

THIS COULD BE YOU...



If you agree with the following:

1. Free contraception on the N.H.S.
2. The right to choose an abortion
3. No forced sterilisation

The campaign needs your^{active!} support.

WOMEN NOW



10p

WOMEN NOW

Women now is the Journal of Nottingham Womens Liberation Group. Its aim is to provide information on various aspects of womens oppression, the theme of women at work corresponds with the introduction of the Anti-Discrimination Bill and the Equal Pay Act. It is interesting to see how firms are preparing themselves to avoid giving women equal wages whilst remaining within the law.

Our Group meets on Thursday nights at 8pm in the Womens Centre for discussion on the progress of the various campaigns and on the problems which face women at work, in the home or in other Countries. The Nursery Campaign group are fighting for nursery accommodation for all children.

26, Newcastle Chambers
Angel Row,
Nottingham.

The Battered Wives Campaign is having some success in setting up a refuge, for women battered in their own homes, to escape to. The Abortion and Contraception Campaign has as its aims the RIGHT for free contraception and abortion to any women needing these services. The Working Womens Charter group sets out its aims clearly in the article contained in the Journal. The Anti Discrimination Campaign aims to end all discrimination against women on the grounds of sex. We want equal pay and equal opportunities. The group is expanding rapidly but the problems facing women are enormous, so if you feel in sympathy with our aims why not join us.



WOMEN WORKERS IN NOTTINGHAM

Nottingham has often been called a "woman's town" because of its abundance of jobs for women. The employment of women in textile, lace and hosiery is not a recent phenomenon but dates well back into the 19th Century and before. Womanpower has always been essential to industry in this area and became increasingly so as men left the factories for the pits towards the end of the 19th Century. In the hosiery industry the proportion of women to men was roughly equal before 1875 about 5,000 of each sex being employed. By 1897 the number of women rose to 30,000 and they became 75% of the work force. The myth that women's work is unimportant and marginal to the economy is quite obviously untrue in a city like Nottingham. A historical study of employment in the 19th Century also shows that the general pattern was for men, women and children to be involved in the production process together. The idea that a man gained status because he could afford to keep his wife at home was an ideal of the Victorian middle classes who displayed their wealth in this way. To some extent this idea has filtered down to the working class, sometimes in a slightly altered form in the idea that women work for "pin money" i.e. that their work is inessential and not worth very much. Women know that this is untrue, that their wages are essential to the family budget. But the myths are useful, especially if we can be made to believe them ourselves, because what the majority of employers pay women amounts to very little more than "pin money". Nottingham in the 19th Century was a prosperous and growing town, and its wealth was established on the basis of its two main industries - hosiery and lace. Hosiery was mainly a cottage industry with the whole family involved in the production process. The men and women generally worked the frames while the children, often from a very early age, were involved in the essential tasks of winding, seaming, and footing. Rates of pay were extremely low and it was necessary for the whole family to work long hours in cramped conditions in order to earn enough to live on. The hosiery industry as a whole was overcrowded and subject to severe fluctuations in trade. Children from the age of 4 onwards were expected to help with the simpler tasks, and at the age of 9 might be put to work on a frame.

In 1809, at the age of 14, William Felkin had begun to learn how to make stockings; many years later he recalled his mother's distress: "My mother directed me if possible to avoid ever learning to gain my bread in a stocking frame. She knew that stocking making had laid in my father's constitution the seeds of disease and of premature death".

N.B. Jo O'Brien P.7 quote (Felkin ...).

"Lace was a factory based industry but its working conditions were no better. The general pattern was for men to work the machines, women to wind the thread, and children to thread the machines".

Quote P.4-5 - Jo O'Brien.

