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way in which workers will push aside the old divisions between men and women has already been amply demonstrated in recent strikes, when previously politically backward women have taken action and been supported by all sections of the trade union rank and file.

### **THE MOVEMENT OF OPPRESSED WOMEN IS ONLY JUST BEGINNING**

The Leeds clothing strike, the Trico strike in London recently, and a whole number of small, but often bitter disputes for equal pay, are just a foretaste of the explosive movements that will develop among women in the future. Working women will again be brought to the fore, as they were in the great revolutionary movements of the past. And there can be no doubt that involvement in mass political struggles will fuel the feminine anger of women and provoke loud and insistent demands for real equality. But women will not be vindicated by virtue of their special oppression, or because they constitute at least half the human race. The aspirations of women will be fulfilled through their participation in the struggle to end capitalism. History has demonstrated the emptiness of formal equal rights for women without their having the material means to enjoy them. Only the workers as a class, men and women together, have the power to build a society that can provide those means.

### **IN CONCLUSION**

Frederick Engels, Marx's great collaborator and an ardent supporter of the cause of women's emancipation, frequently repeated the idea first put forward by Fourier: that in any given society the degree of women's emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation. The continued exploitation and oppression of women as women as well as workers even in the most technologically advanced countries of capitalism is certainly a burning indictment of the system. By the same measure, the extent to which the socialist transformation of society leads to the actual liberation of women will be a decisive test of its success. But we are confident that the socialist society for which we are fighting will bring the genuine emancipation of women, will establish real equality between the sexes, and raise human relations in general to a new and higher level of development.

## **WORKING WOMEN AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM**



**LABOUR STUDENTS  
SOUTH WEST REGION**

**10p**



# Introduction

**Working Women and the Struggle for Socialism**, was first published by the Minority on the NOLS NC, under the title "Women, Sexism, and the Labour Movement", as part of the debate held at the 1976 NOLS Conference.

The South West Regional Committee of NOLS believes that this document provides a valuable analysis of the problems facing women, and we have therefore decided to re-print it, to encourage further discussion on the question of women's emancipation, both in Labour Clubs and the broader labour movement.

When Labour came to power in 1974, its manifesto promised to bring about a "fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families". Yet, despite the support for socialist policies which clearly exists in the labour and trade union movement, the government has been unwilling to tackle the power of capital and has repeatedly given way to pressure from the bosses and the Tory Party. The result has been drastic public expenditure cuts and wage restraint, while prices continue to rise at 17% plus a year, and unemployment remains at well over one and a half million.

In these circumstances, all workers find that their living standards are coming under serious attack, but certain sections of the working class, those who are particularly oppressed under capitalism, like the weak and unorganised workers in the back street sweat shops, immigrants and women, face especially severe problems. In all the different aspects of their lives women, in particular, have been very badly hit by the present crisis of British capitalism.

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At work many women are still receiving appallingly low wages. In fact, the 1976 New Earnings Survey showed that 10% of women manual workers earned less than £26 a week. Furthermore, despite the 1975 Equal Pay Act, the gap between men's and women's hourly earnings actually increased from 50p to 56p during 1976. Clearly it is only when the workers take up the question of equal pay through the trade union movement, as they did at Tricos, that any real improvement in women's wages can be achieved.

Similarly, only firm action by the labour and trade union movement can lead the fight against unemployment which threatens both male and female workers. Women who make up a large section of the workforce in the public sector, are particularly acutely affected by redundancies and their determination to fight the cuts is clearly shown by the large number of working women who joined the demonstration held on November 17 last year, and by the fact that NUPE now has about 400,000 women members as compared to about 150,000 in 1968.

In every sector of industry women workers are organising. More than 100,000 women have joined the TUC in the last 12 months alone. The recognition battles at Grunwicks, and other similar sweat shops, have demonstrated in practice that the barriers between men and women break down when women workers become involved in the class struggle.

It is not just at work, however, that women are facing serious difficulties, for their home and family life is also suffering badly as a result of inflation and the cuts. As the cost of living rises housewives are forced to spend more and more time and effort trying to make ends meet, being urged by the media to "shop around" etc. Furthermore, women are being forced increasingly to do work previously undertaken by the Welfare State. For instance, because of the cut backs in the number of hospital beds women are now having to stay at home to look after old or sick relatives, and nursery closures mean that many mothers are seriously restricted in their activities because they are unable to leave their children in safe, let alone pleasant, surroundings. In addition to this, cuts in the NHS have also led to an attack on abortion rights in the form of the infamous Benyon Bill.

