution to their problems. However, this usually leads to a further reduction in full-time jobs available, especially for single women. Jobs are not the property of individuals but of the whole working class. Because of the lack of child-care, some lower paid women have also taken up job-sharing but with few guarantees.

The British Telecom job-sharing agreement tells the union member to check the implications for themselves, before starting. Such caution is well-founded. Job-sharers are particularly vulnerable to government changes e.g. in the maternity legislation. This will require a minimum of 20 hours to qualify, leaving most white-collar job-sharers stranded. As children grow up, a women worker can find job-sharing a trap rather than an asset. It is easier to split jobs than to merge them again.

Where part-time work or job-sharing has been established, the trade unions must fight for decent pay and conditions. This is essential to prevent part-timers from being exploited as cheap labour and to undermine the pay and conditions of full-time workers.

Women returning to full-time employment after having children should be entitled to the option of temporarily working reduced hours on pro rata pay, whilst caring for pre-school children. This would provide more opportunities – particularly in the NHS, education, social services, etc. – for women to work. They must be able to return to work at the same level as they left, so their qualifications, skills and talents are not under-used or wasted as at present.

Improving the conditions of part-timers requires action by the trade unions to recruit them into membership. If part-timers are allowed to become isolated and attacked by the bosses and the Tory government, this will rebound on all workers. When part-timers enter into a struggle for improved conditions, they must get full support from other trade unions in the industry or service concerned.

Although the Sunday trading proposals were defeated, the Tories will not abandon their attack. Any extension of Sunday opening for shops and stores is an important issue which affects women workers. Many women, because of their working hours and their responsibilities, at home tend to look favourably on more Sunday opening. However, this arises from the

excessive burdens thrown onto the shoulders of working-class women. It is no answer for us to allow the bosses to create another 'working day', particularly as Sunday opening would mean longer, extremely unsocial hours for shop workers. The labour movement should therefore not give support to the bosses' campaign for legislation allowing Sunday opening, but step up the campaign for shorter working hours for everyone.

The Tories have lifted the restrictions on night working for women (between 10 pm and 5 am). They have had the effrontery to repeal this protective legislation in the name of equality. These moves are an attack on all women workers. They will particularly undermine the health of women with young children, who will find it difficult to rest during the day. Since bosses are under no obligation to provide transport to and from home for women who work nights, there will be an increased risk of physical attack.

For women workers, equality means raising their standards to the level of the best which has been achieved by male workers, not sharing any disadvantage they suffer. Similarly, where women have achieved an advantage, e.g. the retirement age or protection from night working, that should be extended to men. Most of current night working is unnecessary. Only essential services should be provided at night and workers should be compensated by shorter hours, frequent breaks, etc.

We call for:

- ★ defence of all existing full-time jobs.
- ★ opposition to full-time jobs being replaced by part-time, casual or temporary employment, or being split into several part-time jobs.
- ★ reduction of the working week to 35 hours without loss of pay to create additional jobs for the unemployed and as a first step towards the dramatic improvement of working conditions.
- ★ rates of part-time pay to be pro rata.
- ★ for casual and temporary jobs to be made permanent where they in reality represent permanent positions.
- ★ extension of protective legislation, pensions, holiday, sickness and other benefits to all part-timers and home-workers.
- ★ opposition to any further attempts to lift restrictions on the number of hours women may work, e.g. through Sunday trading.
- ★ negotiations on part-timers' wages and conditions not to be held separately but as part of the negotiations for all workers on site.
- ★ action to organise part-timers into the trade unions, the key to improving conditions in this area.

Childcare, Maternity and Paternity Rights

Maternity rights for working women have only existed for less than 15 years. Under the Tories these rights have been gradually cut back. Maternity benefit has fallen in value and maternity rights at work have been eroded, with less protection from unfair dismissal and more obstacles put in the way of women who want to return to work.

From April 1987 maternity benefit is only paid to a small number of women. The vast majority have to manage with no help at all. In 1978 the qualifying period for protection against unfair dismissal was six months. In 1985 it became two years. In 1980 the maternity allowance was cut by 5%, saving the government £8 million. Earnings-related supplements were abolished in 1982 saving the government £35 million. Now the Social Security Act 1986 has cut all benefits for pregnancy. The £25 maternity grant has been abolished and replaced by a means-tested payment. Free milk and vitamins for pregnant women and children in families of low-paid workers have been abolished.