The exploitation of children was appalling. Children were often employed in preference to women and men because their labour was cheaper. The warehouses often sent out little or nothing at the beginning of the week and a rush of orders at the end which meant that children were sometimes kept 16 and 18 hours a day and not infrequently through the whole of Friday night. Many young girls were employed at home in the finishing processes as lace runners, hemmers and menders. In 1833 Alfred Power was especially dismayed by the plight of the lace runners whom he considered to be "the most skilful, the hardest worked and the worst paid of all operatives connected with the lace trade". Single women, dependant on their earnings, were reduced almost to starvation, while the very character of their work and the injurious effects of long hours on health and sight totally unfitted them for any other employment. In such cases these women were often forced to turn to prostitution. For married women, there was the problem of young children without time to attend to their families a common practice was to give opium to the babies in order to keep them asleep. Overdoses and deaths were a common result.

Women were not passive in their acceptance of this exploitation. In 1840 the lace runners of Nottingham formed an association and organized a demonstration against the "middlemen" in the lace trade - the intermediaries between factory and cottage who were taking excessive cuts from the earnings of the runners. In a circular "To The Lace Runners of Nottingham and its Vicinity" the women called for a meeting at Rice's Place, Nottingham to point out that "in consequence of this method of giving out work, the lace runners in many cases receive for their work not more than one half the original price. The mistresses reserving to themselves the remainder for that most useful of all purposes "walking with your work to the warehouse". They add at the end of the circular "We also trust that the male portion of society will assist us, as it is the cause of the poor working man as much as the females".

This last point is important since women had often fought alongside male workers against their appalling conditions. Women did not only organise in support of the men either - as the above example shows, they often organised themselves and were able to raise the whole question of womens participation in politics and union activity.

As with womens role in production their role in history and in the struggle of the working classes has also been ignored and forgotten.

Naturally, because of their position, it was mainly women who were involved in confrontations related to the price of food. The Nottingham date book gives an example of September 11th 1812.

"The disturbance began by several women in Turncalf Alley sticking a halfpenny loaf on top of a fishing rod after having streaked it with red ochre and tied round it a shred of black cloth, emblematic it was said of bleeding famine decked in sackcloth... The promiscuous assemblage then proceeded to the house, at the same time extracting a promise that he would reduce the price of flour 6d per stone. The example was contagious. Mobs instantly set to work in every part of the town."

But women were also a very important force within trade unions and political organisations. In Nottingham especially the importance of women and children within industries like framework knitting, lace and textiles showed the men that they could not be excluded from Union life. In 1843 at a meeting of framework knitters in Nottingham there was a proposal to build a national union in which women and children could be members. Also many female reform and friendly societies were set up alongside their male counterparts.

It is in the chartist period that we can most easily trace the political activity of working women. The original charter included a demand on women which was later dropped but nevertheless women took an active part. In 1838 the Nottingham female Political Union had their own banner on a chartist demonstration and they also had articles published in the chartist newspaper, "The Northern Star". The Birmingham meeting had been convened to draw women into chartism and according to reports "There could not have been less than 12,000 women there". Feargus O'Conner one of the leaders of the chartist movement believed that numerically women were the majority in the chartist movement.

In October 1838 the Nottingham Female Political Union was actually formed. On December 8th "The Northern Star" printed a long letter to the women of England from the N.F.P.U. (quoted in "Hidden From History" by Sheila Rowbotham) They warned the working women of England against the treacherous middle classes "who must ever be considered as false friends and of no moment whatsoever for the people".

Women only knew how to deal with the shopocracy by withdrawing their custom from those who did not support the cause of working people. They declared that nothing would hold them back and they were prepared for violence "Its better to die by the sword than by famine". And they finished thus:- "Trusting sisters that you will respond to us in your kindest and most patriotic sympathies in the cause of our common country in every legal manner possible. We remain your dearest friends and sisters".

This illustrates the political understanding and involvement of these women and certainly belies the myth that women are apathetic with regard to political and Union activity.

We have tried to show that women are integral to the economy and their own work was equal to that of men. Equally they played an important role in the fight against their bad conditions.

Our political and economic importance has always been obscured and this has led us to accept our present position as second class citizens because it appears to be something that has always been.

Pam Seymour
Judith Arkwright

Here is a poem written by a woman quoted in the Woman Socialist of 1906.

"Oh, to be alone!
To escape from the work, the play,
The talking of every day;
To escape all I have done
And all that remains to do!
To escape - yes even from you,
My only love, and be alone and free.

