

Women and work in Western Europe

Tuesday 20 August 2013, by [HEINEN Jacqueline](#) (Date first published: 1 May 2013).

This article was first published in *International Marxist Review* Vol 2, No 2 in Spring 1987. It is republished here as part of our [International Viewpoint] effort to build an archive of contributions from within the Fourth International on questions of feminism.

Contents

- [The feminisation of poverty](#)
- [Family and work: a question of](#)
- [The right to work, but not \(...\)](#)
- [Ruling class strategy](#)
- [The family- shaken but unbowed](#)
- [The crisis of the autonomous](#)
- [Feminism is not dead](#)
- [The miners' strike: a pointer](#)
- [The women's peace movement \(...\)](#)
- [Black and immigrant women \(...\)](#)
- [Some possible lines of resista](#)
- [The joys of working for \(...\)](#)
- [Refusing to be slaves to \(...\)](#)
- [The 'comparable worth' solutio](#)
- [The fight against shiftwork \(...\)](#)
- [Keep your dignity, keep \(...\)](#)
- [Trade unions and women's \(...\)](#)
- [The battle for trade-union \(...\)](#)
- [Fight corporatism, chauvinism](#)
- [Women's rights and reformism](#)
- [What perspectives for the \(...\)](#)
- [Feminism = idealism?](#)

Any analysis of the position of women in Western Europe and the effects of the economic crisis on the women's movement in different countries, is bound to appear overgeneralised and superficial. This is because the impact of the crisis is different in each country and because it does not affect all women in the same way.

However, the women's movement on a European level has pinpointed certain common issues with, for example, the issue of women's right to work becoming a central theme on International Women's Day demonstrations. Issues such as the sexual division of labour, violence against women and domestic labour are issues which affect women in different social layers and from different political backgrounds who are nonetheless drawn together in common activity. The crisis undergone by the women's movement since the 1970s has also provoked much debate, especially amongst socialist feminists within that movement.

The following article does not attempt to deal with all the issues affect ting women and the women's

movement in Western Europe. It does not deal in depth with the issue of women and reproductive technology, nor does it discuss the action of European women in solidarity with sisters in the Third World. It merely attempts to pinpoint the ways in which the crisis has hit women, particularly women workers, and identify the responses of the women's movement and the lessons of the struggles which have emerged.

The feminisation of poverty and unemployment

Unemployment in Western Europe continues to rise. But what figures often fail to show is that female unemployment is a higher proportion of the whole than male unemployment in almost every country in Europe apart from Britain and Ireland. [1]. Workers' buying power has declined by 1-1.5 % per year since the late 1970s. In West Germany four to five million people live in an extreme state of poverty and the figure is almost twice that in Great Britain. The large majority of those living in poverty are women. [2].

In an article in *New Left Review* of January-February 1986, Frigga Haug shows how the policies of the West German CDU-led government have promoted a rapid feminization of poverty.

In West Germany today more and more women are doing part-time jobs. Funding for vocational further education has been cut by 25%. Rehabilitation provisions for the unemployed are conditional on the length of compulsory contributions so that it is predominantly women who have been housewives who remain excluded. The cutbacks in the welfare sector affect women doubly: as potential employees—nurses, social workers, teachers—their jobs are being dispensed with, whilst the work is shifted back on them in their families as private individuals. Women's pay remains on average still 30% below that of men (in the low pay sector women constitute 90% of employees); accordingly, women's pensions are considerably smaller than men's. Owing to a complicated system of calculation women must on average reckon with a 70% loss even before retirement (men with 50%). Since their income even before retirement is generally small, this means that a large proportion of female pensioners live below the social security line. [3].

This alarming picture is not only true of West Germany. [4]. In Belgium successive measures taken to undermine rights to unemployment benefit whilst giving higher sums to heads of families have put single women looking for work in an often desperate situation and have made young women totally dependent on the family.

Of course the question of poverty cannot be put in terms of gender without first being explained in terms of class and race. Ethnic minority men in the USA and Britain and immigrant communities as a whole in Europe are twice as likely to live in poverty as are white women for example. In this sense it is probably more accurate to talk about the impoverishment of women rather than the feminization of poverty. It is nevertheless the case that within each of these categories it is women who suffer the worst effects of policies of industrial restructuration and austerity measures.

The bourgeoisie's political goal moreover, is not just to boost the rate of profit or grab an increased percentage of the national wealth at the expense of the working classes. It also seeks to change the relation of forces between the classes in a lasting way and to dismantle the most important gains that the working class has made since the Second World War. These include social legislation, trade union rights, ability to control the work process and to radically reduce the weight of the working class on the political scene in general.

In order to establish this dreamed of 'dual society' where one third or more of the working class would be denied any kind of social protection, the ruling class must put an end to class solidarity

through which, however inadequately, the underprivileged are protected. And it is of course firstly by attacking the most exploited and oppressed layers that this goal can be achieved. Women, young people, immigrants and especially young immigrant women are a prime target because of their role and social status.

Family and work: a question of priorities

The massive entry of women on to the jobs market since the Second World War has done nothing to resolve the situation. As Jean Gardiner points out in relation to Britain:

The economic and welfare reforms implemented in Britain after the Second World War had contradictory effects for women. Women were to benefit from the increase in job opportunities associated with a commitment to full employment, from the expansion of education and from collective provision of a range of welfare services. Yet none of these changes challenged the traditional assumption that the majority of women would continue to be primarily housewives and mothers dependent on marriage rather than employment.

The commitment to full employment did not entail ensuring that all women with children who desired to work had the opportunity to do so. The expansion in welfare services did not include nursery provision. Vocational training and promotion ladders remained geared to male working lives. Sex stereotyping continued to be reinforced by the education system.

Sexual inequality was built into tax and social security legislation. Growing numbers of women, particularly married women, were drawn into a narrow range of relatively low paid jobs, consistent with traditional notions of women's work. Women were expected to retain responsibility for the care of home and family in line with their continued economic dependence on marriage and a male breadwinner. [5]

Such observations are not specific to Britain, but are valid for all the industrialised capitalist countries which have undergone unprecedented growth in women's economic activity. Everywhere the same contradictions arise.

On the one hand women constitute an important part of the workforce—in many countries it is predicted that soon one worker in two will be a woman and, more often than not, a married woman. [6]. On the other hand women are not thought of as workers at all. Still the dominant ideology dictates that above all they are responsible for the home and the rearing of children.

In Sweden, West Germany and Britain a growing number of families are dependent on one parent and in three quarters of all such cases that parent is a woman. But this has not changed the widely held conviction that women work for "pin money". [7] That women usually spend three times as many hours on domestic tasks as their spouses tends to underline this perception of their role. [8]

The current economic crisis forces employers to maximise their profits through short-term solutions and the bourgeoisie is tempted to attack women because they are the most vulnerable on so many different levels: as workers who have come late onto the jobs market and who work in the least organised and most unprotected sections; and as wives and mothers whose weight of family responsibilities forces them to accept part-time work at worse rates of pay than any other form of work including homework. The cuts in social spending tend to force the more stubborn to accept this state of affairs. Here women are once again coming up against one of the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system.

While the capitalist development of the forces of production tends to undermine the family-household system by pulling women into wage labour, capitalist relations set up a counter-tendency reinforcing the sexual division of labour (. . .) It is because one consistent tendency of the capitalist system is to reduce working-class living standards and to force working people to accomplish the labour necessary for their reproduction in their own time. [9]

The establishment of adequate nursery provision presupposes a significant increase in social spending and thus the amount the employers would have to pay to the state.

If part-time work is high among women it is because the ruling class wills it so. In Britain, the first country in Europe to promote female part-time work on such a large scale, it was designed to feed on the contradictions outlined above. The policy met little opposition from the workers movement. In Northern European countries, for instance, many women accepted part-time work even before the recession really started. And they did this- usually encouraged by their husbands—because of the tensions that their economic activity provoked in the home and because of inadequate childcare.

It is no accident that the rate of part-time work is so much higher where the number of women (and hence of married women) in the job market is highest. [10]

Originally the unions, at best, remained silent and at worse welcomed with open arms the introduction of this new form of work considered so suitable for women's needs. But at the same time as the economic crisis deepened the number of women forced to accept low wages and conditions increased dramatically. Gradually sectors of the Western European workers movement have begun to understand that part-time work 'for women' was a trap helping to divide the working class.

The right to work, but not the same right to work

Unfortunately the same cannot be said on the issue of job segregation. Prejudice on what constitutes women's work and men's work is widespread.

Certain branches of industry have always had a majority of female workers (i.e. clothing, textiles, tobacco, shoes etc). But this tendency was reinforced with the massive penetration of women into the service sector to the extent that whole areas of employment are completely feminised. The result is that women are trapped in a limited number of sectors and jobs. One extreme example of this is the situation in Sweden where more than 40% of women work in the five "female" professions: as secretaries, in ancillary work, as shop assistants, in cleaning and childcare. In West Germany the picture is virtually the same but with some women also working on factory assembly lines and in the mail order business. The same type of segregation is also to be found within different industries.

At Olivetti in Turin research by IRES (a research institute linked to the CGIL trade union federation) recently revealed that even when they have the same qualifications and the same seniority, women are in lower grades and are less well-paid than the men. At Aeritalia (the aeroplane manufacturers), again in Turin, even women with qualifications are mainly employed as typists. In a questionnaire distributed nationally by the Bank Federation of the CGIL to all female workers in this sector, two workers out of every three stated that there were no equal career prospects for men and women. Many thought that this was linked to maternity, which however, none of them wanted to give up. [11].