Firms employing fewer than 10 workers are excluded from having to re-employ women after childbirth. This, combined with the raising of the hours-of-work threshold, will mean the majority of women workers will not qualify for reinstatement. In 1980, the Policy Studies Institute found that only 2 out of 10 women not returning to work chose to stay at home. Nearly 4 out of 10 were unable to return to work through lack of childcare, another 3 out of 10 because they could not find suitable hours. Good childcare and variable hours would have led to 78% of women going back to work.

At present, less than 10% of all under-5s attend a local authority day nursery or school. Most of these only have part-time places. A recent survey in *The Independent* showed that 85.6% of 3 and 4-year olds in Salford had pre-school places, and 83% in Liverpool, where the now disqualified Labour councillors built six nursery units between 1983-86. In Tory West Sussex only 8.2% were in nursery schools. The top 24 providers were Labour Councils, the bottom 24 Tory or SLD. Every reputable survey conducted has shown that the vast majority of parents want day care or nursery education provided by local authorities.

The UK report to the European Commission *Caring For Children* found that whilst 80% of working parents use child-minders only 3% think this is the best form of provision. Yet John Patten, Minister with responsibility for policies on women, said: "My very strong feeling is that we do not want to see massive state or employer-provided workplace nurseries...what is needed is high quality, small scale local provision". What he really meant was child-minding.

Child-minding is usually one of the lowest paid forms of home working, done by women who often have pre-school age children of their own. Many of them would prefer other work if they could find childcare themselves. On the other hand there are many child-minders who enjoy looking after children, who would be prepared to undertake training. A one-to-one relationship, or small group, is sometimes the best care for individual children in certain circumstances. Present child-minders should be offered training attached to a children's centre where they could work as part of a team. They should be paid, along with other childcare workers, at least the minimum wage.

Not only do the Tories disregard the views of parents, they penalise those who do have to pay for childcare by refusing to offset it against tax. They claim childcare is a 'perk' like a company car, and that tax concessions for working mothers would lead, according to Margaret Thatcher, to the "most terrible abuses."

Recently some parts of the Civil Service, the Midland Bank and a few other employers have announced that they intend to set up work-place nurseries because of the labour shortage they are experiencing. Any improvement is to be welcomed. However the Midland Bank also intends to charge £10 to £15 a day for a nursery place. The average grade 1 bank worker earns £70 a week, the average grade 2 worker £80 a week. Clearly they won't be able to afford the nurseries yet they make up the vast majority of bank workers. The nurseries are aimed only at management and executive level.

We must demand that there should be no charges for nursery places. They should be accessible to all workers. Workplace nurseries should also be under trade union control to ensure proper standards and to guard against the threat of withdrawal of nursery facilities being used to intimidate women who are active trade unionists and who demand better wages and conditions.

However, it is obviously intolerable that the access of a child to childcare and education should depend on where the parents live or whether the mother has skills which are in short supply at any particular time.

Such facilities should be a right. They are essential for the full social and educational development of a child and an essential service to enable parents, especially mothers, to go out to work, train or participate in education, etc. These facilities are especially important for single parents who have to cope alone.

Therefore we call for :

- ★ **total opposition to any further closure of local authority childcare provision or nursery education.**
- ★ **a public funded national network of childcare, combining workplace and estate based provision. This must be good quality care provided for flexible hours for every child whose parents want a place.**
- ★ **a place in nursery school for all 3 to 5-year-olds.**

- ★ after-school provision for school-aged children.
- ★ a universal maternity grant which reflects the material cost of pregnancy and childbirth and child benefits which cover the material cost of raising a child.
- ★ maternity and paternity leave (in addition to 11 weeks' maternity leave before birth) for up to six weeks then...
- ★ six months (minimum) for either parent on full pay with their original job being held open for up to two years.
- ★ these rights should be available to all workers irrespective of how many are employed at a workplace.
- ★ work on training schemes should be included in assessing contributory benefits and service qualifications.
- ★ special leave and pay (which should not be included in normal sickness entitlement) for either parent caring for a sick child. Many women are also tied to the home by dependents who are aged, disabled or chronically sick and this situation is being aggravated by Tory cuts. The improvement of personal social services, with adequate residential and day care facilities and auxiliary back-up at home is vital.