Could I only stand
Between gray moor and gray sky
Where the winds and the plovers cry,
And no man is at hand;
And feel the free wind blow
On my rain-wet face and know
I am free - not yours but my own -
Free and alone.

For the soft firelight
And the home of your heart, my dear,
They hurt, being always here,
I want to stand upright,
And to cool my eyes in the air,
And to see how my back can bear
Burdens - to try, to know
To learn to grow!

I am only you!
I am yours, part of you, your wife!
I have no other life
I cannot think, cannot do;
I cannot breathe, cannot see;
There is 'us' but there is not me-
And worst at your trust I grow
contented so".

EQUALITY AT WORK ?

"O hard is the fortune of all womankind
She's always controlled, she's always
 confined
Controlled by her parents until she's a
 wife
Then a slave to her husband for the
 rest of her life.

So goes the old folk-song - and how much have things really changed for women now? Today, millions of women go out to work and so lay the basis for some independence, however thin their wage packets, their job security and their own expectations. Of course women have always worked, and continue to work - in the home, but for nothing; not even for the recognition this physically and mentally exhausting labour deserves. On the other hand, a job outside the home gives a woman not only her own pay-slip but also the close company of fellow workers, and with it a sense of her own importance and value. She can see the vital role she plays within the nation's economy (40% of the entire work force is female) but still the working woman is regarded not as an equal to her husband, only as a poor second. WHY?

Women themselves are conditioned into seeing their lives as workers as secondary to their lives as mothers and wives. Indeed any attempt to reverse this "divine order" brings with it an uproar of guilt and reproach. We must at all costs put marriage before a job, home before work, 'him' or 'them' before 'me'. This weakness is ruthlessly exploited by employers in offering women less than a living wage ("after all, it's only pin-money") and work at convenient but unsocial hours, in the early morning (e.g. cleaners) or on the 5 - 9 p.m. twilight shift. It may solve the problem of child-minding, but at the expense of emotional stability, both for children and for parents who rarely meet.

The position of the single woman (whether widowed, divorced, postponing or avoiding marriage) is similar but worse. As well as the problem of bad pay and conditions she comes up against the most blatant discrimination in terms of job opportunities. The vacancies columns of Nottingham's Evening Post show that there are four times as many "dead-end" jobs on appalling pay (as low as £10 per week) for young girls as compared to boys, while in the "professional" category more than half the jobs listed specify that a man is wanted.

It is extremely rare for a woman's job to mention any further training beyond what is immediately required for the job. So, unless fortunate enough to have received vocational training when young - probably as a teacher or a nurse - a Nottingham woman needing to

work has a very narrow choice. She can take an office job as a clerk (or a typist if already trained), she can enter the needle trade where skills can be learnt but go unrewarded; or she can take an unskilled job in a factory, shop or catering establishment (hotel, cafe or canteen). While some trade unionists are calling for a minimum wage of £40 per week, it seems that a Nottingham woman is doing well to get £30 and on average receives £23-24. The rate for some jobs is still as low as 40p per hour.

Another telling example of how deeply* ingrained is the prejudice against working women has been brought up by the Government's attempts to enforce "equal pay for equal work". Employers have decided that a woman's labour is not equal; that a job requiring manual strength should be more highly valued (and paid!) than one requiring dexterity, or the patience to put up with boring and repetitive work.

We must fight this kind of prejudice on all levels - firstly by demanding that the principle of equal pay for equal work is fully implemented, and women's rates brought up to those of men. Secondly, we must press employers to provide and publicise more opportunities for women to train, both in administrative and technical work. At the same time we need to lessen the special burden on women of responsibility for the home by demanding improved working conditions for all (so men can also take on their share) and adequate provision of nurseries. These demands will have to be fought for, especially as they cost money; and possibly the hardest stage of the battle will be getting women to stand up in the unions and claim them as their rights - but until we do, neither our fortune nor our slavery will change.