Contrary to what might have been expected ten years ago with women's increasing economic activity, the recession and the massive introduction of part-time work, has tended to encourage job

segregation. Neither has the introduction of new technology opened up a wider spectrum of jobs to women. Instead from the start they have been trapped into carrying out routine tasks at the keyboard. The opportunity of becoming qualified in some areas such as computer programming have in general been reserved for men. Yet again the vicious circle is repeated: men refuse to do the repetitive work, they are better prepared for change, they are more readily available to take up a training which often takes place outside worktime. [12]

We are thus a long way from the expectations excited by the exemplary struggles of women workers in Canada, the USA and Sweden in the 1970s, demanding the right to enter jobs and sectors traditionally controlled by men (such as the mines, steel and car industries). In more than one example employers were forced to concede in the face of campaigns and court cases supporting the right of women to do the same work as men. Many women workers have since lost these jobs in waves of redundancy or in the name of 'seniority'. Nevertheless the figures for the USA still show a real progression for women in jobs which were previously closed to them. [13]

However in Sweden where several women managed to get into the steel or car industry as welders, cutters, drillers or lathe operators, it appears that most of them have since been forced to leave these jobs for 'easier' work in typically female areas. In steel they are now to be found on the production lines, as packers, in-sorting or checking.

European statistics dealing with traditional male-dominated bastions of industry show that the general decline in employment caused by restructuring and redundancy is proportionately higher among women than men. [14]. It is thus unlikely that they have been able to hold onto those jobs which they managed to force their way into. All this facilitates still further the aim of the employer to force women into part-time and irregular work.

Ruling class strategy

Can we conclude that ruling class strategy is to send women back to the home and re-establish a reserve army of labour in the same way they did after the First and Second World Wars? It would be very difficult to do given the importance of the work done by women in today's economy. The employers are acutely aware of this especially since some of these sectors are expanding as in the case of the electronics industry where profits depend on a super exploited workforce doing jobs that most men would refuse. However, the bourgeoisie also have to take account of the power to resist which women have learned under the impact of the women's movement of the 1970s and their refusal to give up their economic independence. But this independence is only relative, both on the economic as well as on the social level. And because of this the bourgeoisie is able to undermine the gains women have made and push them into the unskilled and part-time sector.

In forcing women to retreat the bosses have a key card to play: women's "guilty conscience". This false consciousness makes women reluctant to complain about having shopping to do when they are tired; guilty about snapping at children; anxious about the house not being as perfectly clean as they think it ought to be or about reading or watching television or simply doing nothing instead of getting everyone else's food ready. Such problems hardly affect men, or only a small minority, and then only if women push them and educate them (and this in itself constitutes yet another job for them to do).

The ruling class relies on the build up of these thousand and one daily problems in order to undermine women's resistance. It is in the context of this desire to trap them in their status as wives and mothers that we have to see the series of attacks launched against women's rights in the last few years. The international campaign for the right to abortion and contraception, for example, was

one of the main gains, however limited, of the women's liberation movement of the 1970s. Whether through the use of violence, as in the United States and Canada, or rhetoric about the rights of the foetus, as in Britain, Ireland, or Switzerland, the supporters of the 'right to life' are motivated by the same goal: to reduce women to breeding machines and to strengthen the family.

The reactionaries are even prepared to use the opposition of many feminists to embryo research and new reproductive technology to support the notion of the "rights of the foetus".

The ability of the bourgeoisie to fight the enemy on their own terrain is evident in other respects as well. In West Germany, the ruling CDU uses feminist language and talks about the "feminisation of society" in an attempt to upgrade domestic work and restore family morale. "The CDU no longer needs to propagandise a conservative model of women. Instead it offers a dynamically remodelled hybrid: the caring housewife and mother with part-time work. Just how much, according to this scheme of things, the household chores are shared between the "marriage partners" is a matter of individual choice. [15] In most European countries, the call for women to give up work in order to look after young children is given the title of "parental leave". Of course in 90 to 95% of cases it is the women who take this leave. But as official statements stress, each couple is, after all, free to decide.

The family- shaken but unbowed

In France the old refrain about population decline and the need to have more children has been rehearsed many times. Socialist Party president Mitterrand of France went even further than his conservative predecessors in implementing the special benefits scheme for the third child. Now other European governments are following suit on the assumption that, even if such measures have no practical importance, they can serve as a model for public opinion. These measures are of course highly dubious. The lowering of the birth rate does not simply result from a 'decline in moral standards' or from the revolutionary ideas of the women's movement on the issue of contraception, but from structural changes in society 'since the Second World War.

It would however be short-sighted to maintain that the idea of the family as a haven is only an idea of the far right seeking to preserve moral fibre. The deepening economic and social crisis pushes people in on themselves giving more appeal to the traditional family, particularly within the working class. Of course the crisis of the family is also in evidence. The number of divorces is increasing and more and more couples are living together without being married. There is an increase in violence within the family.

This violence is largely carried out by men against women, but also takes the form of the maltreatment of children by their parents (more often by the mother) or of mothers beaten by their adolescent sons. A direct relation exists between the increase in unemployment, reductions in social spending, the increased tendency for the responsibility of children to fall on the family (and thus on women) and this increase in violence.

Although it is now less frequently the case a large proportion of divorced people subsequently remarry and many unmarried couples reproduce traditional family relations. As an institution the family is set to survive.

The vast majority of women continue to opt for marriage and family life, not surprisingly since society today offers them no real alternative. This is particularly so if they want to have children or have them without wanting them. This is particularly true of young unemployed women or students who cannot afford their own accommodation, as they might have done ten years ago and for whom

marriage—or at least living together—appears to be the only solution for escaping from the straightjacket of the family. Only a tiny minority of women consciously live out the aims of the women's liberation movement and choose to break from the traditional framework to live alone or in a collective.

The bourgeoisie's ideological attacks have facilitated a retreat in relation to advertising, where feminists began to think they had made gains. We have witnessed a revival of sexist posters centred on women as object with pornographic overtones. This is particularly true in France, [16] but many people who are aware of this kind of exploitation have noticed the same phenomenon in other countries in Europe. Such publicity campaigns would have been unthinkable a few years ago, when the women's movement was stronger.

The crisis of the autonomous women's movement and the new wave of radicalisation

It is a fact that in most countries in Europe, with exceptions like the Spanish state, the feminist movement hardly bears any resemblance to what it was in the 1970s. In some countries it has all but disappeared as an independent and coordinated movement capable of nationally leading campaigns for the rights of women to equality and independence. 'Those groups which see themselves as part of the autonomous movement are generally organised around concrete goals—self-help groups, battered wives centres, rape centres or research groups taking up one aspect or another of women's oppression. Although some national or international meetings have taken place on issues like abortion, violence or the right to work, nevertheless the public expressions of these movements in mass demonstrations on the streets and other similar initiatives are much rarer than they were ten years ago.

This phenomenon should hardly surprise us given the setbacks, not to say defeats, suffered by the workers movement since the beginnings of the 1974 economic recession. How could the divisions and the general decline of the organised workers movement in countries like France, the Spanish state and Italy fail to have its effect on other social movements? Even the peace movement and the ecology movement, which have taken centre stage in the last few years, have undergone difficulties as a result.

In addition, ten years ago it was easier to gain even a limited victory on issues which concern women like abortion and contraception than is the case today. Whatever the reservations of the ruling class in making partial concessions to women's right to control their own bodies, it was possible for them to retreat on the legal level as long as their direct economic interests were not touched. But it was the reverse in relation to questions like unemployment, wages, social spending. These issues which centrally affect women are at the very heart of the austerity policy of the bourgeoisie and will not be changed without mass mobilisation of the whole working class. But in order to maintain itself and develop, the women's movement must be able to win. This is particularly important in a movement which does not have permanent structures or institutional means to ensure negotiating power and preserve the gains it has made.

It would, however, be erroneous to conclude that the women's movement has disappeared or that the page of feminism has been turned. Firstly, it is important to guard against any hasty generalisations because the situation varies from one European country to another. Recent initiatives in countries where the crisis of the movement seemed very grave, must be underlined. In France, the 'national meeting of women's centres' which took place in Paris in December 1985 brought together hundreds of feminists, active and non-active, from feminist groups, from the family

planning associations and from trade unions, who came to discuss their experience collectively and map out perspectives for action. This showed anything but the disappearance of feminist forces from the French political scene. [17]

We must furthermore underline the great success of the Jornadas in Barcelona in November 1985. This meeting brought together 4,000 women from all over the Spanish state; young women, older women, workers, and even peasants, who found their own ways of mobilising for the meeting by word of mouth, since the press gave it no mention. Two abortions were performed during the meeting in defiance of the extremely restrictive abortion law adopted by the socialist government and more than three thousand women signed a statement claiming collective responsibility for the terminations. 'The Jornadas showed clearly that the feminist movement was alive and well. It constituted a reference point for women who, in one way or another, are rebelling against capitalist and patriarchal society, against its norms and laws' claimed one of the organisers of the meeting. [18]

Feminism is not dead

If the independent women's movement as such has lost some of its capacity for mobilisation, feminist ideas have gained ground amongst the broad masses and among working class women in particular. Events in Britain provide the best example. Leaving aside the example of the miners' wives or the women of Greenham Common which we will come back to, it is important to note that specific structures for women in the trade unions and in the Labour Party have taken up a series of issues such as abortion, violence against women, sexual harassment at work and creches which were previously the concern of relatively small independent feminist groups or organisations.

The Women's Action Committee in the Labour Party and trade union women within the TUC have battled for the election of more women to leadership bodies. Labour Party women played a leading role in adopting left positions on international issues such as Ireland, the Malvinas war and against NATO. Within the peace movement all indications are that, whatever the changes, the women's movement has not disappeared in a country like Britain.

Equally in West Germany it has been shown that women workers, particularly in the steel industry, have been in the forefront of the struggle for the 35-hour week. The feminist arguments which developed in support of a seven hour day that is for a reduction in work time which would take account of the specific problems of women and the sharing of domestic tasks within the home—is evidence of the enduring nature of the German women's movement, even though the women workers in question may never have participated in a women's group. The initiative taken by women linked to the Communist Party on the occasion of Mothers' Day, 10 May 1984 got a wide echo: 20,000 women participated and subsequent meetings were held in 1985 and 1986. Conceived originally as a one-off initiative, the character of the meeting changed with the participation of women activists from the Greens; women from the ASF, the women's organisation of the Social Democratic Party; and of trade union militants who all found a point of reference for the exchange of experiences. They also expressed a willingness to establish more lasting links between the different organisations.