Privatisation

A major Tory attack on women's jobs and services has come through privatisation. One form of privatisation has been the selling off at bargain prices of public corporations like British Telecom, the National Freight Corporation and Sealink to big business. This was put forward by the Tories as 'popular capitalism', allowing more people to own shares. In fact, shares soon become concentrated into the hands of the financial institutions again. Shareholders in British Gas declined by 600,000 inside a month of the sale, BT lost half a million shareholders and Amersham International shareholders declined from 72,000 to 6,000.

Privatisation has meant a profits bonanza for the capitalists, who have lost no time in cutting back jobs and clawing back gains made by the trade unions in the past. Massive opposition is now developing to Tory plans to privatise water and other utilities. Working class people fear the collapse of basic necessities, such as water and electricity, or their pricing beyond the means of many. They fear the effects on health and the environment of profiteers moving in. (A national campaign must be mounted to retain these services in the public sector). The other form of privatisation is the opening up of services within schools, hospitals and local authorities to private so-called 'enterprise'. John Hall, General Secretary of the Contract Cleaning and Maintenance Association, estimated that his member companies would double their turnover of £400 million in three years from NHS business alone.

This has had an even more disastrous effect on women's jobs. These firms invariably cut back the workforce, substitute part-timers and even casual workers, cut hourly rates, and reduce holiday and other entitlements. School cleaners employed by a contractor in Birmingham had their wages cut by 25%, fewer holidays, no sick pay and no pension scheme. Complaints from teachers, parents and school governors led to the contract being withdrawn.

A further round of privatisation is expected in April 1989. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities (AMA) has estimated that 700,000 jobs are at risk, including 440,000 part-time jobs. Seventy per cent of jobs threatened are held by women. The threat of privatisation has been used by authorities to force vicious cuts on the workforce, and over the last few years there has been a drastic reduction in jobs, wages and conditions for local authority workers. Whilst no one would oppose services becoming more efficient, the idea that this type of 'streamlining' will avoid privatisation is a pipedream. It simply makes the services more attractive to private contractors and assists the Tories in achieving their aim of dismantling local authority services.

Some trade union leaders have put forward the 'alternative' of in-house tenders. But the experience of the NHS has shown that attempting to fight

off private contractors by trying to compete with them can only lead to disaster. For example, in the West Midlands, one in-house tender at Ridge Hill Mental Handicap Unit involved 'the 40-strong workforce agreeing an increase in their work rate from 86.75% to 93.75% and the withdrawal of their 15% bonus. Their total hours were cut from 806 to 643 per week.' In-house tenders mean cuts in jobs, wages and conditions.

However, the lack of national leadership has forced many shop stewards to involve themselves in tendering. This involvement must be used to oppose cuts, reveal managements' intentions and build up a campaign amongst workers to oppose any cuts in jobs, conditions and services.

The whole labour movement – the trade unions in conjunction with the Labour Party – must launch a fight against privatisation nationally, otherwise individual sections of workers will continue to be picked out, isolated and defeated.

After 10 years of Tory attacks the Housing Bill and the Poll Tax proved to be the last straw. Mass opposition, with women at the forefront, has taken place. The very security of homes is threatened by the Housing Bill, in effect privatising housing. Not only does this threaten tenants but also the jobs of local authority workers, especially women, as the Housing Departments are decimated.

But above all it is the Poll Tax, first of all in Scotland, which has drawn tens of thousands of women into activity around a campaign of mass non-payment. Levied equally at a low paid woman worker on £70 a week, or a professional on £400 a week, taxing young workers for the first time, presenting huge bills to families with young people at home, it will also cripple local authorities' ability to provide services.

