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A woman's work...

Women and paid work
We have often said in past issues of LINK that women are bearing the brunt of the current capitalist crisis and we have printed articles showing how this crisis is affecting women's lives and eroding some hard fought gains. For the ruling class, the only 'solution' to the crisis is to blame the working class and attack their living standards. Central to this 'strategy' is an attack on women workers. This attack challenges not just women's right to work outside the home. It also amounts to a general undermining of women's position in the labour force, resulting in damaging long-term changes in the entire structure of female employment. It amounts almost to a regression to conditions which existed in the past – for example, an increase in part-time work, working at home, the mushrooming of small firms (better described as sweat shops) which manage to evade all labour law and make trade union organisation more difficult. Ironically, this process may be helped by new technology. Isolated women workers operating computer terminals from their own home may become the pattern for the future.

Unemployed women
As the article on the facing page shows, women are not only more vulnerable to redundancy, but also find it harder to get jobs that fit in with their home commitments. The latest Department of Employment questionnaire, which asks women what arrangements they have made for childcare, *before* allowing them to register for unemployment benefit, is a further vicious attack on our right to paid work, and must become the focus of a massive campaign.

Unemployment can also be very demoralising. It is vital that the labour movement makes facilities for women and children a priority, when planning and setting up centres for the unemployed.

Holding our own
But women have not been slow in fighting back. The Lee Jeans Sit In was the first example of successful direct action under the Tory government. More recently, women workers at the Merthyr Tydfil Hoover Factory have succeeded, not only in saving their own jobs, but also those of the men on the same grade. Now, the militancy of the nurses and other health service workers shows that women are not prepared to take it lying down!

More generally, women have organised publicly – for example, for the Women's Festival in Battersea Park, and have contributed important ideas to the debate on the alternative economic strategy.

But, we cannot win alone. Solidarity with the labour and trade union movement is essential, but not always easily achieved. Until trade unions seriously confront the relationship between work and domestic life which is of concern to women *and* men workers (and which means campaigning *for* shorter hours and *against* low paid work) then our alliance is not really on equal terms. Similarly, we need more positive action from invididual unions, such as programmes to bring women into men's jobs, improved promotion and training facilities for women and part-time workers, parental leave and better childcare facilities and a shorter working day. Such measures would improve the quality of life of both women and men and bring us nearer to socialism.

Determined to win
Maintaining our right to work, especially throughout the present crisis. is central to the struggle for women's liberation. Indeed, it could be said that many other struggles are contingent upon women having a secure position in the workforce, rather than a tenuous foothold in a ghettoised section of it. Legal and financial independence, equal pay and opportunity will all be dead ducks, if we don't understand and halt the present trends.

Finally, we have the problem of fighting on many fronts. The threatened visit of the Pope is intended to reinforce the Tory ideology that a woman's place is in the home and that she has no right to control her fertility – a slave to nature and her husband.

Similarly the war in the Falklands and Reagan's visit to Britain are grim reminders that we are fighting in the knowledge that war and the nuclear horror threaten our very survival. However, women have been and are in the forefront of the struggle for peace, and we shall oppose Reagan and Thatcher's war mongering, as we oppose all other reactionary ideologies.

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Cover photo: Building an IBM computer (Jerry Mason)

EDWIN MADUNAGU

Women's unemployment

HEATHER MACRAE, of the Lewisham Women and Employment Project, looks at the facts behind some local statistics.

"He was quite truthful about it. He said, 'supposing I was to say to you in six weeks time you're not wanted anymore, are you still willing to work?' I said, 'Yes'. Paying £3.50 for fares (at the moment) and it's right on the door-step. My husband's quite annoyed ... I want my money and I want to be independent ... and I can pick him (son) up from school everyday. You see, with Molins it's from 10 to 3.30pm – the perfect hours ... even if they are using me, it's convenient for me ... ".

Mrs B lives in Deptford, south east, being made redundant from her waitressing job at Molins, a multi-national engineering firm near her home. Sixty other women – all catering and cleaning workers – had lost their jobs in a recent rationalisation. When the *Women and Employment Project* spoke to her, the catering manager had just asked her to return to her old job, this time on a casual basis. The company had tried to install vending machines for food and coffee but male shop-floor workers had resisted. They wanted 'their ladies' back. Mrs B was asked to return. As her response suggests, the job fitted perfectly with her unpaid work as mother and wife and so she returned.

Disposable labour

Mrs B's experience highlights the way in which women are used as disposable labour in our society. Our work with women locally suggests that statistics on unemployment fail to show how gender segregation in the home and workplace make us particularly vulnerable, not just in the current economic crisis, but also in times of greater economic security. Over the last year we have spoken to many wageless women. Often it has been easy to see how women's ghettoisation in the workplace helps employers to get rid of workers when they are not 'needed', or divides the workforce – even on trade union lines, in the face of redundancy. In such cases women have often received worse redundancy settlements than men. Being restricted to the area of schools and home makes it harder to find alternative employment.