B. Holland

Dear Madam or Sir,



THE ANTI DISCRIMINATION BILL

If introduced on the lines of the White Paper "Equality for Women" the Bill will still fall short of our Campaign requirements. It will be necessary to have separate legislation to end discrimination in pensions, social security and income tax. Our comments on the White Paper have been sent to the Home Secretary, and a copy of our report is available at the Nottingham Women's Centre.

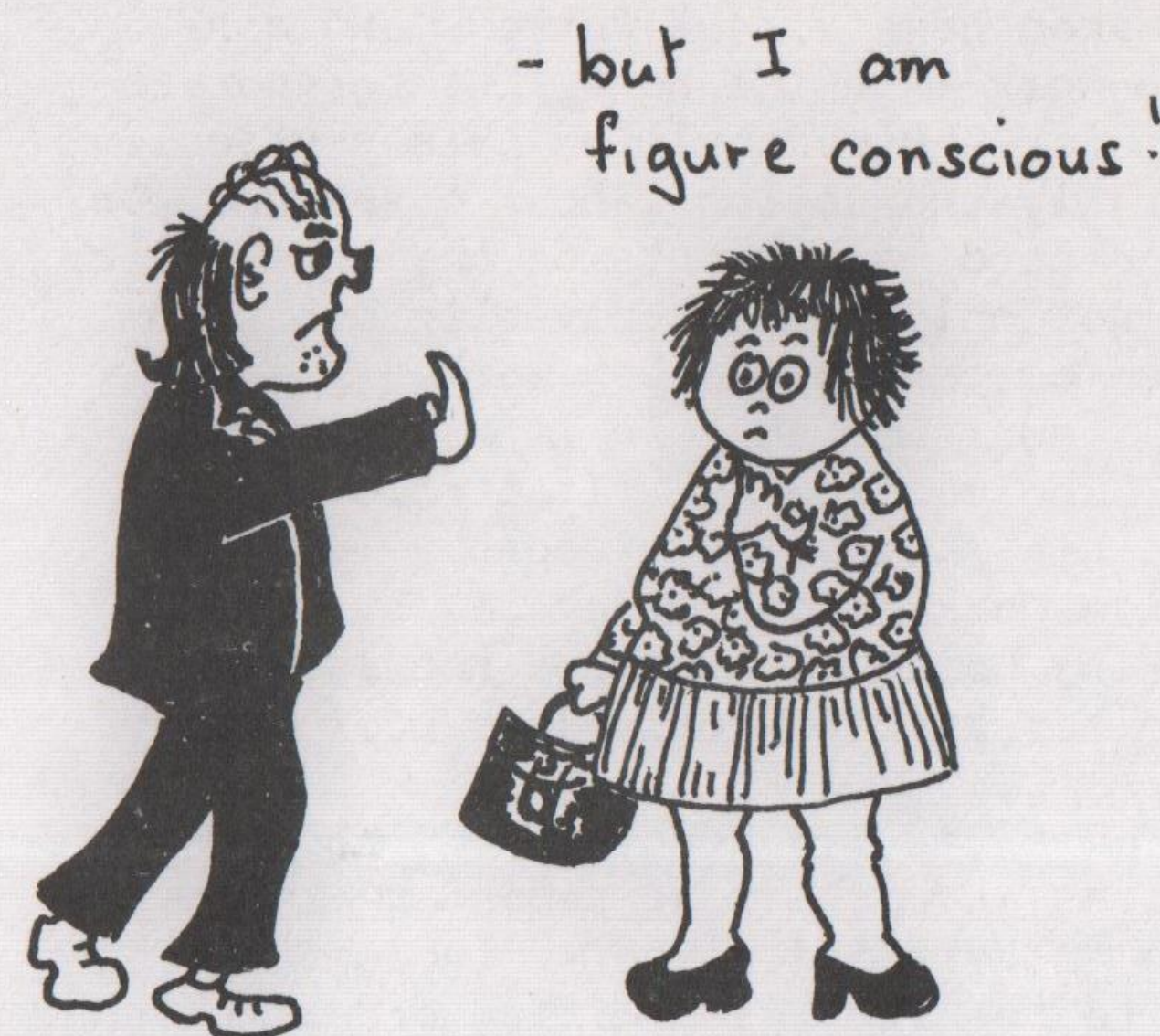
The Women's Movement is continuing the campaign to get a stronger Bill, but we are also looking ahead to its enforcement. We were critical of the proposal that the complainant must prove discrimination by her employer, etc. as we felt this placed too great a burden on an individual, especially if it involved a very large Organisation with ample financial resources and legal advisers. We feel therefore that the onus of proof must be on the Company, i.e. they must prove they did not discriminate because of sex or marriage. We can be fairly confident that there will be a Sex Discrimination Act on the Statute Book by the end of 1975. What we must do now is to study the Bill and the enforcement procedure. Women's Organisations and Trade Unions will be able to represent women at the proposed Industrial Tribunals and in the Civil Courts, and we must now work in preparation for this. Women from each Group must be trained to advise women of their rights, and be able to assist and represent women bringing cases of discrimination.