Even a brief outline of the present situation is sufficient to show that all the major problems facing working women stem basically from the crisis-ridden capitalist system in which we live. **Working Women and the Struggle for Socialism** takes up and develops this point and also outlines a clear socialist approach to the whole question of women's emancipation. This is particularly important, for if the labour movement is to win the majority of women to its banner, it must prove that it is aware of their problems and willing and able to fight for a solution.



# Working Women and the Struggle for Socialism

Every period of social crisis and intense class struggle is accompanied by an awakening of the most oppressed sections of society. Among these are certainly included millions of working women, whom capitalist society exploits both as workers and also specifically as women. It should be of no surprise to socialists, then, that the crisis of British capitalism and the recent battles of the industrial workers should have been accompanied by movements among working women.

Numerous strikes for equal pay, the leading role of women in tenants' struggles, and the increased participation of women in the labour movement generally, all indicate that millions of women, who previously suffered their particular oppression in silence when there was no visible prospect of change, are clamouring for change now that there has been a reawakening of the labour movement and socialist ideas.

Equal pay has been the focus of the struggle of working women, but behind this there is a profound feeling that the formal, legal equality won by women in the past must now be translated into genuine economic and social equality, equality established in the concrete forms that people recognise in practice. The labour movement, which grew up as the expression of the oppressed under capitalism, has a historic duty to champion the cause of oppressed women and to make the social liberation of women an integral part of its programme. Unless it does this, it will not remain true to its essential aims.

## WOMEN WORKERS AND EQUAL PAY

Underlying the new movement of women and the reawakening of women's political consciousness has undoubtedly been the big increase in women's participation in the labour force in the post-war period. It is this development above all which, by giving women a greater degree of independence and more self-confidence, accentuated the dissatisfaction of women and stimulated demands for equality. The new mood was expressed first among the middle strata of professional and semi-professional women who had generally made more progress than women in industry. But the inchoate women's liberation movement which followed the student radicalisation of the late 1960s reflected deeper-rooted, if less obvious, stirrings among working class women. It was the strike of the women machinists at Fords in 1968 that prompted the

Labour government to introduce the equal pay legislation which, in spite of its manifest limitations, has acted as a lever for trade union action. And it has been in the recent struggles for equal pay, often entailing long and bitter strikes involving the support of other sections of the labour movement, that struggle for equality has found its most important expression. The social power of women is directly related to the extent to which they work and the degree of economic independence that this affords them.

Between 1951 and 1971, the working population increased by 2.5 million, 2.2 million of whom were women. Now approximately 40% of the workforce is female. Women were thus a vital source of additional labour, and at the same time made an essential contribution to the rise of workers' living standards during the boom period.

Nevertheless, women remain one of the most exploited sections of the working class. The gap between men and women's earnings widened considerably during the 1950s and '60s. The relative improvement of the last few years has only marginally narrowed the differential. Recent percentage increases for women can look impressive in isolation: but the cash differences are still enormous.

If we take the figure for women's average weekly earnings as a percentage of men's (full-time manual), the position of women actually declined from 58.7% in 1950 to 57.4% in 1975. In the latter year, a third of full-time women workers earned less than £30 a week, compared with only 2.3% of full-time male workers. Ten times as many men as women were earning over £90 per week.

In addition, a third of women workers were employed on a part-time basis, mainly because of family responsibilities, with inferior conditions and disproportionately lower rates.

The right to pregnancy leave of at least six months on full pay and the right to return to the same job for up to a year after having a child is essential if women are not to suffer enormous disadvantages as far as employment is concerned through having children. Fathers should also be allowed a period of leave on full pay when their child is born.

Even if the Equal Pay Act were to be implemented fully—and we are still a long way from that—women generally would still not receive equal earnings because they are concentrated in low-pay industrial and other low-paid jobs. Over 90% of typists, nurses, canteen and domestic workers, and machinists are women. Together with teachers, shop assistants, social workers, hairdressers and laundry workers, these categories account for more than half the female workforce. The sort of jobs women mainly do obviously reflects their traditional role at home and the general social disadvantages of their position.

Although the trade unions have been able to utilise the Equal Pay Act to make some gains, the official intentions of the Act are being undermined in many different ways. First, the employers have been introducing new grading schemes which ostensibly are not based on sex, but which in fact concentrate women into the lower grades. The predominance of women in



the lower grades has been the norm for years in teaching and the civil service, for example, where there has been 'equal pay' for a long time. The Equal Pay Act also allows employers to carry out job evaluation schemes which are supposed to establish scientifically the relative value of various jobs. Needless to say, many ways can be used to weight these supposedly 'scientific' methods against women—by placing more emphasis, for example, on physical strength than manual dexterity. Only trade union action can ensure that equal pay schemes are implemented to the advantage of the workers, as opposed to the employers.