We call for:

- ★ a nationally co-ordinated campaign of industrial action against the Tories' privatisation plans.
- ★ special rank-and-file delegate conferences of all trade unions involved in industries or services threatened with privatisation to draw up a fighting programme and co-ordinate strategy and tactics.
- ★ a campaign of rallies, demonstrations and public meetings to win mass support for the defence of nationalised industries and public services.
- ★ democratic workers' control and management of nationalised industries, the democratisation of the NHS and local authority services, in order to involve the rank and file trade unionists in the running and planning of the services they are defending.
- ★ urgent action to organise into the trade unions workers in the firms being awarded contracts under the Tories' privatisation schemes to end cut price tendering based on cheap labour and scandalous conditions.
- ★ the next Labour government to be committed to the re-nationalisation, without compensation, of all privatised firms, and the clearing out of

all profit-seeking parasites from the schools, hospitals and other public services.

Unemployment and New Technology

The run-down of British industry, caused by the failure of the capitalists to invest, means that many of women's traditional jobs, for example in textiles, are disappearing. The catastrophic decline in the economy, only temporarily slowed down by the present fragile boom, has inevitably led to attacks by the Tories on public expenditure, bringing massive cuts in both the jobs and services women rely on.

With the onset of a new recession, there will be an attempt to throw hundreds of thousands of women workers onto the dole, particularly part-time workers and those on temporary contracts. On top of this, new technology is an additional threat to jobs. Instead of being used to shorten working hours and improve conditions, new technology has brought redundancies. This has hit factory jobs, secretarial and clerical work, the retail trade and many other areas of employment. Word processors, computerised administration, highly automated production, more often than not mean new hazards (from VDUs, additional stress, etc.) de-skilling and more intensive production-line work, as well as greater management control over work practices.

Improvements gained in the past, and the achievement of other demands outlined in this Charter, could be wiped out overnight by redundancies or the closure of factories and offices.

We demand:

- ★ **trade union control of new technology, over its introduction into the workplace and over related changes in working practices.**
- ★ **reduction in the working week, as a first step to a 35-hour week, without loss of pay, to create new jobs and improve conditions at work.**
- ★ **opposition to all redundancies, including of part-timers. Share out the work with no loss of pay.**
- ★ **the nationalisation under workers' control and management of all firms threatening redundancies.**
- ★ **a massive programme of useful public works, employing workers on trade union rates and conditions, to improve housing, healthcare, education, and leisure and community facilities.**

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment reflects backward and abusive attitudes towards women in capitalist society. It causes distress and can undermine women's health. In some cases, harassment leads to women being forced to leave their jobs. It obstructs women's attempts to overcome their second-class status at work. Where incidents take place between workers, sexual harassment is an obstacle to genuine class unity.

Sexual harassment includes unwanted or repeated comments of a sexual character and behaviour which causes offence, distress or humiliation to women. It can take the form of embarrassing attention, verbal intimidation, unwanted physical contact, demands for sexual favours or physical assault.

Surveys by NALGO, for instance, indicate that between one third and one half the women in some workplaces have experienced some form of sexual harassment. Most of the women concerned were angry and feel that there appeared to be no real way for them to deal with the incidents.

Women who have no alternative to low paid jobs in sweatshops and small offices are amongst the most vulnerable. One survey reported that 'with high unemployment employers often hold the whip hand and argument or resistance will only bring dismissal. One 16-year-old machinist in a leather goods factory told of being offered an extra £10 in her wage packet if she agreed to sexual intercourse.' (*Women and Work in the West Midlands, Low Pay Unit.*)

Fewer and fewer women, however, are prepared to put up with this abuse today. But sexual abuse is not just a personal problem; it is a trade union issue. More and more women recently have been campaigning to establish this as a trade union issue, demanding that their union organisations actively oppose all forms of sexual harassment.

Recently a film, *Business as Usual*, has been made based on the dispute at 'Lady at Lord John' in Liverpool. In 1983 the manageress was sacked for protesting at sexual harassment by the area manager. She was reinstated after effective picketing of the shop by TGWU members from the unemployed branch and by members of the LPYS.

★ Trade unions should campaign amongst their membership, explaining that sexual harassment is a threat to the health, right to work and self-confidence of women workers. As such, it is a trade union issue which should be dealt with in a serious and positive way.

