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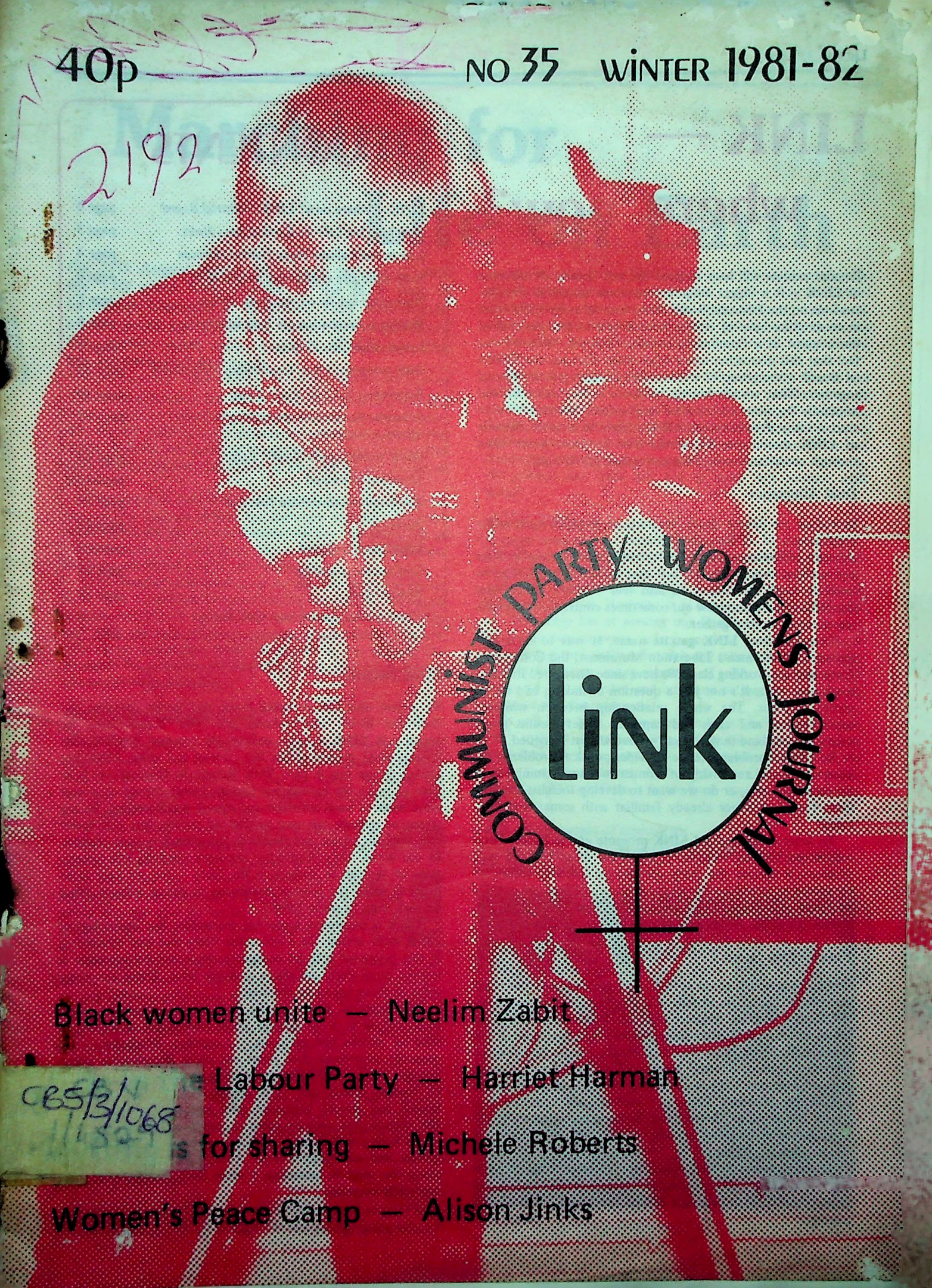