As the price of conceding equal pay, some employers are demanding that women should be prepared to work shifts including night work and do other work from which they are now protected by legislation. In fact, the number of exemption orders granted to employers by the Department of Employment has recently gone up. We should firmly oppose such moves. Equality for women does not mean that they must share in the worst exploitation of men. Night work, in particular, is highly detrimental to the social life and even health of male workers, and it would have even worse effects on women because of the additional responsibilities in the home which, in practice, they mostly have.

Moves towards equal pay are also being frustrated by the rise of unemployment, which has hit women workers much worse than men in the recent period. Registered female unemployment rose by nearly a quarter of a million between 1973 and 1975, and this is estimated to account for only a quarter of the women who are really unemployed. The lack of entitlement to unemployment benefits means that most women do not bother to register. In other words, redundancies have become one of the main ways in which the employers are avoiding giving equal pay.

The labour movement must fight for equal earnings for work of equal value. We will not accept equality of low pay, a danger in many of the traditionally low-pay industries. There must be a national minimum living wage, linked to the cost of living, that applies equally to men and women.

We must also demand access for women to training and higher grade jobs from which they have long been excluded. The pay of part-time women workers should be at least in proportion to what the employers would have to pay full-time workers, and they should also be entitled to security of employment and the proper entitlements. These demands are vital, not only to defend the position of women workers, but to safeguard the living conditions and organised strength of the working class as a whole. If capitalism cannot afford to grant these demands, all the more reason to change the system!

## WOMEN AND THE TRADE UNIONS

The last decade or so has seen an enormous increase in the participation of women in the trade unions. Between 1962 and 1975 women's membership of TUC-affiliated unions rose by 91%, compared with only an 11% rise in men's membership. This meant in absolute terms that an additional 1.3 million women had been drawn into the ranks of organised

labour.

As women workers had traditionally been the worst organised and the least politically conscious, this in itself was an extremely positive development. The general increase in the strength of organised women workers has been an important factor in the successful strike action of sections of women workers in the recent period. The organised pressure of women in the unions contributed significantly to the Equal Pay Act and other legislation, and it is undoubtedly mainly trade union action, through the branches and the shop stewards' committees, which has enabled women workers to take real advantage of it. Nevertheless, there are still large numbers of women not organised into trade unions, and these obviously tend to be among the most exploited. Because of the lack of campaigns to recruit women workers and fight for their interests by a number of unions covering industries with a high proportion of women, many women are not convinced that the unions can really help them. At the same time, within the unions, despite the big increase in women members, women still do not play the role that they should, either in the official structure or in the branches and factory committees. This undoubtedly reflects the social pressures on women workers, their extra responsibilities at home and often their less permanent position in employment because of this. But it is vitally important that the labour movement should fight to overcome these pressures, organise a bigger section of women workers, go out of its way to encourage them to participate in union activities, and try to ensure that women take their share of leading positions.

Under-representation of women in trade union positions and activities is sometimes posed, especially in student circles, as a question of 'male dominance' and 'male prejudice'. This, however, is a superficial and false approach. It is hardly surprising that trade unions, as mass organisations embracing millions of workers, reflect the prejudices of society. Male prejudice is certainly not the only kind. All manner of craft, political, and other backward prejudices, the product of social pressures and organisational conservatism, stand in the way of class militancy and a conscious outlook. These mental obstacles, together with prejudices against involving women, will only be overcome through action. Recent struggles show that this is already taking place.

The demand has sometimes been raised in the trade unions for women to be allocated quotas on various bodies to ensure that women members are fully represented. But such organisational measures would not advance the interests of women workers. It would generally have the effect of institutionalising the differences between men and women in the unions, reinforcing sectional attitudes based on sex. The election of representatives, delegates, officers, etc., on the basis of activity and ideas, even if this means that women are initially under-represented, is the best guarantee that their interests will be fought for. Election on a formal sectional, or numerical basis has always proved a disadvantage, and women would not be an exception.