Trade unions must pay special attention to the needs of women workers where they are a small minority or where women are just being introduced into a previously male-dominated workforce. Where incidents involve management, many trade union officers will take the case up. The main



On the picket line. A scene from *Business As Usual*.

difficulties arise with incidents between workers. Unfortunately, there have also been incidents at and around branch meetings themselves.

There is a need for:

- ★ a campaign of education for trade union officers to know how to deal with such cases.
- ★ proper procedures for the issue of sexual harassment to be raised in trade union branches where two members of the same branch are involved. This must include a system of appeal if a member is not convinced that the branch has taken adequate action. Women workers must feel confident that their complaints will be dealt with firmly and sympathetically. Many incidents can be dealt with by discussion and resolved without further action. However, with more serious cases, and to deal with persistent harassers trade unions need disciplinary procedures.

There must also be the ultimate sanction, where necessary, of the removal of such people from the workplace, whether by making provision for the removal of the offender's trade union card or by a refusal to work with him.

- ★ the introduction of the recent Local Government Act, which includes the notorious Clause 28, and the propaganda which surrounded it encouraged discrimination and sackings of lesbians and gay men. The labour movement must oppose harassment of lesbians and any discrimination on grounds of homosexuality.

Business as Usual: for trade details contact:

Warner Bros. Home Video, 135, Wardour St., London W1.
Tel:01-386-5411.

Health and safety

Women workers face most of the health and safety problems which affect men but they face special problems as well. Childbearing makes women more vulnerable to many hazards. Many women also tend to be concentrated into jobs with particular risks, e.g. VDUs, which affect eyesight, can cause upper limb disorders, and appear to be linked to pregnancy and birth abnormalities.

Two-thirds of hairdressers suffer from dermatitis during training. 'Sick building syndrome' associated with large modern buildings, causes skin rashes, mental fatigue, headaches, wheezing and dizziness amongst growing numbers of office workers.

Stress at work has increased enormously under the Tories, with the same level of output as 1979 but being produced by fewer workers. Forty percent of patients seeing a doctor in Sheffield did so because of stress. This is particularly a problem for those women workers who also have to make provision for childcare.

Recently the Tories have repealed protective legislation in the name of equality. They talk as if all workplaces are healthy and deride the idea that 'dark Satanic mills' still exist. Yet between 1983 and 1985 fatal and major injuries in the textile industry rose by 54%. The Tories responded by lifting the ban on women cleaning machinery with dangerous moving parts!

Jobs involving heavy physical work of lifting or exposure to toxic chemicals can affect fertility and pregnancy. Anaesthetics used in operating theatres can also cause miscarriages. But the problems go much wider. According to a recent French survey, pregnant women standing for more than three hours are 60% more likely to go into premature labour. Noise, wet conditions and monotony lead to stress and doubles the rate of premature birth. This is no small problem in Britain where 75% of pregnant women work.

Even if they provide adequate protection for men (which is doubtful) most safety levels do not provide adequate protection for women. For instance, the safety levels of many toxic substances are based on average body size of male workers, while women are on average smaller and therefore more susceptible.

All recent evidence indicates that infertility is an increasing problem, now facing 1 in 10 couples. What is clear is that, far from women requiring less protection, men require more. The only solution to the problem is to make the workplaces safe for everyone.

Any campaign on health and safety and particularly on protection for pregnant women must be linked to a campaign to improve maternity rights

and benefits. There is less protection for pregnant women from unfair dismissal than any other group. If a woman works with a dangerous substance the boss is under no obligation to provide her with an alternative job or see whether a safer substance could be substituted.

The scrapping of the maternity grant and entitlement to return to their jobs for millions of women adds to their insecurity and poverty. The qualifying period of two years continuous employment in one job for a full-timer and five years for a part-timer discriminate against women. This lack of job security could lead to women concealing the fact that they are pregnant, risking their health to keep their jobs. A doctor at St. George's Hospital in London pointed to the fear of unemployment as one of the causes of stress amongst pregnant women.

The decline in health and safety for all workers is a scandal. The trade union leaders must launch an offensive against the Tories. There must be a campaign for registration, regular inspection and the enforcement of all remaining Health and Safety Regulations.