ELIZABETH COFFEY
SEX DISCRIMINATION CAMPAIGN
NOTTINGHAM

Barbara Castle's "Better Pensions" proposals do indeed go some way towards giving women a better deal than hitherto, but as it is an earnings-related scheme, women will still be at a disadvantage since their present earnings are still only half those of men. There is unlikely to be an early improvement with the implementation of the Equal Pay Act. Traditionally and historically there are many jobs which have been performed only by women, usually involving greater dexterity. These jobs have been rated as being of less value than jobs requiring physical strength. With the advanced technology now introduced into many industries, very few jobs now require physical strength, but the distinction is still made between "men's jobs" and "women's jobs". The criterion should be "equal pay for work of equal value" and not for "broadly similar work".

CANTEEN ASST.
Full and part time vacancies to be filled: Fantastic pay and holiday money.
(You bet its fantastic at half a mans wage)
.....

FIGURE CONSCIOUS.
Young lady 17 - 18 yrs wanted for firm in Sandacre
Various duties. (You bet).
.....



ATTRACTIVE LADY.
Is offered position as assistant Advertising Sales Agent. Aged 20 - 28. Sales experience not essential but helpful.
(Big Knockers a great advantage).
.....



THE WORKING WOMENS CHARTER

We all know that women are still suffering from severe discrimination at work despite the commitment nearly one hundred years ago by the Trades Union Movement to fight for equal pay. The 1970 Equal Pay Act and all the discussion in recent years about legislation on sex discrimination have done little either. Women still earn approximately half as much as men (eg. 1973 Ave. male earnings: £40.90 per week, Ave. female earnings: £22.60 per week) and still have tremendous difficulties in securing training for skilled jobs and promotion to higher grades. The Women's Movement has studied the position of women in society in some depth and has come to realise all-round changes in womens role are needed before real gains are made. The Working Womens Charter is a product of this thinking and attempts to lay down a set of demands that are essential in any fight for womens rights. The Charter was drawn up by a group of women in London and passed initially by the London Trades Council in March 1974, the demands are as follows:

We pledge ourselves to agitate and organise to achieve the following aims:

1. The rate for the job, regardless of sex, at rates negotiated by the trade unions, with a national minimum wage, below which no wages should fall.
2. Equal opportunity of entry into occupations and in promotion, regardless of sex and marital status.
3. Equal education and training for all occupations and compulsory day release for all 16 - 19 year olds in employment.
4. Working conditions to be, without deterioration of previous conditions, the same for women as for men.
5. The removal of all legal and bureaucratic impediments to equality e.g. with regard to tenancies, mortgages, pension schemes, taxation, passports, control over children, social security payments, hire purchase agreements.
6. Improved provision of local authority day nurseries, free of charge, with extended hours to suit working mothers. Provision of nursery classes in day nurseries. More nursery schools.
7. 18 weeks maternity leave with full net pay before and after a live child; 7 weeks after birth if the child is stillborn. No dismissal during pregnancy or maternity leave. No loss of security, pension or promotion prospects.
8. Family planning clinics supplying free contraception to be extended to cover every locality. Free abortion to be readily available.
9. Family allowances to be increased to £2.50 per child, including the first child.
10. To campaign amongst women to take an active part in the trade unions and in political life so that they may exercise influence commensurate with their numbers and to campaign amongst trade union men that they may work to achieve this aim.