Even in France where the workers movement was going through a profound crisis, the women's conference organised by the Communist-led trade union federation, in November 1985 showed how much young women workers, who do not know much about the independent women's movement, are influenced by its ideas and objectives. Prefacing their remarks with 'I'm not a feminist but . . .' many women present denounced machismo in the union, the lack of initiatives by the trade union

leadership and took up the need to take positive measures to get women elected to the leading bodies to play a real role. Of course the CGT leadership decided not to follow this meeting up and is determined to make everyone forget some of the more 'extreme' notions being put forward such as a women's demonstration for jobs. Nevertheless, this initiative demonstrated the existence of a deepening radicalisation which it would take more than a few manoeuvres by the bureaucracy to suppress.

On a more general level, we have seen that women workers have often been in the forefront of the workers' struggles that have developed in recent years. In the 1983 steel strike at Beckaert Cokerill in Belgium women workers fought both redundancies and restructuration and the bosses' "solution" which consisted of 'saving the men's jobs' but putting the women onto part-time work. The women gained broad international support for their struggle.

Another example was the near general strike in Denmark in the Easter of 1985 which followed the breakdown of annual negotiations between employers and the main trade union federation, LO. It was the unskilled workers (organised in their own union) who took the initiative to extend and consolidate the mobilisations and to form an inter-company strike committee in one of the main industrial estates in Copenhagen. It was here that the strike held out for longest. It was the women who were first to take up the struggle to force the trade-union bureaucracy to release funds for the strike and thus allow the workers to hold out. They were also the first to organise solid support around the Tuborg factory where the workers took action immediately following the defeat of the strike against the government. More recently during the printworkers' dispute in Britain women workers as well as the strikers' wives organised specific women's demonstrations of several thousand women, picketing and construction of barricades as well as solidarity campaigns.

What stands out in each of these examples is that from the moment they took up demands affecting the entire workforce, the women showed a determination which totally surprised the trade union leaderships. This was undoubtedly because the women suddenly became aware that they were most affected by the bosses' attacks on all fronts. Perhaps because they feel they have more to lose than the men and perhaps also because, being less organised, they are less ready to accept the bureaucracy's attempts to put a brake on the movement.

It is certainly no coincidence that women's voting patterns in national elections, which for a long time tended to favour the right wing, have changed. In Britain, France and elsewhere, elections have brought an equal and sometimes greater number of women voting for workers parties. There is undoubtedly a link between this and the aggressive right-wing campaigns against the social services and the rights of the most oppressed in society. [\[19\]](#)

The miners' strike: a pointer to the future

It is within this general framework that aspects of a new radicalisation have begun to appear in the last few years, in particular the mobilisations of women workers of which the most exemplary was the British miners' wives in the 1984-85 strike. There have been previous examples of movements of solidarity with strikers organised by their wives in particular in relation to struggles against closures and redundancy: in the Erwitte and Speyer disputes in West Germany in 1976; the docker's strike in Denmark in 1983; or more recently in the Sagunto steelworks strike in the Spanish state. In the case of Sagunto the struggle was in defence of a whole community threatened with extinction by a government decision to close the large steel furnaces on which the economy of the town depended. The women's organisation, which took on the task of publicising the struggle at a national level, was often more radical and imaginative in its initiatives than the steel workers whose jobs were

threatened. But the women's combativity did not lead them towards taking up their specific problems as women within the framework of that struggle.

The extraordinary step forward represented by the Women Against Pit Closures lies in the dual aspect of the struggle which these women led. On the one hand they took up the organisation of the collective canteens or financial support, tasks which were decisive for the long duration of the strike; but on the other hand they also participated in the pickets, the daily confrontations with the police, the public meetings and national and international tours. In doing so they gained confidence in themselves and discovered their own capacity for collective discussion of problems of emotional and economic dependence at home. As a result the women began to radically challenge relations within the family and social relations in general. This new awareness expressed itself in the very moving speeches, interviews and written accounts made by the women themselves.

It was wonderful to observe it and every day to talk through the relevance of what we'd been doing in the women's movement with these women and how far those ideas were important—and how far they weren't at all. The antagonism to men which they associated with the women's movement was felt to be offensive and deeply wrong. [20]

Many of the women were able to recognise themselves in the following speech by Lorraine Bowler of the Barnsley Women's Action Group during a 10,000-strong women's support rally in May 1984:

"At the beginning of the strike women from the Barnsley group wanted to go picketing and we were told that it was a bad enough job organising the men. All I can say to that is that women do not need anyone to organise them. They can organise themselves. The proof of that is shown in this hall today. I'm sure that for some or most of the women here today it is the same in their homes as it has been in mine over the weeks. There are arguments now as to whose turn it is to go on a demonstration or picket and whose turn it is to babysit. Talk about job-sharing we've seen it at its best over the past eight or nine weeks. In this country we aren't just separated as a class. We are separated as men and women. We, as women have not often been encouraged to be involved actively in trade unions and organising. Organisation has always been seen as an area belonging to men. We are seen to be the domesticated element of the family. This for too many years has been the role expected of us. I have seen change coming for years and the last few weeks has seen it at its best. If the government thinks its fight is only with the miners they are sadly mistaken. They are now fighting men, women and families." [21]

The fact that many of these women work outside of the home undoubtedly aided their entry into this struggle. The fact that they were thrown up against police violence allowed them, as it did their Irish sisters, to become more politically aware and to reject the very foundations of the system which they were up against. '

It is the first time in history that such a mass awareness among working class women of their double oppression developed. This awareness extended both to the fight alongside men against the bosses and the government and the simultaneous challenge to the traditional relations within the home; the need to fight for their own independence and for the movement as a whole.

Starting from basic class demands in the face of massive redundancy threats, they came to the conviction that they had a special role to play in the struggle. The women also understood that the ability of the miners to understand their needs and their demands would be decisive for the unity of future struggles. This is surely the main explanation for the fact that a good number of these women's groups decided to continue organising after the defeat of the strike. Women Against Pit Closures continues to occupy a central place in the Justice For Mineworkers campaign which aims at the reinstatement of all workers sacked or imprisoned as a result of the strike. The influence of

feminism within this process is obvious. But what was of greatest significance was the forms of self-organisation which the women developed to carry out their solidarity work.

The structures imposed at the beginning by the nature of the mining communities themselves reflected both their degree of cohesion and the separation between the men's and women's worlds. The collective kitchens, the groups organised around popularising the strike quickly took on another dimension (without undermining their original function) because of the exchanges of experience and collective thinking by the women about their own reality. They were encouraged in this by the example of the women of Greenham Common. 'It was only women that made peace camps, it was the women who made a stand for peace. I know men agree with it, but it took women to get up off their arses and do something before things moved' said one wife from South Yorkshire. 'They are brilliant those women!' added another. [22] The setting up of coordination between Women Against Pit Closure groups and Greenham Common Groups underlined the common dimension of the two struggles.

The women's peace movement to the rescue

The specific struggle of women within the peace movement is an international phenomenon and one aspect of the new forms of women's radicalisation referred to above. Despite the difference in the level of mobilisation in different countries, such 'movements within movements' perform the function of bringing a feminist dimension to the anti-war mobilisations and bringing a new political dimension to the women's movement itself. Greenham Common is the best known example of this type of campaign.

The camp installed by these women outside the military base of the same name which was designated as the site for 96 cruise missiles became a catalyst for the British peace movement. Through their combativity and endurance over the months and years, their daily confrontations with the forces of law and order forcing the military authorities to transform the base into a veritable fortified camp, the women of Greenham Common have helped to popularise the objectives of the peace movement both in Britain and abroad. Despite the deployment of cruise missiles which was seen by peace activists as a grave threat, the women did not give up. Their obstinacy helped ensure that the question of nuclear armament remain a central political question.

Since the (defensive) effectiveness of cruise missiles depends on their unseen mobility, the continued existence of the peace camp has limited their activity. The Greenham women, backed up by an organisation called Cruisewatch, have made each missile journey public, and have slowed its progress.

The nine-mile perimeter fence round the United States Air Force base at Greenham is a patchwork of dams, a symbol of army fallibility and peace women's determination. [23]

In many cases these women, workers and housewives who have never been politically active before, were motivated to get involved in the struggle for peace by concern for their children's future. 'We do not want our children to die in a nuclear holocaust', said Helen John, one of the spokeswoman of the movement, who left her husband and five children in order to go and live at Greenham. [24] On the basis of a spontaneous reaction to the threat of war, the women of Greenham developed a critique of all aspects of government policy calling for actions at schools, hospitals, offices, to demonstrate the 'link between the lack of funds for these institutions and the money being poured into the arms race'. [25] By these means they began to push the trade union leaderships to put their congress resolutions into practice. Because of their tenacity and their links with trade unionists locally, the women managed to get the Trade Union Congress representing nine million trade

unionists to support International Women's Day for Disarmament on 24 May 1984. [26]

The women of Greenham have also played an important role in the establishment of links with other anti-war campaigns, particularly with the independent peace groups in Eastern Europe, thus showing the truly internationalist character of this movement. In the course of trips to the USSR where they were received like heroines of the anti-imperialist struggle, they managed to make contact with the spokespersons of the Moscow group (to the great displeasure of the Soviet bureaucrats who did everything to prevent it).