COMMUNIST PARTY WOMENS JOURNAL

# link

Black women unite — Neelim Zabit

Labour Party — Harriet Harman

for sharing — Michele Roberts

Women's Peace Camp — Alison Jinks

CBS/3/1068

# LINK — where now?

Regular readers will have noticed the new format of this issue of **LINK** – it is bigger, brighter and more colourful. The discussions on the Editorial Board about how to make **LINK** look more exciting have of course been linked to the question of the content of a Communist women's journal. However, we feel that this discussion needs to go wider that just the Editorial Board – the group of women who actually put the journal together. What we are hoping to do – in this editorial, and hopefully by means of readers' and writers' meetings – is to start a lively debate among **LINK** readers as to what the role of **LINK** should be. We would like to know *your* views through contributions in *Comment* and in **LINK** itself.

## Dual Allegiance

In a sense the debate about the purpose of **LINK** mirrors the predicament of all Socialist Feminists who've been trying for a decade to live out their dual allegiance to their sexual politics and socialist beliefs. It's not just that socialist feminists go to twice as many meetings: we also feel – often – torn and doubtful and wonder how our sometimes contradictory beliefs can be made to fit together.

That was how **LINK** got its name. It was to be a link between the Women's Liberation Movement, the Communist Party and the working class. We have since discovered that this is no easy task. It's not just a question of linking two movements together. The whole relationship between women's subordination and class and capitalist society seems much more confused and tangled than we had at first imagined.

So **LINK**'s problems relate to wider political problems. Do we seek a broad readership of women to whom feminist ideas are relatively new, or do we want to develop socialist feminist ideas for an audience already familiar with some of the debates?

To what extent should **LINK** promote and publicise Communist policies on women – which are often not too well understood outside the Party nor always followed within it? Or should it introduce the whole spectrum of feminist politics to a new audience of socialists? Do men have a role to play in writing for **LINK** as well as reading it?

## Finding Our Space

One thing we need to do is find our space amongst the other journals of the left in Britain. *Red Rag* and *Scarlet Women* are specifically socialist feminist journals. *Feminist Review* specialises in longer and often more academic articles. *Spare Rib* is not specifically socialist. *New Left Review* carries very few articles by or about women *Marxism Today* has had some articles on feminism but has necessarily left many areas of debate untouched. *Women's Voice and International Socialism* promotes the views of the Socialist Workers Party (which is fair enough but many of us wouldn't agree with their analysis of the position of women).

So there seems to be a space for a socialist feminist magazine which is accessible and does not confine itself to one particular 'position' on women. Is this the 'niche' where **LINK** belongs?

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*Cover photo: Lansdowne Girls Project*

## LINK Debate

We would also like to break down the barrier between 'us' (Editorial Board and writers) and 'you' (consumers), by creating in **LINK** a more collectively planned product that reflects what people would like to read and write. **LINK** has already begun this in part. With 'Round the Regions', we have tried to make the journal less London-based, though of course more news of local activities and events is still needed. We are trying to remedy our past neglect of racism, but this is not easy without advice and feedback from black women readers, In our series 'Only Yesterday' we have tried to link generations of women in struggle in the Party – but we have done little to make the journal interesting to young women. What do they want to see in **LINK**?

There is enormous scope for expanding the readership of **LINK** both within the Communist Party and well beyond it. If this potential is to be realised, more active participation is needed from Party members at every level. There are many ways of becoming more involved.

The Editorial Board – the 'we' of this editorial – need more people to write articles, short news items or letters, to send us photos and cartoons – a constant headache – and generally contribute their views and ideas. Distribution is also crucial. You can sell **LINK** at meetings, on demonstrations and to friends, check that it is always available through your branch and district literature sales network, and make sure that sales in your area are going up, not down!

We hope you'll discuss **LINK** in your branches and women's groups, and send us your views. A lively debate will help **LINK** along the road to becoming a more lively, controversial and enjoyable magazine.

**Link Editorial Board**

EDWIN MADUNAGU



# Marching for Life on Earth

**On 27th August, about 50 women set out to walk the 110 miles from Cardiff to the RAF base at Greenham Common in Berkshire. They were marching for peace and protesting against the escalation of the nuclear arms race. ALISON JINKS describes her experience of the march.**

'The women's march for life on earth has walked 110 miles from Cardiff to Greenham Common. We are a group of ordinary women from all over Britain who have undertaken this action to show our horror of the growing Nuclear Threat. This issue vitally concerns the future of Humankind and the whole planet.