As you can see, the Charter encompasses both the needs of women at work itself and the needs of women in the home in order to demonstrate the purpose and importance of our separate demands we have to introduce them as part of a whole struggle to change the way we are treated as women in this society. Also, in order to understand why we are given second class jobs at third class rates of pay, we have to look at our responsibilities in the family and at the way we have been brought up and educated because these form the conditions under which we accept discrimination.

The Working Womens Charter recognises that as women we are in a weak position to fight for equal rights at work while we have to do another job in the home - housework, while we carry a tremendous emotional responsibility within the family, and while we are conditioned and educated to aspire only to the roles of wife and mother.

It also recognises that we are in a weak position to break away from our family situation if it becomes intolerable, or if we simply choose to avoid it, because single women have such an insecure economic position. Most women are stuck in a vicious circle. We have to work for most of our lives and still be 'good' mothers to our children and maids to our menfolk. If we are not working outside the home we are supposed to be perfectly satisfied devoting ourselves to our families, and yet we often find ourselves completely isolated from friends and relatives because of our family responsibilities.

In the last war it was essential that masses of women entered the work force and so nurseries were provided all over the place to help in this, they became for a short time an essential service. We as women should be able to make such choices. If we do not want to have a child we should have contraception and abortion facilities available to us. If we need (or wish) to continue working after the birth of a child, we need longer maternity leave and safeguards for our jobs, to make this possible. If we want a life outside the home we need nurseries for

OUTWORK AND — OUTWORKERS

our children. If we are to lead a full and adult life we must have a complete education and not one that presupposes motherhood and passivity. If we are going to change our present position within the workforce we must challenge the Trades Unions to take up our struggle and to allow women full participation in unions. This last field involves establishing creche facilities at meetings and convening meetings at times when women can attend as a beginning towards greater participation and consciousness.

In Nottingham we have set up a "Working Womens Charter Action Committee". This has the aim of publicising the charter and coordinating work around it. We meet every month to discuss our activities. We hope to send speakers to Trade Union Branches and any other organizations who are interested. We are also attempting to do research into the employment of women in Nottingham, nursery facilities available, wages etc. and to work closely with other groups of women who are active on abortion and contraception, on child care provision and on Industrial and Trade Union issues.

We have already had support for our campaign from the Nottingham and District Trades Council, several Labour Party Wards and several Trade Union Branches including NUPE, ASTMS, NUT. We hope always to involve both working women and non-working women in our campaign. It is important that we take up the demands in the Charter right now because the economic crisis is already affecting women especially severely because of price rises, unemployment and cuts in social expenditure, and because the Equal Pay Act is supposed to be enforced at the end of 1975 and many firms are at this time trying to find loop-holes to avoid it. Anyway, we cannot go on waiting for ever.

If you would like more information, speakers, etc. please contact
Gill Haymes,
Secretary
49 Elmswood Gardens
Sherwood
Nottingham Tel. 604074

Before the Industrial Revolution men and particularly women have been systematically exploited in their homes under the title outworker. We have progressed from spinning and weaving on hand looms, in tiny cottages, to assembling complex printed circuits in council houses and semi's. The back breaking treadle machines women used to work for sixteen hours a day in the twenties and thirties have given way to motor powered sewing machines. Would it surprise you to know people are still working nearly sixteen hours a day on some outwork for a miserable pittance? The majority of outworkers today are still exploited and sometimes even threatened by their employers if the dare to complain about pay, or the long hours they have to work to make even a very small wage. Most firms who employ outworkers are not unionised, the very mention of a union would result in a threat to have your work stopped.

Although I will not be naming specific employers, all cases mentioned have been documented and authenticated by Trades Union Officer's.

One woman showed me her hands, her finger - tips blistered and sore, she had worked for four days averaging six hours a day, breaking bits of plastic off a central stem, her wages, £1.50p. Pensioners in Nottingham earn 6p an hour putting pins into flags. A couple in their early fifties worked three hours for 9p. The same couple, their grown up son, daughter son in law worked a total of one hundred and twenty hours, earnings, £5.22p another forty six hours work brought them £1.21p.