Through their activity, debates and their subsequent challenge to the traditional role of women in society, the women of Greenham, became, in the same way as the miners' wives, a source of inspiration for feminists the world over. [27]

However, underlying the motivation of many of the women of Greenham (and that of activists in the Dutch Vrouwen voor Vrede or the German Women for Peace Groups) is the concept of the 'non-violent nature' of women and other theories which are dangerous for feminists. 'Dangerous because they trap women within a set of values conjured up for them by patriarchal society: psychological and political make-up flowing from the maternal function, from "natural" qualities of gentleness and goodwill towards the human race. [28]

Some German feminists have developed this approach systematically. They put the question of male violence at the centre of their actions, believing that war is only one aspect of that, on the same level as rape, violence in the home and pornography. But such an analysis only serves to confuse cause and effect. It is not male violence or the psychology of individual males that is the root cause of militarism and women's oppression, but the system of production and reproduction as a whole and centred on the social relations of domination. [29]

The super-hierarchical and oppressive institutions of the military establishment synthesise all the most reactionary values in society such as submission, blind obedience and discipline. They make typically 'masculine' values like virility, aggression and strength into supreme virtues. Such institutions consider women as minors that have to be protected and defended like children and old people in order to enclose us in the social role 'for which we were created' - which fits in so well with their interests—that of wife, mother and at best nurses, teachers and secretaries. The essential function of the army is to maintain and defend an oppressive society, a class and patriarchal society, whose interests and order we utterly reject. [30]

So wrote Spanish feminist Fina Rubio who was echoed in a different way by US feminist, Johanna Brenner:

"The link between women's liberation and anti-militarism rests on our opposition to this social order and our demand for full participation in public life, a living wage and creative work. The right to live as a lesbian. Collective responsibility for children. Thus to be able to mother without depending on a man. We oppose militarism because it denies these goals—in its defence of capitalist power and capitalist interests around the globe, in its celebration of masculinity defined by women's inferiority. in its absorption of resources and corresponding impoverishment of social expenditures." [31]

In this framework we are in complete agreement with all those women who, at the inspiration of the Greenham women, have in their ideas and activities stressed the scandal of the choices made by the state in relation to 'public spending'. The anti-militarist collective in Barcelona also confirms that: 'To remain in NATO would imply coming to the aid of patriarchy in the oppression of other women. This is yet another argument for being against military blocs and for a neutrality policy which is active and solidarises with all women and all oppressed peoples of the world.' They then suggest:

'We think that we must make an inventory of the costs of maintenance of the army, of nuclear material, of arms factories and personnel employed and attempt to draw up an alternative budget which is at least partial if not total) [32]

Whatever disagreements there may be with particular aspects of the orientation of the international women's peace movement, there is no doubt that its discussions and activities have breathed new life and ideas into the women's movement and helped to approach the relationship between oppression and patriarchy in a new light.

Black and immigrant women in revolt

A further important element in the radicalisation of new layers of women is the development of feminism among immigrant women and those from ethnic minorities in a number of European countries. Here again the participation of working class women from these communities in exemplary struggles is a new phenomenon. From the strike over wages by Turkish, Greek and Yugoslav women in the car components factory in Pierburg, West Germany in 1973; that of Asian women at Grunwicks in Britain fighting for trade union rights and the strikes by Philips workers in a series of countries, we have already seen several examples of some of the most exploited layers of women fighting for their basic rights. But what is new is the determination to organise themselves independently and on a permanent basis.

In West Germany, Southern European immigrant women held their first national conference in 1984. The delegates declared that they would take up the struggle on three fronts at the same time: as women oppressed within the family; as immigrants who are totally dependent of their husbands, because they do not possess their own residents' permits; and as workers doing the lowest paid and most menial jobs.

In France, beyond the Immigrant Women's Collective which has existed since 1982 and is the umbrella organisation of most of the immigrant women's associations, there is now also an Association of Arab Women, which came out of a festival organised in 1983 by an independent immigrant radio station which made air time available for the discussion of the problems of women immigrants. This included discussion on previously taboo issues like contraception. In the meantime, a second generation of Arab women were playing a role in the frontline of the anti-racist movement, taking up the discrimination to which they were subjected to by their brothers and demanding more freedom.

The demands and preoccupations of immigrant women have forced feminists in different European countries to look at things afresh. Nowhere has this been more the case than in Britain where women from the ex-colonies are part of the advance guard of the movement and are challenging many of the old ideas of the movement. In particular they reject the choice posed to them by the radical feminists: either fight racism side by side with men or fight sexism alongside feminists. Their strong reaction against the incomprehension or insensitivity of many white women to their needs has led to a number of them rethinking the issue of family and the role that it plays for ethnic minorities in imperialist countries like Britain.

That many white socialist-feminists ignore racist attacks on Black households is not new. However, in doing so, they also ignore the fact that harassment and racial attacks from white women and white men, and sometimes white families, can impel solidarity within Black households. Whatever inequalities exist in such households, they are clearly also sites of support for their members. In saying this, we are recognising that Black women may have significant issues to face within Black households. Struggles over sexuality and against domestic violence, for example, have

been important issues for all feminists, including Black feminists, and have involved confronting assumptions about domestic relationships. But at the same time the Black family is a source of support in the context of harassment and attacks from white people. [33]

In particular immigrant women, like women in Latin America and other colonial countries, established that the right to choose cannot be reduced to the right to abortion and contraception as the European and US movements have tended to do.

In the last few years, women of colour have alerted white feminists to the eugenic and racist prejudices informing certain doctors' readiness to grant or withhold abortion or to introduce the dangerous injected contraceptive Depro-provera. Some doctors are known to give abortions to women they consider 'unfit' mothers only on the condition that the women agree to their concurrent sterilisation . . . These realisations have prompted many feminists to rephrase their previous demand for the right to free contraception and abortion and call instead for reproductive rights. [34]

All these facets of the new forms of radicalisation represent a decisive contribution to the recomposition of a future women's movement. In most countries in Europe the overall political situation and defensive character of many workers' struggles does not facilitate the task of socialist feminists who are hoping to define an orientation based on a class perspective, taking account of all aspects of the specific oppression of women and men. This is obvious in a case like the miners' strike, so exceptional in its scope and duration. As the women from Women Against Pit Closures said: 'Nothing will ever be the same again.' What exactly is the way forward in a movement which is so diverse—not to say dispersed, as the women's movement is today?

Some possible lines of resistance

The above analysis tends to show that women have not surrendered to the effects of the crisis and that the inherent contradictions of capitalist society have only served to increase women's awareness of their position, even in the home where the weight of patriarchal relations weighs most heavily. The setbacks and partial defeats that the autonomous women's movement has suffered, the fragmentation of its forces in different countries, have not prevented advances in analysis of the forms which discrimination against women can take in this period. Equally they have not prevented the development of struggle, sometimes successful, in new areas. Any discussion on strategy should base itself on these gains.

The introduction of new technology in the tertiary sector brings with it not only the loss of jobs in the short and medium term, but also a substantial worsening of women's working conditions who make up the major proportion of the workforce in this sector. In relation to employment the most pessimistic predictions of the experts have not been immediately fulfilled. [35] In the first instance there has been a small creation of jobs because of the new requirements brought about by the introduction of microcomputers. But as time goes on, the automisation of most of the more repetitive tasks will lead to the opposite development. The fall in the price of office computers will undoubtedly contribute to this as it will allow every employer, however small time, to equip themselves with computers.

In West Germany, for example, where more than 200,000 jobs have been created between 1966 and 1982 in the banking sector alone, the trade unions predict that 80-110,000 jobs will be lost between now and 1990, out of the current 550,000. In the post office which is the biggest employer of female labour in the country between 40-60,000 jobs will disappear in the coming years. [36]

This type of job loss is accompanied by new forms of work organisation which tend to strengthen job

segregation. One example in Denmark is the opening of broadcasting stations in outlying areas where women research assistants work on monitors which feed into a central computer. Many women like the fact that they no longer have to make long journeys and are thus in a better position to live up to family responsibilities, since this policy of decentralisation is accompanied by a policy of flexible hours. The major problem is however that the prospects for promotion are negligible and these women are assured of being trapped for ever in the lowest grades and worst paid jobs. It is no surprise to learn how the few (skilled) men working in such a place thirty kilometres from Copenhagen reacted: 'I have no intention of working here more than two days a week', said one programmer, 'because if I lose contact with the division in Copenhagen, I will not have the necessary information for going good work. Two days a week is quite enough. [37]

The joys of working for oneself

But the ability of the bosses to 'make a man (in this case a woman) a slave to the machine does not stop there as the development of homework within the area of new technology demonstrates. In some countries, especially in northern Europe, the number of firms which are proposing to 'solve' women's problems by installing a terminal in their homes now goes beyond the odd special case. In Britain this affects mainly semi-skilled technicians because the cost of telecommunications is so expensive that home work by unskilled female operators would not be financially viable for the time being. But technological development and privatisation will ensure that companies will extend this system if they can make a profit. The advantages are obvious: lower wage costs, limited contracts (that is to say no contracts at all since the women workers would be independent piece workers), nil risk of workers agitation, etc.

Women who have chosen this work have generally done so under duress, either because they cannot find other work, or because they have no one to look after the children. But a study carried out in Britain in 1980-81 showed, as one might expect, that most of the women complained of isolation, of the impossibility of doing their work with the kids around and of the constraints on their work time imposed by the clogging up of the central computer. Many started working at night, either to get some peace, or to avoid waiting hours for access to the figures that they needed or to economise on electricity. [38]

The reaction of most women workers questioned seems to show that for the time being they reject a form of work which traps them in the home and deprives them of social contacts which they particularly value, even if they might do a job which they do not enjoy. [39] Nevertheless, the possibility of struggle against the threat of an extension of homework will depend largely on the wider capacity of the workers movement to reply to unemployment connected with the introduction of new technology. The pressure of redundancy is a powerful argument at the disposal of the employer. But the examples of resistance seem to be limited since the trade-union leaderships seem more interested in the effects of restructuration in the main traditional bastions than in the female-dominated sectors.