We must also completely reject the idea of separate trade unions for



women. From time to time, sections of women workers whose case was not taken up by the movement and who felt themselves abandoned by the existing organisations, have attempted to form a women's union. Such attempts, however, have always been doomed to failure. For the employers, separate trade unions for women would be a gift, offering unprecedented opportunities for splitting the movement. In any case, if women organised independently they would mostly find themselves much weaker; the great majority of working women with any trade union experience correctly reject the idea of separate women's organisations.

The task of socialists in the trade unions is not to accentuate the differences between men and women, but to fight to overcome them. Recruiting women workers, drawing them into activity, making it possible for them to take leading positions, must be regarded as an essential part of the fight to transform the trade unions into organisations for the transformation of society.

### WOMEN, THE FAMILY, AND THE HOME

The position of women in relation to the family and the home follows, ultimately, from their childbearing role and the burdens that this imposes in present society. The extent of their family commitments and the time and effort demanded by the home are largely influenced, if not entirely determined, by the number of children a woman has. For this reason alone, women should have the right to decide whether they will have children, how many they will have, and when they will have them. But here abstract right means very little: practical means are everything. We must therefore demand that contraceptives are available free to all who want them and that competent medical advice is also freely available through agencies easily accessible and congenial to the women who need their help. Women should also have the right to free abortion. Abortion no doubt raises moral issues, but these must be resolved by the individuals concerned. To deny working class women abortions on moral grounds is sheer class hypocrisy when, as everyone knows, anyone with enough money can easily arrange one. In practice, women are denied abortions on class grounds, because they cannot afford them. If the present NHS cannot provide free contraceptive advice and abortions to those who need them, then the health service must be expanded and improved so that it can.

Capitalism, in the sphere of personal and sexual relations, as in other spheres, surrounds the individual with a stultifying complex of dead traditions, restrictive morality, legal regulations, and of course tax laws. For the ruling class the essential features of the family are that it is the basis of the inheritance of property, that it places a legal obligation on individuals to support wives and children, and that it serves as a unit for taxation.

In the past, because of its inherently parochial nature, the family was also expected to nurture the young in the morality, mores, traditions, and

prejudices propagated by the ruling class to cement the social structure, although this function is now being undermined by the general degeneration of capitalism itself. Is it any wonder, then, that the laws, conventions and ideas surrounding the family should be based on the subjection of women? Humiliating cultural and psychological discrimination, the accumulated excrement of the past, is added to inferior social status and irksome material disadvantages.

It should go without saying that the labour movement, if it is to represent the interests of women, must stand for the formal equality of women in law and in relation to employers and the state. We can have no objection to legislation against discrimination insofar as it really improves the position of women. But it is only by attacking the social roots of discrimination which are imbedded deep in the soil of class society—and by successfully mobilising women themselves for this task—that the real social emancipation of women will be achieved. We have to tackle the practical problems of lifting the burden of bearing and bringing up children from women and provide them with the means of breaking out of the isolation of the home.

Children are obviously essential to the continuation of human society, and by that fact cannot be exclusively an individual matter. Even from a capitalist point of view, human reproduction is necessary to reproduce wage labour and surplus value. Yet in present society the main burden of providing for children is thrown onto individual parents, regardless of their means. Until society lifts the weight of bringing up children from individuals by providing them with the facilities which are really necessary, women's opportunities in society will continue to be limited and mothers will remain more or less chained to the kitchen sink.

Quite apart from the obvious drudgery and demoralisation of housework, isolation in the home is a severe social handicap in every respect. In particular, it cuts working class women off from the activity of the class in general, both at work and in the labour movement. Every working class mother knows the obstacles to participation in trade union or political activity. And even the positive desire of many women to provide a decent and comfortable home for their family is exploited by the capitalist class. Through the mass media, the church and conservative women's organisations, they attempt to play on the insecurity of housewives to arouse their fear of 'industrial disruption', 'political turmoil' etc. Recently, such attempts have met with little support and even rebounded on the bosses in the case of a number of successful strikes. But the residues of prejudice, inertia, and conservatism fostered for generations around the family hearth are certainly still there.

In the face of these conditions, the task of the labour movement is to show the mass of working women, especially those tied to the home, the practical paths by which they can escape from domestic drudgery and isolation. It would be completely mistaken simply to denounce the 'bourgeois family' in the abstract in the manner of various doctrinaires. We should certainly explain in our propaganda, in clear and simple terms, socialists' criticisms of existing family relations. But the way to win the



active support of working class women is to put forward a programme of demands that offer practical solutions to their day-to-day problems.