These are but some of the outrageous wages paid. Another problem is the safety factor in outwork, no enquiries by the firm were made when a young woman was sent a machine which pressed metal prongs into a plastic base. The woman had three children at home, four at school, her husband rang the firm and asked them to take the press back as it was too dangerous, with small children in the home. It was a fortnight before they fetched the press, in that time one of the children had caught her hand in the press and a metal prong had gone through her finger. There was no guard or safety device on the machine at all. Sewing machinists although experienced are not usually paid the same price for work as the girls in the factory even though they are using their own electricity.

The reasons why outwork is increasing and in my opinion will continue to do so, are basically three.

The first is of course money, even an extra pound a week can make a vital difference to a family on a low wage, and to a pensioner struggling with ever rising prices, and inflation, even a few shillings brings a few more comforts and can mean the difference between being cold or warm. The second reason is not so obvious, space and land being at a premium, employers would look for an alternative if wishing to expand.

Outworkers are one alternative, the employer would also save on heating, lighting, insurance, holiday pay, etc., He need not even take his work to the outworker, I have seen women struggling with prams and pushchairs, loaded with work and children, queuing for more work and on a Friday queuing for their pay, such as it is.

The third but probably most important reason, for the ever growing numbers of outworkers, is the deplorable lack of adequate nursery facilities provided by most County Councils.

The employer could also provide creches, I am sure many women stay at home and suffer inadequate pay, rather than leave their children in the hands of indifferent child - minders.

The Unions are not doing enough to prevent this exploitation of labour, they would seem to be unconcerned about the shockingly low rates paid, which they would certainly not allow inside the factory. The last laws written into the Factory Act concerning outwork was in 1901.

There is no security of jobs, and some rates have not been increased for ten or more years. No threshold agreements exist for most outworkers. The picture is not however one of unrelieved gloom, there are some good employers of outworkers who realise that a satisfied worker is an asset. I am one of the fortunate home machinists, a machine is provided, my work is delivered, the rates are the same as the girls in the factory and my employers Ormster Gowns of Nottingham are considerate of my domestic situation.

Maureen Brown.

Outworker or Home Machinist.



Howard University did a study to find out what were the most boring jobs in the world. These were the results:-

1. Assembly line workers.
2. Light operator.
3. Girl in a typing pool.
4. Housewife.

.....

CONTRACEPTION

There was an old woman
Who lived in a shoe
She had so many children
She didn't know what to do ...

This rhyme is now used as an advert for Family Planning Clinics. Contraception is a simple way for women working at home to ensure that they can cope with and love the children already there without the fear of unwanted children. It is also essential to the freedom of women who choose not to have any children and work outside the house.

It's easy to think of contraception as the simple solution for all women, but whichever method is chosen it may have to be effective for 20-30 years. But effectiveness is only one problem. What about the dangers and all too often overlooked side effects? If, as the populationists believe, we are doing the world a service in limiting the number of children born, so why are women treated as neurotics when they question or complain about the possible harmful effects?

Many women show few of the side effects associated with various contraceptive devices, but that does not mean that they do not exist. The pill, for example, causes bio-chemical and enzyme changes in the lining of the womb and research has shown that these large vessel changes are reflected in the blood vessels of the head and elsewhere because it alters the hormone balance which affects the body's resistance to infection. Modified types of pill are used which may cut down the risk of thrombosis for instance but which repress or produce different kinds of side effects. It is odd then that symptoms such as headaches, depression, migraine, and loss of libido which are categorised simply as neurotic fears, are in fact caused by these changes in the lining of the womb.