Refusing to be slaves to the machine

The fight against job loss is not just a matter of saying 'no to redundancies' as important as that may be. It also raises the question of a decrease in hours or pace of work and a redistribution of labour in order to create new jobs. Typists at INSEE (the French national statistical centre) gave an example of this in a nine-week strike in 1981. Previously working a non-stop seven hour day, they managed to get 25 minutes extra breaktime and one hour of manual work other than on the screen, reducing

hours worked on the machine to 5 hours 35 minutes (a big improvement, but still very wearing on the sight and on the nerves. Those who have taken up the fight against the harmful effects of work with a VDU are particularly concerned with health problems. The actions taken by US women show some steps forward in this respect. More than ten years ago workers in the administration at Boston University created a '9 to 5' organisation. At a national level this organisation eventually had 12,000 workers as members.

In 1983 it decided to launch an awareness campaign on working with a VDU, receiving more than 6,000 responses to a preliminary enquiry in 1982 and more than 40,000 in a 1983 survey. The results of these two surveys confirmed other studies conducted by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) concerning increase in stress levels, the deterioration of sight among women working on VDUs etc. The causes of this were obvious: the rhythms of work dictated by the machine, the worker remaining in the same position all day, the absence of breaks, the lack of human contact, and all this for low salaries. [40] Canadian workers at the Surrey Memorial Hospital set up an inquiry into the effects of radiation coming from VDU screens. It showed that out of seven women who were pregnant at the time, three had miscarriages, three had given birth to malformed children and only one had a normal pregnancy. The inquiry went on to prove that the machines were emitting above the normal level of low frequency radiation. Those in charge of the hospital had the audacity to respond that: 'One also has to take into account the effects of alcohol on the foetus. How can you prove that these girls did not have a tot of whisky every night'? [41]

In this and in other cases, preventative measures for pregnant women have nearly always had to come from the women themselves. This is a basic issue of conditions of work which it is important that the trade union leaderships also take up. Another aspect of the struggle which is beginning over the introduction of new technology is over the deskilling that is involved in the vast majority of cases and especially for women. The CFDT (one of the two main French trade union federations) started an action for the training of all personnel affected by work reorganisation in the Cheques Postaux division of the post office following the effects of office automation. Firstly, the women workers had to be given confidence they could be retrained and that their objections to doing retraining outside of work time would be taken into account. After lengthy small-group discussions many women agreed that the demand for training for all was an important one. APEX (the British white collar union) has noted that, taking into account most job evaluation schemes merely evaluate one job in relation to another, 'no amount of juggling can correct deskilling which often occurs if trade-unionists neglect job content at the stage of implementation or extension of electronic systems. [42]

The 'comparable worth' solution

Assessment of job content is something which feminists in the USA have been concerned with in their far-reaching campaign on the question of comparable worth. This involves a comparative study between different types of work in order to show how certain aspects of women's work are systematically passed over when job evaluation takes place. The policy of equal pay has remained inoperative for the most part, whether it is the result of specific legislation like the Equal Pay Act in Britain which was preceded by mass mobilisations or whether it was the result of legal decree establishing the principle of equality between men and women. The British Equal Pay Act is ineffective because, in most instances, the law is not implemented by the employer, even where the work is equal. Official bodies that police the act fail to enforce it. This was nowhere more evident than in the recent case in a British industrial tribunal of a woman worker in the canteen at Cammell Laird shipyards who was claiming discrimination.

The tribunal judged that, although she was doing work of equal value to a man, this did not mean that she should be remunerated through equal bonuses. Finally and most importantly, these type of laws have no effect because 'equal work' does not really exist. In this sense the fight for 'comparable worth' has the advantage of highlighting the systematic downgrading of the work women do and of ex-posing the mechanisms of job assessment. According to one author the concept "threatens to upset the way the labour market in particular and society in general are organised'. Firstly, because it is costly. Secondly, because it knocks on the head the idea that the value of men's work is superior to that of women. Thirdly, 'comparable worth would redistribute not only economic resources, but also labour market power to women workers'." [43] However, the main problem with this approach is that it takes place within a certain established framework that of the hierarchy of values and jobs which prevail in capitalist society.

"Most campaigns for comparable worth aim only to distribute people meritocratically into a hierarchy of jobs, to decide where women's jobs should be on the ladder—should a secretary get paid more or less than a truck driver? A favourite theme of comparable worth campaigns is to compare nurses to skilled male blue-collar workers; in the Denver campaign a common example involved nurses and tree-trimmers, and a recent pamphlet by the Democratic National Committee Women's Task Force compared nurses and sign painters. The message is that nurses are smarter because they are more educated—what an outrage it is that smart nurses are paid less than dumb tree-trimmers! . . . But this kind of elitism can easily be turned around on women and divide us. If nurses are smarter than truck drivers, then aren't nurses also smarter than secretaries? Than waitresses?" [44]

This is certainly not the way to forge unity between white and Black women who are so newly making their voices heard.

A movement that intends to speak for all women can hardly afford to accept such inequalities in opportunity and position between us. When comparable worth studies open pay scales up to negotiation, feminists ought to be arguing for reduced pay differentials between all workers as a key part of the charges. [45]

Quite apart from this another problem comes out of the work quoted. This type of approach ends up merely accumulating case histories and giving pride of place to all sorts of experts who are the only ones deemed capable of working through the legal maze. Although ultra-leftism can be a danger here, we must also be wary of the value of court actions to defend women's rights. Experience shows that it is possible to use successful legal action in order to encourage women to mobilise against discrimination; but equally it is dangerous to set off on a purely legalistic road giving the last word to the representatives of the established order.

The fight against shiftwork and nightwork

In their desire to make new and costly machinery financially viable, and to increase work productivity, the bourgeoisie is increasingly enforcing more and more shiftwork. This affects more men than women proportionately, but women feel the problems very acutely because of home and childcare responsibility; shiftwork often upsets the delicate balance they have established in their double day's work. Most women workers who were asked showed an ambivalent attitude towards part time work which they saw as a guarantee of independence and social contact, but also as something which kept them away from their families. A further nuance was the difference in attitude between relatively skilled office and other workers and unskilled women workers regarding the priorities which each put on their family / work scale of values. [46] But both groups, when asked, if

asked, would almost certainly say that they do not want to work irregular hours because this would mean too much upheaval and possibly family conflict.

At the Angers factory of Thompson in France the 70% female workforce (52 % of the unskilled workers) delayed management setting up a new shift system there for two years. That was after several minor stop-pages, innumerable pressures and the promise of various alluring offers (such as 13 months wages on retirement and a significant reduction in the work week). In the end they sacked about ten of the most intransigent. The workers claimed that 'Shift work is slow death' and were confirmed in this conviction by tales of woe from colleagues already working shifts who had to get the children up at five o'clock in the morning and worried about them leaving them alone at night in an empty house. They spoke of the ruination of family life, of their children being brought up like orphans, of problems with their husbands who did not appreciate their wives working such hours. [47]

But if shiftwork poses such grave problems, then nightwork can constitute a threat not only to workers' social life but to their health and mental stability. Employers within the EEC have made clear their intention to fight to lift the legal ban on nightwork. A debate on Convention 89 of the OIT has been promised by the European parliament between now and 1991. In several countries such as Belgium, the government has begun sounding out the trade unions by producing material on the career openings for women that would be possible with the introduction of nightwork. Elsewhere, as in Switzerland, the employers have tried to get abrogation of the law.

The management of a watch factory, Ebauches SA of Neuchâtel, where nightwork for men had been in force for some time tried to introduce it for women also. The women resisted, encouraged by feminist groups, socialist organisations and sections of the trade unions. Following a broad mobilisation which included demonstrations of women in nightdresses and protest actions of all kinds, the Federal Office of Industry (OFIANT) was forced (at least provisionally) to take the side of workers against management. In their case to the OFIANT management argued:

"Women are more tolerant of monotonous work than men. A man could do the work very well but after only a short time he would be demanding a change in his work situation. This work demands patience, professional awareness, and endurance because it is repetitive work. Experience has shown that women are better adapted to such work. Women tend to get more job satisfaction from boring and repetitive work. They do not get bored but allow their imaginations to flow. Experience has shown that they do not want change in their work. Whereas once a man has mastered a certain work process, they either want to change to something else or they want to change the process to suit them [and that is something we don't want here). The jobs in question offer very little chance of promotion... [48]

A little less subtle than the Belgian government's propaganda! The support committee for the Neuchatel women organised a forum on the implications of nightwork on health in which several doctors, specialists, trade unionists and other workers came to testify to the effects of nocturnal activity on workers' physical and mental condition. Take the example of the labourer employed on the railways who simply said: 'It is now 12 years that I have worked nights and on shifts, without any regular meals, and hardly ever hot meals. Out of 20 colleagues who have retired, there are three, no more, who have reached 65. [49]

The main consequences of this type of work are well-known: sleeplessness, stomach problems, nervous depression etc. These sort of phenomena also occur with shift work which starts at four or five o'clock in the morning.

So rather than taking up the discrimination involved in banning nightwork for women and thus

banning them from certain jobs, it would be better to turn the problem on its head and take up the employers proposals to lift the ban in order to instead demand its extension to all workers, male and female, except in socially necessary areas. This was the position adopted by French feminists in the Etats Generaux on women and work which brought together about 2,000 women in 1982.