The demand for wages for housewives, however, which has recently been raised in the movement, points in the wrong direction. The demand undoubtedly arises from a recognition that housework, in capitalist society, is an unavoidable necessity for millions of women who are providing for workers and future workers. But this demand, apart from being utopian as far as capitalism is concerned, implies the continued existence of housewives as such. Indeed, it implies that the status of housewives will be improved and made more permanent. This may be well intentioned. But the way to emancipation lies in the opposite direction, through breaking out of the narrow confines of the home.

Our demands should be formulated on the following lines:

(i)

The free provision of creches and nurseries, to be available at all times, to allow women the time to work, study, participate in social activities, etc., with easy access for working mothers and all the necessary accommodation, equipment, and trained staff to provide a safe, enjoyable and stimulating environment in which women, could leave their children with confidence. Employers with women workers should be obliged to finance creches and nurseries, to be run under the control of the trade unions.

(ii)

The provision of communal restaurants, laundries, and other facilities to relieve people of domestic work. Here the quality of the facilities is as important as the quantity if they are to provide a real alternative. Such facilities would not provide all the answers, but, as we must explain, with a socialist plan of production, the enormous increases in living standards and reduction of working hours that would be possible, the tedious domestic tasks of everyday life would be rapidly reduced to their right proportions.

When we raise demands for communal childcare facilities and the socialisation of domestic labour, reactionaries will always begin to scream about the 'nationalisation of children', the 'abolition of private life', and other wild fantasies provoked by the suggestion of social progress. But in a socialist society the early participation of children in group activity with other children and adults would not at all be incompatible with much closer—and less problematic—relations with their own parents, free from all the tensions stimulated by capitalist conditions. Without the stresses and strains of class society, personal relations would be much freer, more harmonious, much better in every way.

The demands outlined above must be taken up as part of the immediate struggle to improve the position of women. But the possibilities of the labour movement extracting concessions from the capitalist class on these issues are becoming more and more limited as the economy moves deeper into crisis. These demands must therefore be used to demonstrate to

women that the day-to-day problems of the family and the home will not be resolved within the present system and that they require the implementation of a socialist programme. Without falling into utopianism, we can attract masses of working class women to socialism by pointing to the tremendous possibilities that will be opened up to the majority of women for the first time when production is planned and power in the hands of the workers. Increased production, more and better houses, an abundance of consumer goods, are after all, not an end in themselves, but the means to better human relations and a higher level of culture.

## **DISCRIMINATION, SEXISM, MALE CHAUVINISM, AND SOCIAL EMANCIPATION**

In the period of post-war economic expansion, technological developments within capitalism and a more complex division of labour themselves undermined some of the old rigid distinctions between men and women, especially in the field of employment, but also in other areas as a result. A general shift to the left, which affected the articulate middle layers of society as well as the workers, made the open defence of blatant sexual discrimination increasingly difficult. More recently, pressure from the labour movement has led to the enactment of legislation intended to improve women's conditions of employment and outlaw sexual discrimination. These laws have given legal recognition to the position already established by many women in the professions. Insofar as they provide a lever for women fighting to improve their position, we can only welcome such measures. However, they clearly have limitations.

The Equal Pay Act has been dealt with above. The Protection of Employment Act undoubtedly offers significant benefits to women workers, particularly in relation to pregnancy leave and payment. But to take advantage of this, a woman has to have worked more than a certain number of hours a week for the same employer for two years. This rules out many women who have to work part-time or change their job frequently because of their children—in other words, the women most in need of protection. The Sexual Discrimination Act may well end some of the most blatant discriminatory practices of employers, particularly in relation to advertising and filling jobs. But the Act leaves out some of the worst forms of discrimination against women: those enshrined in the tax laws and the administrative practices of the DHSS in relation to social security.

The law will also have the effect of driving discrimination into more devious and covert forms. And to utilise the law, women have to go to the Equal Opportunities Commission or the County Courts, overcoming all the inhibitions this entails. In any case, neither the Commission nor the County Courts have very strong powers to enforce their rulings, and they have already demonstrated a marked reluctance to take a tough line with offending employers. Practice has already shown that the only effective way of making use of these laws is through the trade unions. Ultimately, it



is only the power of the labour movement, expressed if necessary through strike action, that can really defend and advance the interests of working women.

One of the dangers inherent in attempts to legislate against discrimination is that it tends to focus attention on the symptoms of discrimination and prejudice rather than the underlying causes. There are thousands of conventions, habits, etc., which serve to underline the differences between the sexes.