The Factory Inspectorate has been reduced and other health and safety measures undermined by Tory cuts. Scientific and medical research by universities and other public bodies has been reduced, leaving research more and more dominated by big business and the profit motive. Collective action based on the involvement and awareness of trade union members is our only protection.

We demand;

- ★ Free medical services, including cancer screening, on site where appropriate and in work time. This must include all women workers, including for example cleaners who may not be on site at the same time as the majority of workers.
- ★ trade union courses on health and safety available to all workers in works time.
- ★ no sacking of women because they are unable to do jobs where there is a threat to fertility or pregnancy. Jobs should be made safe for all workers. Excluding women may still leave a serious threat to male workers' health.
- ★ trade unions to campaign for decisive control over health and safety at work rather than leave it to joint committees of workers and management, which are invariably dominated by management.
- ★ campaign for the Health and Safety Executive to be a democratically elected body representing the labour movement and not dominated by management, employers, government representatives and 'experts' who are usually biased towards the bosses.
- ★ a recruitment campaign around these issues, especially in small workplaces which have a low level of trade union membership and 50% higher accident rate.

Training and apprenticeships



Young trade unionists in the fight for more staff at Hoxton DSS office.

Young women starting work or women returning to work after bringing up children continue to be channeled into traditional jobs, which are mostly classed as unskilled, with little training and very limited opportunities. Apprenticeships, industrial training and further education courses which are essential for entry into skilled trades, technical jobs, etc, have always been very restricted for women.

Now there is a drastic decline in training generally because of the crisis of British capitalism, and the situation for young women is even worse. There has been a tremendous decline in apprenticeships, down by over half between 1979 and 1986. Only a fraction of those left are taken up by women. TOPS has also declined rapidly. Whilst it did provide training, like YTS, it tended to reflect and reinforce segregation in the workforce.

For example, 72% of TOPS completers in food preparation were women compared with 18% in management and 8% in science and technology. 385,000 young people are now on YTS, which is an attempt to exploit young people as cheap labour under the pretext of providing some kind of training (with no guarantee of a job at the end). The scheme has a worse health and safety record (136.2 accidents per 100,000) than the most dangerous industry – shipbuilding and marine engineering (121.4 per 100,000.) Employment Training for 18 year-olds has been a flop,

providing only 150,000 places. It is an even more blatant attempt to force young people to accept rock bottom wages. The 'trainees' receive only their dole plus £12, most of which would go on transport and other expenses of going out to work.

We demand:

- ★ the replacement of TOPS, ET and YTS with a massive increase in apprenticeships and training schemes under the control of the trade unions and on trade union rates of pay. (A minimum of £55 for 16 year-olds and £65 for 17 year-olds.)
- ★ the right of all young workers to attend day or block release F.E. courses, with all college and exam fees paid by the employer and without loss of pay. There should be special steps to encourage women to take up scientific and technical courses, including provision of childcare in educational establishments.
- ★ the pay of young people on existing YTS schemes to be topped up to trade union rates with a guarantee of genuine training and proper health and safety precautions. Work on such schemes should count towards contributory benefits or benefits which require continuous service qualifications.
- ★ the right of trade unions to go into all educational establishments to talk to young people about the importance of trade union membership and make them aware of their rights.
- ★ a campaign by trade unions, local authorities, teachers unions, and school governors, against job segregation, to encourage women to apply for more training and re-training, including non-traditional courses.

Conclusion

More women than ever are involved in the fightback against the Tories and the bosses. The key role played by women in the miners' strike has been an inspiration for all working class women. It smashed any idea that women are a drag on trade unions or are incapable of struggling for themselves.

Many have also been involved in their own battles over pay and jobs – as nurses, dinner-ladies, factory workers, civil servants and teachers. In all these battles women were united on the need to bring down the Tory government, which has backed the bosses offensive to the hilt and carried through savage attacks on jobs, services and democratic rights.

As a representative of big business, Britain's first female prime minister is ruthlessly attempting to reverse the progress made by working-class women over the last 20 years. Tory policies are dictated by the crisis in the bosses' system. Capitalism faces a world-wide crisis and an especially acute crisis in Britain. The prolonged, but superficial boom of the last few years is drawing to a close. Whilst it improved the position of a narrow layer of workers, for the majority, and especially for working class women and youth, living standards and conditions continued to worsen. The rise in homelessness, the destruction of local authority services, including housing and the attempt to impose the poll tax have led to a bitter and angry mood amongst millions of workers, especially women.