We believe that a double response is necessary. On the one hand, it is important that laws against sexist discrimination should prevent any opportunity for an employer to refuse a woman a job that she wants on the grounds that she is a woman. Any anti-sexist law must take this into account. On the other hand it is necessary to take a fresh look at al legislation on nightwork for men and women. Nightwork is forbidden for men and women in Sweden, why not in France? Of course there would have to be exemptions, but shouldn't that be up to the male and female workers to decide? [50]

Keep your dignity, keep your job

Sexual harassment may have been taken up in different ways in different countries [51] but it is one issue which has shown the real impact of feminism in challenging centuries—old taboos. The literature on sexual harassment is abundant, especially in the USA where in-depth studies have shown that between 40-80% of women asked said that they had been victims of sexual harassment at their place of work. In Britain research has established a figure of 60%. [52]

It didn't matter whether the women were old, young, white, black, good-looking or not, the only common factor that one survey done by the Michigan Task Force could uncover, was that the women who were sexually harassed had all eventually lost their jobs in one way or another: either they had been sacked, they had left, or they had been transferred. [53] What characterises sexual harassment is its coercive character and the threat it poses to women's jobs, not to mention their health. [54] "The difficulty comes from the fact that, for several reasons, women do not dare talk about it", explained a worker on *Antoinette*, the women's journal of the CGT (the French Communist Party-led trade union federation) [55]. *Antoinette* has recently been taken to court for defamation of a manager in the PTT (the French post office and telecommunications agency) accused of sexual blackmail of one of his employees. It is the first time that a trial of this character has come before a magistrate's court in France.

Another controversial case was that of a parliamentary representative of the German Green Party who was denounced by one of the secretaries of the parliamentary fraction of the party for sexual harassment. He was stripped of all his functions as a result since his colleagues felt that such activity was unacceptable and in breach of their support for the women's liberation movement. In itself, this event is quite banal, but what caused the real heat was not the act of aggression itself, but the fact that the party deliberately chose to make a political issue out of it. The women in the Greens' Bundestag (parliament) fraction drew up a document on the basis of a survey to which they received 1,000 replies. [56]

The document established that 78% of the men asked claimed ignorance of any cases of sexual harassment. But it also revealed the refusal of the workers' movement in most cases, to confront the issue. The fact that the food industry trade union, for example, could reply to the questionnaire "that to our knowledge there is no example of this type" is amazing. And as for the public sector union (OTV), who were asked if there had been any cases of sexual harassment at their congress or during trade union training sessions, it replied that "it is a purely polemical question. We have never heard of anything like this".

Trade unions and women's liberation

The statements by these two German trade unions should hardly be surprising. Ever since feminists have fought publicly on the issue of women's oppression they have encountered opposition within the workers' movement to any issue outside the traditional trade union framework which was considered to belong to the so-called area of 'private life'. In the past it was common to encounter the question 'Is contraception an issue?' [57] It took the huge movements on abortion and contraception to force the unions to admit that it was.

It took several more years for some of those organisations to also recognise that leaving the final decision on abortion in the hands of doctors or committees of experts was no solution either. Today only IG Metal, one of the main trade unions within the German DGB trade union federation, agrees that, 'The right of a woman to control her own body is the only criteria that can be taken into account'. Feminists in Britain had to wage a ten year campaign, with mass demonstrations organised by the National Abortion Campaign, before the 1985 Labour Party conference finally agreed to abolish the 'conscience clause' whereby Labour Members of Parliament were able to vote how they wished on the issue of abortion, thus giving them the right to vote against the line of the party which was for a woman's right to choose. These are important steps forward although we must have no illusions in their immediate import. 'It is rather depressing to understand why the Powell Bill failed', explained one NAC activist about the latest legal threat to abortion rights, which was finally rejected in parliament through a procedural manoeuvre. 'Unlike John Corrie's bill of five years ago, it was not defeated by the weight of the labour movement fighting with pro-choice groups and the women's movement . . . There is very little activity on this question. [58]

The German trade unions have made a radical turn since the Green's scandal in parliament. Some leaders even talk about patriarchy. At its last congress, the OTV did not just come out against this type of sexual harassment, but went so far as to condemn violence and rape in marriage. [59]

This is a long way from the reluctance to even discuss such matters in the past. This is linked to the fact that in countries like Britain and West Germany the position of women within trade unions is changing, both numerically and in terms of their status within these organisations. [60]

The battle for trade-union representation

In the past few years a battle has been started by women to get more representation in the leading bodies of the workers' organisations. Quite apart from the battle by WAC inside the Labour Party, most of the British trade unions have been forced to take some measures to increase the presence of women in their leaderships. In the National Union of Tailor and Garment Workers, for example, there is a majority of women on the leadership, whilst 42% of the executive of the major manual public sector workers union NUPE is female. But this is not the case in the rest of Europe.

In West Germany women workers are still only entitled to the smallest voice when it comes to decision making. But the example of the Greens who adopted the principle of 50% quotas of women at all levels of the party has begun to have an impact in other political parties as well as in the trade unions. [61] Having calculated that it would take 90 years to become barely half of the leadership through waiting their turn, the women in the GTB textile union with a predominantly female membership, declared that they had had enough and demanded immediate measures to make their voices heard. In southern Europe, however, the picture is very different because the general loss of union membership in these countries is very often accompanied by a proportionate loss in female representation.

The situation in Italy seems particularly dramatic for a country where women's committees in unions went through an unprecedented development in the mid 1970s. At that time several union bodies, like the CGIL-CISL-UIL. Joint union committee in Turin or the FLM metal workers union, took a very innovative approach. They proposed the '150 hours of education', an experiment in collective self-education, open to non trade-union women on issues like women's health at work, abortion or the problem of the family. This initiative had a big impact on all the women's groups within the unions. From 1975 to 1978, supported by the trade-union left, these feminist organisations were strengthened and beginning to be recognised. New coordinating committees were set up starting with the biggest, the committee for the coordination of metal worker delegates, on both a local and a national level and the women demonstrated in their thousands in separate contingents on demonstrations.

In 1978, the new female presence in the union was totally accepted. [62] But today, not only have all the structures disappeared, but the participation of women in the life of the trade unions has gone through a massive regression. This was underlined by an official of the CGIL at its last congress: 'Women workers represent 30% of the members. In the intermediary congresses only 25% of delegates were women and their interventions on the platform were only 15% of the total. In the regional conferences the proportion of women was even lower, reaching only 10 to 11%. [63]

The question of numbers is important given the apathy of trade union leaderships to any decision which doesn't suit them. This is especially the case when it comes to defending the interests of the most oppressed layers, where there is every chance that resolutions concerning women's rights would remain a dead letter if women were not present in leadership bodies and in the negotiating committees to defend their rights.

However, there are many difficulties. Many women still see their work as a source of pin money, supplementary to the family wage and judge that their domestic tasks are more important than any other, even when their children have grown up. Moreover, trade union meetings usually take place outside of work time—a major obstacle for most women. Furthermore, women are concentrated in small and medium-sized workplaces where the level of organisation and mobilisation is much weaker. Finally women have little confidence in themselves and are not encouraged by sexist attitudes which continue to prevail in the trade unions.

Fight corporatism, chauvinism and sexism

Of course numbers are not everything. It is also important that the attitudes of workers organisations on the question of women's rights allow the battle to be fought. In fact if you examine the platforms of the trade unions you are usually quite struck by the progress that has been made. This is undoubtedly the result of the pressure of the autonomous women's movement in the last 15 years or so. [64] But trade union leaders continue to 'forget' women when it comes to the negotiating table just as they also 'forget' the special interests of young people and immigrants. This was underlined by Claudia Pin], a former trade union full-time worker and journalist on the West German DGB's monthly journal, who speaks from experience: 'It is not surprising: in their vast majority, these (trade union leaders) are former skilled workers who have never questioned the conditions of unskilled workers, especially women piece workers or typists.' [65]

Of course it is difficult to generalise as the activity of IG Metall in the electronics factory of Rhenanie-Nord-Westphalie in Detmold, West Germany, showed. In this factory which employs 1,500 people and TOO women workers who do piece work in the home for miserable wages, IG-Metall carried out a massive mobilisation of the women and through locally based meetings managed to

unionise first 150 and then 400 of the women. They are now represented on the union council fighting to get a collective contract. But this is an exceptional example. Generally, trade union representatives are rarely sensitive to the question of the sexual division of labour and tend to justify all sorts of discrimination.

In the 16 proposals for CFDT members on VDUs dated 1982 the presence of women is noted in the following way: they talk about ‘female computer scientists, female workers on the cathode screens, female wage earners, female employees’, that is to say, they translate the different grades into the feminine where possible or applicable, but no mention is made of the division of labour existing between men and women and the coming changes. and none of the problems of the sexual division of labour are even sketched out. [66]

The author of the above lines, Chantal Rogerat, was a former editor of *Antoinette* sacked by the CGT on the eve of their forty—first congress in 1982 for a “grave error” for having defended a socialist feminist line in the women’s magazine of the CGT as well as supporting *Solidarnosc* and publishing letters from readers expressing disagreement with the line of support for Jaruzelski put forward by the CGT and the Communist Party in France. [67] She is a living example of the difficulty of trying to impose a feminist and internationalist point of view on organisations whose degree of bureaucratisation is extreme and whose direction is reformist. And this is the whole nub of the question. Nine times out of ten the demands of the most oppressed layers conflict with the line of compromise defended by the workers’ organisations, especially in a period of recession. Belgian women in the ‘Women against the crisis’ campaign went through this experience. At the beginning of the 1980s, at the height of huge waves of struggle against the government, they managed to set up a broad trade union united front in defence of women’s rights against unemployment and part-time work, against rearmament and for the right to work for all, especially migrant women. But the policy of support for the government by the Christian trade unions (CSC) and the refusal of the FGTB trade union federation to wage a serious struggle against government policy helped to break this campaign. And what is true in Belgium is also true elsewhere.