Ghettoisation ... and casual labour

Registered unemployment amongst women rose by five times that among men between 1971 and 1980. Married women, and those aged between 25 and 44 in particular, have been worst affected. All women are remaining without paid work for longer and longer periods.

These patterns are reflected in Deptford where more than half the women registered are looking for service sector work in the distribution and miscellaneous service industries. Over the last two years an increasing number of women have lost jobs from banks and offices – traditionally key areas of work for local women who have also come to form a larger proportion of those looking for manufacturing work.

Chiltonian, Molins, Zenith Carburettors, Woolworths, RACS, Goldrei Foucard, Johnsen and Jorgensen – all are local companies which have shed jobs or closed over the last two years. Women employed on a part-time basis have been first to go in several instances ... jobs have been casualised ... the trade union involvement has been divided ... few have found alternative employment. Johnsen and Jorgensen, where plastic drug containers are manufactured, sacked the evening shift workers – all women – when international trade fell. Several months later the shift recommenced, but all the workers (women) were employed on a casual basis. One woman, who had just lost her job from another local firm showed how important work at Johnsen and Jorgsenen was to local women:

"There's a few round here who work at J and J. In fact, I was hoping when I got made redundant that I might go there part-time. All the women I know were saying, 'That's all right. You can come to our firm'. And I said, 'Oh yeah, that's all right, I don't mind working in a factory. It'll make a change.' Since then they're practically closing down themselves!"

Negotiating redundancy

Mrs D had been a filing clerk for a food wholesaler in Deptford. Goldrei Foucard was taken over by Northern Foods and moved to Aintree! She told us of the role APEX played in the redundancy process:

WEP: Did the men in the warehouse get the same sort of agreement?

Mrs D: Theirs was better than ours. I think they had a better union.

WEP: What union were they in? The TGWU?

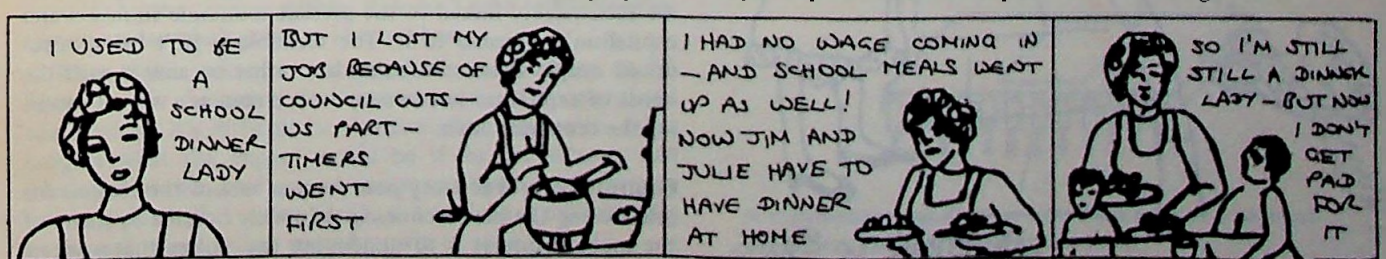
Mrs D: Yes ... and they fought harder of course ... and they got more than us. Let's put it like that.

WEP: It's a shame – having two different unions. Do you think that it was because all the women were in APEX that you weren't regarded as so important?

Mrs D: No, I don't think that – I think men can be more bullying. They don't care, do they, if they're out of work, whereas a woman would worry. Let's say I was quite pleased with ours in the end ... because the deal they offered us first, if we hadn't been in a union we would have come out much worse off ...".

Halting the decline

When a local economy is decimated – as Deptford's has been over the last decade – then women's job opportunities suffer disproportionately to men's. This article gives a few examples of how the hopes of women of getting paid work have been destroyed, and the factors involved. The labour movement as well as the women's movement must confront the unequal division of labour at home and in the workplace, and the specific effects of the recession on women. This must become a key part of the struggle against unemployment if women's right to paid work is to be preserved and strengthened.



Notice board

WHAT PRICE HOUSEWORK?

'A conservative estimate of the annual value of housework was £7,000, said Dr Ellen Derow of the Policy Studies Institute at a symposium on women's work, paid and unpaid, organised by the Fawcett Society. Her estimate was based on a comparison with the skills needed for jobs listed in the New Earnings Survey and was lower than some estimates by a women's magazine and by insurance companies.' The estimated figures included some of the following components:

Childcare	14½ hrs	p. week	£26.40
Laundry	5	"	£9.38
Shopping	4	"	£7.00
Cleaning & gardening	6	"	£13.80
Taking children to school	5	"	£10.28
'Management & admin	3½	"	£11.69
Total weekly earnings			£138.08 (= £7,180 p.a.)