Sexual discrimination is inevitably reflected in the language and the minutiae of everyday life. It is no wonder that women are highly sensitive to these expressions of sex differences: because of the largely inferior status which has been imposed on them, even the most petty indicators of sex roles become irritating reminders of their oppression as women. But whilst socialists should certainly adopt a sensitive and conscious attitude to all expressions of discrimination and prejudice, it would be a mistake to be drawn into a campaign against the superficial manifestations of sexual inequality to the detriment of explaining and fighting against the conditions from which they arise.

Campaigns against 'sexist attitudes' and 'male chauvinism' inevitably reflect, albeit unconsciously, the assumption that women's greatest enemy is 'Man', and that all women should be united against the male oppressor in the fight for equality. This is a purely feminist assumption which contains the hidden assumption that women could achieve real equality within capitalism, if only sexism and male chauvinism could be overcome.

Women, it is certainly true, are doubly exploited under capitalism, both as members of the working class and as women. There are undoubtedly certain forms of sexual discrimination experienced by all women, regardless of their class. But this does not mean that working class women therefore have a fundamental identity of interest with middle class, or bourgeois, women. What does a woman night cleaner have in common with a woman company director? Do women in the factories gain if more women are admitted to the floor of the stock exchange? Should all these women stand united against male domination?

Sexual discrimination is unmistakably class specific—anyone who does not recognise this is blind to the real character of society. In spite of male prejudice, the majority of women have, above all, an identity of interests with the working class. To set working men and working women against one another on the basis of backward prejudices generated by capitalist exploitation, will not advance the cause of women at all. The emancipation of women is inseparably bound up with the emancipation of the working class—as most active working class women are aware.

Women's Liberation, a spontaneous trend among students, intellectuals, and sections of professional women rather than an organised movement, undoubtedly had a certain effect in stimulating new demands for equality among working class women. But Women's Liberation, in spite of generally trying to express its aspirations in socialist language, could not help reflecting its heterogeneous class basis, and gave a new currency to suitably updated feminist ideas. Frequent claims to represent

working women by no means ensured that it laid its ideological foundations on a conscious working class outlook. And it must be said that the hopelessly confused contributions of the various 'Marxist' sects which became involved in Women's Liberation did nothing to help. However, if NOLS adopts the correct approach, it will be able to win increasing numbers of women, including those from a middle class background, who will be moved into opposing the present system through a reaction against discrimination, to a consistent socialist point of view.

Because 'gay rights' have been made an issue in some student circles, it is necessary to comment in passing on 'Gay Liberation' which, laying claims to analogous grievances, made an appearance after Women's Liberation. It should go without saying that socialists are opposed to discrimination against people, or their victimisation, on grounds of homosexuality. Although a number of laws are framed ostensibly to protect people from homosexuals, they are undoubtedly frequently used by the police to harass people who cause no harm to anyone. Nevertheless, beyond this, 'gay liberation' belongs to the sphere of personal relations. It is necessary to maintain a sense of proportion. Certain dilettantes, notably in the NUS, have exploited the diversionary value of this issue to distract attention from more important issues which cause them political embarrassment. Serious socialists will recognise that 'gay liberation' cannot provide the slightest social basis for an independent contribution to the labour movement. The various exotic theories and emotive arguments that are sometimes advanced to prove otherwise are simply symptoms of the utter confusion and lack of perspectives that still prevail in purely student politics.

'Sexist', 'male chauvinist pig', etc., are purely personal characterisations which—whatever their particular justification—cannot replace clear theoretical understanding. Prejudice is not just the product of the mind, to be erased by suitable enlightenment. It is a social product and must be combated with materialist, not liberal, idealist methods. 'Sexism' is not a male monopoly to be fought only by righteous women. 'Male chauvinism' has its counterpart in slavish acceptance and rationalisation of inequality by oppressed women who see no possibility of things changing—and this often finds its expression in prejudice.

Sexism, moreover, is hardly the sole form of human prejudice. It is inevitable that economic exploitation, political oppression, daily social humiliation, give rise to a host of sexual, racial, national, craft, religious and even local prejudices. They cannot be eradicated simply by preaching and denunciation, which, if anything, will tend to reinforce them. Education and propaganda will only be effective as far as the majority of workers are concerned when they are actively drawn into an organised and conscious struggle against capitalist tyranny in all its forms. Fortunately, we will not have to wait until the workers are spiritually purified and freed from all prejudices: their conditions of life as a class under capitalism ensures that they will move to transform society in a period of crisis. And as soon as the workers are involved in class action, all the apparently indelible prejudices of the past begin to be washed off very rapidly. The