Women’s rights and reformism

We can see from the tenth conference of DOB women (in West Germany), how much the unions limit themselves to their function of ‘cooperative societies’ in periods of crisis: what is at the centre of their policy is the defence of minimum demands, the attempt—and only that- to limit the damage in the deterioration of conditions of work and life. There was no question of qualitative advances in the feminisation of the trade unions because of the accumulated problems in establishing a compromise in a crisis and the differences the unions as to the state of the discussion. [68]

This was in 1981. But even four years later at the eleventh congress, the representative from the DGB leadership made it clear that new technology was vital to the competitiveness of German industry on the world market. This is exactly the same type of logic defended by the CFDT, the majority union at Thompson in Angers, during the struggle described above. The struggle looked lost at the beginning because the CFDT kept being evasive in order to try and fit in with management’s demands, making alter-native proposals which in fact were not satisfactory either to management or workers. They kept drawing up formulas for the cheapest human and economic costs which had the effect of frittering the movement away and handing the initiative to the employer. In this way the profoundly radical idea of refusing to do shift work, taken up by the Angers workers was not taken up by the CFDT. [69]

This defeat had repercussions within the workers’ movement on a national level as well as among

the bosses who decided to take advantage of it in other factories. We could give many examples like that of the Italian electronics multinational, SGS, whose management decided to introduce night work for women workers and received a sympathetic hearing from the CISL. The trade union official responsible did not hide the fact that the union encountered strong resistance from the women who wanted nothing to do with nightshift working, even with a 50% wage increase and the exclusion of Sunday working.

The trade union representative castigated the rigid attitudes of the women in the following terms: 'We can see here how much day to day culture, habits and lack of ability to imagine a different relationship to leisure still holds sway here', she declared. Insisting on the high cost of investment and the rapidity with which machines become obsolete in the electronics business, she asserted: 'We are witnessing a continuous cycle which is not imposed on us by the demands of technology (as is the case in chemical or steel industries) but by the economic and financial situation. [\[70\]](#)

This last example shows that reformism is not the preserve of men only. It is simplistic to assert as Anna Coote does in an article in the journal of the British Communist Party, *Marxism Today*, that 'Labour institutional blindness persists in spite of our efforts to make it see' (us being women) and that passive resistance by trade-union leaderships in relation to feminist demands come from the fact that it is men who control these institutions and organisations. [\[71\]](#)

Of course men tend to be conservative on these questions and this is reflected in the orientation of left currents within the workers parties as well as in the trade unions (and it is true that these currents are largely dominated by men). Despite very progressive positions on many issues they have great difficulty in incorporating a feminist perspective into their struggle. This is true in the case of the Bennites in the British Labour Party and in the case of the opposition inside the CFDT in France who very seldom take up the demands of women in their activity or even in their platform.

The congress of the British National Union of Mineworkers rejected the demand made by Women Against Pit Closures for associate membership and devoted precisely 15 lines in its annual report on the role of the wives' groups, even though they continue to be in the frontline of the battle in defence of the victims of repression. Conservatism is also present in many of the far left parties which may have a correct programme but are nonetheless extraordinarily passive when it comes to defending it in day to day activity. Some have dragged their heels when it comes to recognising basic rights such as abortion. However we will never resolve anything using Anna Coote's method which recommends a separate struggle from men and then "making alliances" with them. For us it is clear that this road will lead to an impasse.

What perspectives for the feminist movement

The fact that working women are forced to do a double shift is one of the basic things which divides male and female workers in capitalist society. This unpaid work done by women in the home takes on a decisive importance for the capitalist class who, without it, would have to increase wages and cut into their own profits as a result. But if this is true for the capitalist class, it is not true that women's work in the home contributes to improving the standard of living of the working class as a whole—and that this therefore serves the interests of the male working class. It is not by fighting men as such—who also suffer from the system of exploitation—that we will solve the problem. This is not to say in any sense that we should postpone the struggle against the specific oppression of a particular group, especially women. Nor is it to underestimate the breadth and difficulties of the struggle now against sexism within the working class which is obviously a factor in the oppression of women.

The capitalist drive for profits creates the conditions under which men and women negotiate the division of labour within the household. In this process, men have an incentive to protect their traditional family roles which, however burdensome, also confer important privileges. For men to share childcare and housework equally would substantially decrease their (already small) leisure time, since domestic work has to be done along with a normal work day . . . The traditional ideology (domestic work is the woman's responsibility) strengthens men's positions and undermines women in the conflict over who will have how much free time. [72]

The fight to get men to take responsibility for domestic tasks has an importance which neither Marx nor Engels saw (although Bebel did more) because they were convinced that the massive involvement of women in the labour market would break up the family. Instead women, while becoming an essential part of the waged workforce, have not been liberated from 'their' domestic tasks as a result and because of the wage differentials with men, for most, economic dependency continues.

How can domestic tasks which today fall on women become a collective responsibility? How will the struggle to change social relations and the relations between men and women develop?

Unemployment, the lowering of the family income, the absence of collective establishments, the renewed attacks on the right of women to control their own bodies create an enormous pressure making it all the more difficult for women to find the time to get organised and the energy to fight the sexual division of labour within the family. However, the solution is certainly not the one proposed by some British feminists who propose an incomes policy which would undermine male wages in order to increase female wages, or in other words to redistribute that part of the cake which the capitalists choose to give to the working class. [73]

And nor is it a matter, as some feminists seem to hope, of relying on a ministry of women's rights to resolve the problems. Even right-wing governments like the Kohl government in West Germany are promising this whilst at the same time making massive cuts in social spending. The examples of France and the Spanish state show the limits of such ministries in governments led by Socialist Parties pursuing policies of austerity. At best all such bodies are able to do is create a discussion in the media about women's problems and occasionally subsidise certain projects or centres within the women's movement, as is the case in the Spanish state. [74]

Feminism = idealism?

A coherent response to the attacks that women are subject to would have to include the fight for a policy of a minimum wage, of work for all, forth creation of equipment collectives which will also create jobs-alongside of a challenge to the sexual division of labour, the fight against all forms of violence, for minority rights and for the right to choose . . . Is this unrealistic? If you look at the problem from the point of view of the economic resources potentially available, of course it is not. Is it simplistic, taking into account the defensive character of workers struggles today? This argument is a more serious one. But is the attempt to reconcile the interests of the employers and the workers any more realistic? This is not what the examples we have given above would indicate. To negotiate on the basis of a relation of forces established in the course of struggle is one thing. But to limit your objectives and abandon from the beginning certain demands because of 'the needs of the national economy' or 'modernisation' is another. Is it idealistic, given the state of the women's movement today? The movement is dispersed. It has suffered deep divisions. Contrary to the illusions pedalled by some feminists of the "first wave", it is clear that not all women have the same interests (even if they have some common interests).

Nowadays feminism is pluralistic and cannot be reduced to one unitary 'Women's Liberation Movement'. However this does not negate the need for an independent movement, capable of taking initiatives and leading national and international campaigns in defence of women's rights. The history of the women's groups within the peace movement, their ability to pose new problems and to make themselves heard because they were both in-side the peace movement and organised autonomously as women, tends to confirm this. Of course it is not easy to win demands which will make a big hole in the employers' profits as the demand for creches or nursery schools, for example, would. The difficulty is compounded given that these demands also imply a change in social relations.

We want not just any form of childcare, but parents and worker-controlled childcare, cheap and based in the community and workplace. And we need to put these demands into an anti-capitalist, pro-woman political framework. This political framework must offer a vision of democratic and participatory institutions to meet real life needs, replacing of the fundamentally hierarchical and privatised institutions—including the isolated nuclear family—that we have. The conflict women face between being caring and being autonomous is not inevitable, but the effect of the way society is organised: the way production is organised, the way work is organised, the way our daily needs are met. We have to insist that the road to a more human society is not through forcing women back into the kitchen, but by making the one-family kitchen obsolete. And until that's possible, by making everybody—husbands, kids, etc—share responsibility for family care. [75]

It is a long-term political project which presupposes the overthrow of the whole system and we have not got there yet. But it is important to know where we want to go. Precisely because the women's liberation movement carries a significant challenge to social relations, it can play an important role in the recomposition of the workers' movement—on condition of course that it participates in that movement and that feminists who defend an anti-capitalist view know how to make their voices heard. The strategy which the women's movement needs in order to achieve unity in the face of divisions and also to retain its memory and continuity, is the subject of many debates at the present time.

We are not pretending to have all the solutions and do not think that it will be easy under present conditions. But the movement must show its readiness to fight all forms of discrimination and to solidarise with the struggles of the oppressed and exploited in general, both at the national and international level. Despite all the limitations the mobilisations of feminists in Western Europe have shown on several occasions the deep internationalist consciousness that exists. For us, socialists and feminists, this is a very important gain because it is from our ability to listen to each other and learn from different situations that we will draw our strength to carry on in the struggle for the liberation of women and to change society.

Jacqueline Heinen

P.S.

* <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/>

Footnotes

[1] The average unemployment in Western Europe has now reached 10% of the active population. In one in every two cases the rate of unemployment is higher for women than for men, reaching or going beyond 20% in countries like the Spanish state, Belgium or Italy. For more detailed figures on the situation of women workers in Europe see International Viewpoint No 94, 10 March 1986.

[2] For the horrifying statistics on this see "Alt = Arm" in the collection *Frauen in der BRD*, (VSA, 1983)

[3] Frigga Haug, "The women's movement in West Germany", *New Left Review*, No 155, January-February, 1986, p.73

[4] In 1977, statistics for the US showed that 47% of women heads of family in the US were on the poverty line and that proportion must have gone up since. Even taking into account that poor families tend to undervalue the man's income in tax declarations (especially in cases of divorce or where a couple are living together) the situation of such women is nonetheless serious

[5] Jean Gardiner, "Women, recession and the Tories", in *Essays on Thatcherism* (London: Laurence and Wishart, 1983), p.189.

[6] In Europe, an average of 60% of married women are economically active. This percentage goes beyond 70 and 80% in Belgium and Sweden respectively

[7] Figures given by the Equal Opportunities Commission for Great Britain show that nearly one million families depended on one person in 1985. Out of those, 151,000 were women. The proportions in Sweden and West Germany follow similar patterns.

[8] See Paola Manacorda and Paola Piva, *Terminale donna*, (Edizione Lavoro, 1985), p.97 and *Femmes et marché du travail*, (Paris: Hatier, 1985), p.61

[9] Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas, "Rethinking women's oppression", *New Left Review*, No 144, March 1984, p.60.