The people of this country have never been consulted over our nuclear defence policy. We therefore demand a televised debate between our representatives and the representatives of our government so that there may at last be a public dialogue between politicians and people on this issue.'

This demand was handed in to the Commandant at the RAF base, Greenham Common on 5th September. The march was planned to end on that day, but having got fed up on the way with the lack of press coverage, the women decided to take direct action and chain themselves to the railings! The Women's Peace Camp was established and it has since decided to carry it on indefintitely.

## Self-reliance and sisterhood

There was a general atmosphere of self-reliance on the march and the feeling that the march was *ours*. Women took their own initiatives and everything 'just got done'. We never felt like that on a male dominated march, by which I mean one not organised by and for women.

A great feeling of solidarity grew towards the end, as ideas of the chaining were discussed. No one was sure whether it was legal or not and we got quite panicky at times!

In Bath, we saw a video by Dr Helen Caldicott, a peace campaigner from America, which left us lost for words. When asked why she gave up her job as a doctor to work for peace, she said: 'Knowing what I know, how can I *not* try to change it?'

This same feeling was the basis of the direct action taken. As the march wore on, more and more of the women just got up and spoke at rallies and I think everyone began to let themselves *feel* and express emotion without the fear of looking 'silly', a pressure which inhibits women, when they are spread out and divided among men on mixed marches.

We didn't want the march to be hostile in any way. This included allowing men on the march (about 4 went the whole way) and not refusing help from men at stops – this occasionally led to situations where the march was 'ushered' through towns by men who were into keeping some sort of control, and even welcoming us 'in brotherhood'!

## Breaking barriers

Local peace groups (CND and religious) went out of their way to feed us and put us up at night. It was strange going into so many churches with other feminists and yet never openly talking about the male-oriented religions and how they've affected history with respect to war. The vicars seemed a little bewildered at times, but everyone always got on well – there was ambivalence on both sides but barriers were being broken down.

Being nice paid off quite a lot – the police even danced and joked with us! At Greenham, the Americans were antagonistic to the women until a notice was put up saying 'We like you, Yanks, we just don't like your bombs.' After that, they started waving and smiling! At the Welford base, where a petition was handed in, the marchers were given tea on the lawn. However, the soldiers had been told not to make 'eye contact' with them!

## The Peace Camp now

The Women's Peace Camp is still there, outside the main gate of the RAF base. They have received many messages of support, and delegates have spoken at the huge Peace Rallies in Bonn and London. However, it is a cold, wet and muddy winter. The camp has at present one Portakabin and are hoping for one or two caravans. A large geodesic dome is being built for meetings and shelter, but this will take some time. Money, support and many, many messages of solidarity are needed, if the camp is to survive and continue to inspire campaigners for peace and disarmament:

'It will be a long, hard winter, and if it's left to too few, we won't make it. People *are* inspired by the place and what it symbolises. It is magnetic to demoralised members of the peace and disarmament movements as a place to gather strength.' (Extract from a letter from the Peace Camp to its supporters.)

*Send your messages of support to:*

*Women's Peace Camp, Main Gate, RAF Greenham Common, Newbury, Berks*




Morning Star

**The march**

# Notice board

## BITS AND PIECES

### BIFU

The Banking Insurance and Finance Union (BIFU) has produced a booklet *Equality for women –proposals for positive action*. It suggests a range of positive action to involve women in the union and also looks in detail at the way banking employment policies keep women at the bottom of their employment ladder. It is available from: BIFU, Sheffield House, 17 Hillside, London SW1.

### Married women – invalidity pensions and invalid care allowances

Married women who are disabled cannot get the Non-Contributory Invalidity Pension. They can only get this if they can prove that they can't take a job AND that they can't do 'normal household duties'!

Similarly, married women who cannot work because they have to look after invalid relatives do not get an invalid care allowance. A man, married or single, or a single woman in the same position would get one automatically.