The grafenberg ring, a coil used in the 1930's, was taken off the market because of complications it produced, and yet present day coils produce just as disturbing side effects. Pain at insertion has been described as far worse than labour and some women could barely walk home from the clinic. The Doctor's remedy for one woman's pain was "Take Paracetamol" and the attitude to heavy bleeding of another woman: "If that's all you can go to work". The risk of death from using the coil or the pill is far lower than actually having a baby, but how long must women be 'trained' to put up with the discomfort? A pill for men so that it does not create abnormalities in the sperm is difficult to produce but a significant factor seems to one

gynaecologist that "men are sensitive about years of impotence". What happens then if women are too shy to use a Family Planning Clinic feel that the attitudes, risks and discomfort leave no alternative but relying on contraceptives sold over the counter, such as foams, jellies and suppositories?

A recent report in the magazine "Spare Rib" said that they were led to the conclusion that "chemical contraceptives cause a woman to conceive by encouraging her to rely on such products alone". It is imperative that spermicides are used together with the cap or with sheaths, and yet "Preceptin" and "Delfin" claim they are "for use alone" and Rendell Pessaries state "no further precautions need to be taken". A more subtle approach is the claim on "C Film" as "The his or hers contraceptive". There is a serious lack of information on all the products bought over the counter.

Many contraceptives protect themselves with a 'let out' clause "highly effective when correctly applied". Spermicidal powder is annually tested for its effectiveness and in laboratory conditions all the sperms in the dish will be contacted and therefore killed. In the vagina, however, they could easily miss especially if it is impossible to tell if the contraceptive is correctly placed as with "C Film". Douching or bathing after intercourse washes the spermicide away and yet no manufacturer warns against it. Packets are not date stamped and yet products are no longer effective if kept for too long and suppositories and foaming tablets deteriorate quickly if kept in hot or damp places. Instructions on how long before intercourse these products should be inserted varies from 20 minutes to 3 hours before deterioration begins. Three hours before which particular stage of love making is also omitted, so is the fact that for maximum efficiency tablets should start foaming before insertion or they are useless. Lastly no products mentioned possible side effects on caps or washable sheaths and yet "Which" found that Rendell's pessaries, who claim their product is "ideal with the sheath or IUD" actually damages rubber!

It seems as if the only consideration in marketing most contraceptives is commercial viability. The less we know the more we buy. Whether it be the pill, IUD or chemical contraceptives the attitude behind keeping women ignorant is the same. As a London Gynaecologist puts it, the concern is "let's help the patient to tolerate it" instead of "Let's investigate the cause" of these side effects.

WORKING WITH MY BABIES

This summer my partner and I had booked spaces in five agricultural shows in different parts of the country where we planned to put on an exhibition with ourselves as part of it. I was working at one of these, in Lincoln the week before the babies were born, and three weeks later was the next show we were booked to do - in Peterborough. I was worried, partly because in hospital the babies had been treated as if they were very delicate. If any thing happened to them there would be no sympathy for me, I knew I was on my own. But I felt I just had to start working then, before looking after two babies that started taking up all my time.

Well, it worked out all right, and so have all the pieces of work I have done since then, and I have managed to travel by trains with them quite long distances without many difficulties.

But, I am told it will get harder as they get older.

We do not often put on shows in theatres, more often, art galleries, or public places like streets, pubs, agricultural shows, but then we do not like to turn down offers of work, and so last week we did a show in a studio theatre in Manchester. My partner and I spent a

day setting up the theatre space and we presented our work in the evening. My three month old twins were with me, being fed when they were hungry but otherwise just kicking on a rug. In the pub afterwards an agency reporter spoke to me, and later contacted me and tried to get me to consent to having a Sunday People reporter visit me and write up a story about my "family show". He was nervous but persuasive - "you can't expect people to be interested in the sort of work you do, but having babies with you, that is unusual", etc. etc. I guessed from his tone, and because of the sort of reporting usual in the Sunday People, that what they wanted was a shock expose of my situation. I very firmly said no thank you.

No doubt my working situation is not a common one; however, I feel that I am in the same position as all women with children, in that I have to find my own way to go on working - there is not a generally accepted and accessible method of combining these two commitments.

When I knew I was pregnant, and again when I knew I was expecting twins I did feel some panic - would I be able to cope, i.e. be able to go on working, which I needed to do to keep myself, and also because I am completely committed to my work.

Shirley Cameron

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