[10] In several countries (such as Denmark, Netherlands and Sweden) part-time work concerns nearly half the women who are economically active. In Europe on average 80% of the part-time workforce is made up of women workers (nearly 95% in West Germany and Great Britain). We are talking then about roughly a quarter of the active population involved in this work and all that it brings with it; low wages, insecurity of employment, minimal benefits, irregular hours, lack of promotion prospects.

[11] *Rinascita*, 28 June 1936

[12] On the question of job segregation and the impact of new technology on female labour, the literature produced by the women's movement is plentiful, especially in the USA. For Europe see Diane Werneke, *Microelectronics and office jobs*, (Geneva: ILO, 1983); Jacki West, "New Technology and Women", "Office work" in *Work, women and the labour market*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982); Cynthia Cockburn, *Brothers - Male dominance and technological change*, (London: Pluto Press, 1983); *Le sexe du travail, collection of contributions from the tenth world congress on sociology*, Mexico, 1982, (Grenoble: University press, 1984); *Cahiers du féminisme*, No 28, Spring 1934; "Hoch die Technologie—Neider moit der Frauen-nerwerbsarbeit?" in *Traumen verboten*, ed. by Karin Roth, (Hamburg: VSA Verlag, 1984); Frauen

computer, ed. Elisabeth Vogelheim, (Hamburg: Rororo. 1984); *Terminale donna*, op. cit.; Patricia A. Roos, *Gender and work*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1985).

[13] Mary Alice Walters, "Ideological offensive against women", in *Intercontinental Press*, December 2 1985.

[14] See "Employment and unemployment", *Eurostat 1985*, (Office of Statistics of the European Community, 1985). It is not possible to see exactly how this is reflected by profession because the statistics do not distinguish between men and women.

[15] Frigga Haug, op. cit.

[16] A notorious advert depicting a woman in a bikini did the rounds in Paris. It said, 'On September 2 I will take the top off' . The same poster was displayed a few days later with the woman's top off and the slogan; 'On September 4 I will take the bottoms off' . Such a publicity campaign delighted the Parisian male who is not after all so atypical in Europe.

[17] *Cahiers du feminisme*, No 35, Spring 1936.

[18] Ibid.

[19] The figures for France leave one in no doubt. They show that waged work has a big influence on the way women vote. See "Les femmes et la politique: le role essentiel du travail", *Critique Communiste*, No 39, March 1985.

[20] 'Women in the miners' strike', interview with Jean MacCrindle by Sheila Rowbotham, *Feminist Review*, No. 32, Summer 1986.

[21] Barnsley women 1984, "Women against pit closures".

[22] Huw Benyon, ed. *Digging deeper*, (London: Verso, 1985).

[23] Sue Finch, "Socialist feminists and Greenham" *Feminist Review*, No 23, Summer 1986.

[24] Extract from an interview by Valerie Coultas in *Socialist Action*, 7 July 1935

[25] Anne-Marie Granger and Linda Woods, "De Greenham Common a Bonn, de Copenhagen a Comiso, les femmes en lutte contre la militarisation", *Cahiers du feminisme*, No 27, Winter 1984

[26] This date was chosen as an annual celebration at an international European meeting of women in 1982

[27] See "Acerca del feminismo, el pacifismo . . ." the contribution of the DOAN group to the Jornadas in Barcelona, in the *Bulletin of the Jornadas*, p.38

[28] Frédérique Vinteuil, 'Les raisons d'une participation', *Cahiers du Feminisme*, no. 27, Winter 1984.

[29] Unlike the imperialist states, continually seeking to conquer new markets, there is no economic compulsion on the USSR towards the use of armed force internationally. The

compulsion rather comes from the need to maintain the sphere of influence of the bureaucracy, as for example in Afghanistan. Thus the dynamic towards the use of armed force is different in each case whilst the situation of women is broadly similar, in both camps

[30] Fina Rubio, 'Mujeres en el ejercito? No, gracias'. contribution to *Jornados* op. cit. p.39.

[31] Johanna Brenner, "Thoughts on Women and the Peace Movement", *Against the Current* (new series), no.1, January-February 1986

[32] 'Las mujeres ante la militarizacion de la sociedad', DOAN group op. cit. p. 14

[33] Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Margaret Coulson, "Transforming Socialist-Feminism: The Challenge of Racism", *Feminist Review*, no. 23, Summer 1986

[34] Lucy Bland, 'Sex and Morals: Rearming the Left', *Marxism Today*, September 1985.

[35] Notably S. Nora and A. Minc, "L'information de la societ  ", *Documentation Fran  aise*, (Paris: 1986).

[36] Frauen am Computer, op. cit., p.37, 48.

[37] Eva Gurtnarson and Gitte Vedel, 'Il lavoro a distanza' in *Terminale donna*, op. cit..

[38] Ursula Huws, 'Le moderne lavoratrici o domicilio', *ibid*

[39] See especially Daniele Kergoat, 'Le travail a temps partiel', *Documentation francaise*, (Paris: 1984).

[40] See Robin Baker and Sharon Woodrow, 'The Clean, Light Image of the Electronic Industry' in *Double Exposure*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984).

[41] Cecilia Bright, 'La difesa della salute', in *Terminale donna*, op. cit. p.17.

[42] Jackie West, op. cit. p.77.

[43] Helen Rebick ed., *Comparable Worth*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1934), p.25.

[44] Johanna Brenner. "A Socialist Feminist on Poverty and Pay Equity", *Sojourner*, April-May 1986

[45] *Ibid*.

[46] Daniele Kergoat, op. cit.

[47] Marie Victoire Louis, "Thompson on l'  chec d'un syndicalisme", in *Temps Modernes*, no. 476, March 1986, p. 125.

[48] *Travail de nuit des femmes*, (Neuchatel Parti Socialiste Ouvrier, 1985).

[49] *Travail de nuit: ne pas c  der*, (Neuchatel: Comit   Travail Sant  , 1986

[50] *Etats généraux-Les femmes dans le travail et le travail des femmes*, (Paris: 1983).

[51] The issue of nursery provision, despite being central to the analysis of the women's movement and very much present in trade-union demands, very rarely sparks off actual struggles. This is undoubtedly partially linked to the weakness of community organisations in most countries in Europe and at the lack of focus for struggle- finances for nursery provision tends to come from different authorities at different levels of government. In the ease of workplace nurseries this problem is linked to the difficulty of getting the trade unions to act since many rank and file workers do not see this issue as a priority in a period of recession and unemployment

[52] Nathalie Hadjifortiou, *Women and Harassment at Work*, (London: Pluto Press, 1983).

[53] Elissa Clarke, *Stopping sexual harassment*, (Detroit: LERP, 1982)

[54] See Peggy Crull, "Sexual Harassment and Women's Health" in *Double Exposure*, op. cit.

[55] Josette Dubois, interview with Dominique Lacan, "Antoinette en proces—le chantage sexuel en accusation", *Cahiers du Féminisme*, no. 36, Summer 1936.

[56] Sybille Piogstedt and Kathleen Bode Ubergriffe—*Sexuelle Belastigung in Buros and Betrieben*, (Hamburg: Rororo, 1984).

[57] Margaret Maruani, *Les syndicats a l'épreuve du féminisme*, (Paris: Syros, 1979).

[58] Ann Potter, 'Women's rights-mobilise the labour movement' *Labour Briefing*, August 1985.

[59] Steffi Engert, "Feminismus in den Gewerkschaften", *Was Tun*, 9 January 1986.

[60] In Britain the increase was very marked from 16.5% in 1960 to 29% in 1978, to over one third in 1985. See "A woman's place is in her union", in *Women, work and the labour market*, op. cit.. In West Germany it went from 15.3% in 1971 to 20.7% in 1981. The proportion of women delegates to the DGB congress over the same period went from 6.4% to 11.6%. See *Frauen in der BRD*, op. Cit.

[61] The women's conference of the DGB does not yet require quotas but does demand "equal representation at all levels". See *Was Tun*, 12 December 1935.

[62] Bianca Beccalli, "Féminisme et syndicalisme: le cas italien au cours des années 70" in *Le sexe du travail*, op. cit.. See also *L'acqua in gabbia—Voci di donne dentro il sindacato*, (Milan: La Salamandre, 1979 and *L'esperienza a tornino dell'Intercategoriale donne CGIL-CISL-UIL* (Turin: Musolini, 1979

[63] *Unita* 23 January 1986.

[64] See the comparative study of trade union policy in Europe in "Femmes travailleuses: féminisme et syndicats", *Cahiers du Féminisme*, no. 10, June 1979.

[65] Claudia Pinl, *Das Arbeitnehmerpatriarchat*, (Cologne: Kieperheuer & Witsch, 1977).

[66] Chantal Rogerat, "Syndicats et division sexuelle du travail", *Temps Modernes*, March 1986.

[67] See *Cahiers du Feminisme*, nos. 18-20.

[68] 68) *Frauen in der BRD*, op. cit..

[69] "Thompson ou l'échec d'un syndicalisme", op. cit.

[70] Pinuccia Cazzaniga, "I turni di lavoro in un'azienda elettronica" in *Terminale donna* op. cit.

[71] 71) Anna Coote, "The feminist touch", *Marxism Today*, December 1985.

[72] Johanna Brenner, Maria Ramas, op. cit.

[73] Bea Campbell began to develop these ideas in the journal *Red Rag* towards the end of the 1970s. She also put forward similar ideas in the debate published in *Feminist Review*, no.23, Summer 1986.

[74] Frigga Haug, op. cit. See also *New Left Review*, no. 151, on the women's movement in the Spanish state and *Cahiers du Feminisme* which carried regular articles throughout the period of the Socialist Party government.

[75] Johanna Brenner, "Women, the Right and the Family", *Against the Current*, Spring 1982.