The EOC is mounting a campaign to get this changed and needs letters of support. For more details you can get a leaflet *Why shouldn't married women have the same rights as the rest of us?* free from the EOC address above.

| WOMEN'S EARNINGS RELATIVE TO MEN'S (%) | |
|---|---|
| 1970 | 63.1 |
| 1975 | 72.1 |
| 1977 | 75.7 |
| 1978 | 73.9 |
| 1980 | 73.5 |
| 1981 | 74.8 |

## PART-TIME PROSPECTS

Part-time workers are likely to find themselves up against it in the coming year, and by and large part-time workers are women. Of those working less than 30 hours a week (the 'offical' definition of part-time), 84% are women. Two out of five women work part-time, compared to about one in 15 men.

A lot of redundancy agreements, for example, will require part-timers to go first before anyone even talks about voluntary redundancy or other measures. It is however highly likely that such an arrangement is unlawful under the *Sex Discrimination Act*. Both the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) and the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) are looking for a good test case on this issue.

### Discrimination at work

Meanwhile, part-timers who manage to hang of to their jobs are still likley to suffer discrimination as the following figures show:

*Pay:* In 1979 it was estimated that three quarters of all part-time workers were earning less than £1.50 per hour. (£1.50 was the Low Pay Unit's definition of low pay).

*Pensions:* In 1979 only 25% of companies with their own pension schemes admitted part-timers.

*Sick pay:* In 1979 it was found that 39% of establishments with sick pay schemes did not allow part-timers to join.

*Promotion:* A survey in 1973 found that part-timers were eligible for promotion in only 14% of the workplaces which were looked at. Only 27% gave the part-timers any training.

*Holidays:* In 1978 a survey found that 23% of part-time workers had no paid holidays.

These facts are all taken from a booklet produced by the EOC called *Job-sharing. Improving the quality and availability of part-time work*. The booklet looks at job sharing in Britain and the USA, negotiated rights, state benefits and the pros and cons of job sharing. It includes a model agreement for job sharers. A booklet to start us thinking about getting work organised to suit family needs rather than vice versa.

## WOMEN AND TRADE UNIONS

The points made above about part-time conditions underline the importance of involving more women in the unions. They at least may understand that part-time work is often the only option available to women with children and that far from providing a bit of 'pin-money' the income can mean the difference between being above and below the poverty line.

Being trapped in a part-time job however is one of the many factors which can discourage women from joining a trade union and getting involved in its activities. A research paper produced by the EOC brings together this and a number of other reasons why women tend to be less active in the unions. It is more readable than a lot of research papers and it provides useful evidence to back up the fight for positive action to get women involved. It may even provoke some new ideas!

*The Role of Trade Unions in the promotion of equal opportunities* by Valerie Ellis and *Job-sharing: improving the quality and availability of part-time work* are both available from the EOC Publicity Section, Overseas House, Quay St, Manchester M3 3HN.

### Other useful booklets:

*The Part-time trap* and *Part-time pittance – Low Pay Review*. Both by J Hurstfield from the Low Pay Unit, 9 Poland St, London W1U 3DG. *Part-time workers need full-time rights* NCCL, 21 Tabard St, London SE1. (This is NCCL's new address.)

*NOTICE BOARD*

is devoted to bits and pieces, facts and figures. If you have something which you think could be useful, please write to **LINK** 16 St John St, London EC1.

**UNEMPLOYMENT (UK)** *Source: Dept of Employment Ga*

| | 1975 | | July 1980 | | October 1980 | | January 1981 | | April 1981 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 000s | % | 000s | % | 000s | % | 000s | % | 000s | % | 000s | |
| Men | 777.1 | 5.5 | 1264.6 | 8.9 | 1414.2 | 9.9 | 1716.4 | 12.1 | 1819.8 | 12.8 | 2010.8 | 14.1 |
| Women | 200.5 | 2.1 | 632.0 | 6.4 | 648.7 | 6.5 | 703.1 | 7.1 | 705.5 | 7.1 | 841.3 | 8.5 |