However, 'if a houseworker claimed comparability with a man in costing the various tasks involved in housework, the annual rate would rise to £8,393.'

Source: Employment Gazette

LOCAL GOVERNMENT MATERNITY GAINS

Unpaid maternity leave (up to 22 weeks) will count in local government towards entitlement to annual leave and sick leave. Up to now only the paid part of maternity leave has counted.

This was the major decision of the Central Arbitration Committee of the conciliation service ACAS, ruling on a dispute involving administrative, professional, technical and clerical staff, members of NALGO.

The arbitration award, announced at the end of March, also: rejected the employers' attempt to worsen maternity leave provisions in line with the 1980 Act; and gave the green light for local negotiations on a number of issues, leave for fathers for instance, "as social patterns change".

DISCRIMINATION IN RETIREMENT

Women workers should get the same benefits on retirement as their male colleagues, according to a recent European Court decision[1] involving travel concessions for retired rail workers.

British Rail workers get special travel concessions – both for themselves and their immediate family. When they retire they continue to receive the travel concession. However retired male workers continue to receive travel concessions for their families, retired women workers do not. Ms Garland, a retired British Rail employee, complained that this was discriminatory. She had to take her case to the European Court, relying on EEC law because our *Equal Pay* and *Sex Discrimination Acts* exclude discrimination connected with retirement.

EEC law prohibits discrimination in pay, and as the European Court pointed out, *pay includes all payments whether in cash or kind and whether it is paid immediately or in the future.* Benefits paid in retirement are therefore a form of deferred payment and should be equal between men and women. This is the second case in which the European Court has said that retirement benefits are a form of deferred pay and the decision will help the push towards equality in pensions.

Retirement ages

However, neither British nor community law at present help in the fight for equality in retirement ages. This was confirmed by another British Railways Board case.[2]

A voluntary redundancy scheme allowed women to take early retirement at 55 but men could not leave until they were 60. EEC law allows for discrimination in retirement ages.

TUC document

The TUC has produced a document *Equality in occupational pensions* which looks at discrimination in pension schemes, the problems of getting rid of it, and negotiating targets. It is more easily understood than most documents on pensions.

1. *Garland v British Rail Engineering (1982)*
2. *Burton v British Railways Board (1982)*

ONE PARENT FAMILIES

Census returns for 1981 indicate that there are 353,614 one-parent families in England (Hansard 7.4.82). This represents an average of 2.1% of all households. However, this proportion is much higher in parts of inner London, where the percentage of one-parent households is as follows:

Hackney	4.9%
Lambeth	4.6%
Southwark	4.2%
Islington	3.9%
Tower Hamlets	3.6%
Wandsworth	3.6%

Areas outside London with higher than average proportion of one-parent families include Knowsley (Merseyside) with 3.4% and Manchester with 3.2%.

Despite the financial hardships that most of these families face, *30%* of one-parent families are not claiming benefit to which they are entitled, saving the Treasury £25 million a year.

LOW PAY PAMPHLET

Women: Work and Wages, by Pauline Glucklich and Mandy Snell, is a new pamphlet produced by the Low Pay Unit. It deals with pay differentials, and the limitations of legislation, job segregation and the attitudes of trades unions. Available from The Low Pay Unit, 9 Poland Street, London W.1.

NURSERY PROVISION

A recent series of Parliamentary Questions by Labour MP Reg Race has led to a picture of the pitiful provision of full-time state day nurseries. Despite the demand that obviously exists from working parents – especially in one-parent families (see elsewhere on this page) – the provision of local authority full-time day nurseries ranges from the inadequate (inner London) down to the non-existent (most of Wales).

In England there are 28,252 places – an average of 10.2 places for every 1,000 under-5s. The highest proprotion of places occurs in inner London:

Camden	77.1
Islington	65.4
Hammersmith	64.9
Westminster	63.0

The following local authorities have *no* full-time nursery places: Barnsley, Salop, Warwickshire, Dudley, City of London. Isle of Wight, West Sussex, Wiltshire, Cornwall, Isles of Scilly.

The situation in Scotland is marginally better: here there are on average [illegible] for every 1,000 unde[illegible] available in Tayside, [illegible] and Central, 21.8. N[illegible] in the Borders, Dur[illegible] Fife, Orkney and Sh[illegible]

Wales has the v[illegible] Great Britain, with a mere 0.9 places per 1,000 under-5s.

Source: Hansard 7.4.82