The sustained economic growth of the post-war period has gone forever. This is the basis of the continuing attack on our rights and living standards. Working people are not responsible for this crisis – and we should not be forced to pay for its consequences. The lesson of past governments, and especially of the present Thatcher government, is that no amount of sacrifice will put big business back on its feet. Acceptance of low wages for one group of workers has never produced higher wages for other groups. Nor does acceptance of low pay and poor conditions save jobs.

Unemployment and attacks on living standards are both symptoms of capitalist crisis. By cutting the market for goods and service they actually aggravate this crisis. There is no way out within the bosses' rotten system which is based on the anarchy of market forces and the pursuit of profit for the wealthy few. The tragedies of the last few years, the Zeebrugge ferry, the King's Cross fire, the Clapham train crash, the Hillsborough disaster, and the destruction of the environment, indicate how far the bosses and their government are prepared to go in the pursuit of profit. We must fight to bring down the Tory government and return a Labour government with an overwhelming majority. But it must not be a Labour government which repeats the mistakes of the past.

The Labour Party has committed itself to establish a Ministry for Women

and a Minister with Cabinet status after the next General Election. This would be a welcome step forward. Provided the ministry is linked to women in the labour and trade union movement, it could act as a focus for campaigning activity, ensuring the policies of the next Labour government reflect the real interests and needs of working class women.

But even the most modest reforms raise the question: How will they be paid for? Extra taxes on workers would mean robbing the not-so-poor to pay the even poorer. Extra taxes on the bosses would mean a refusal of the bosses to invest and economic sabotage. More state spending on the basis of government borrowing or printing money, however, would lead to a nightmarish explosion of inflation. Only socialist economic policies, with the extension of public ownership to give effective control of the commanding heights of the economy, can provide an answer.

Any attempt to revive the diseased capitalist economy will inevitably mean further attempts to salvage big business through renewed attacks on workers' living standards. We want a Labour government committed to bold socialist policies which will mobilise mass support for a real change in the system. The political battle for the return of a Labour government must go hand in hand with the industrial struggle for decent working conditions and living standards.

There is no contradiction between campaigns and industrial action, on the one side, and working to build mass electoral support on the other. This is something that many of our leaders have unfortunately failed to grasp. Past reforms can only be defended through struggle and new gains will only be won through struggle. We must fight for every job, for a living wage, a 35-hour week, for equal pay and the vital services needed by our class. The policies of this Charter have been drawn up as the basis for this struggle.

The fight against discrimination against women and to provide the community services needed to end isolation and drudgery in the home is a vital part of the labour movement's struggle. This should not be left to women alone but must be encouraged and supported by the whole movement.

Many women workers are undoubtedly disillusioned about the neglect of their interests by sections of the trade unions. They were disgusted by the lack of active support for the miners on the part of trade union leaders, notably the TUC tops. Trade union leaders who co-operate with the Tories' anti-union laws or who fail to organise effective support for embattled sections like the miners, printers and health workers cannot seriously offer a way forward for women workers. Whilst everyone would be in favour of clear and attractive presentation of information and ideas, glossy leaflets and packs are no substitute for a struggle on crucial issues such as low pay, cuts and health and safety.

The need for class solidarity, highlighted by the miners' strike, is vitally important for women workers, many of whom work in small sweatshops or



Liverpool Labour Women's Council banner on abortion rights demonstration in 1988.

in the public sector where they lack direct 'economic muscle'. In the fight against the Tories and the bosses women have become active in the struggle to transform the trade union organisations. This means a campaign to democratise the unions and fight for the election of shop stewards, local and regional officials and especially national leaders who will fight for the members of their class with the same determination which Thatcher shows in defending the bosses' wealth and power.

When this is achieved the trade unions, the mass organisations of the great majority whose labour is the source of all wealth in society, will become unstoppable instruments of change. We believe this Charter outlines the bold, fighting policies needed to defend the interests of women workers and to unite all workers, women and men, in the struggle for socialism.

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