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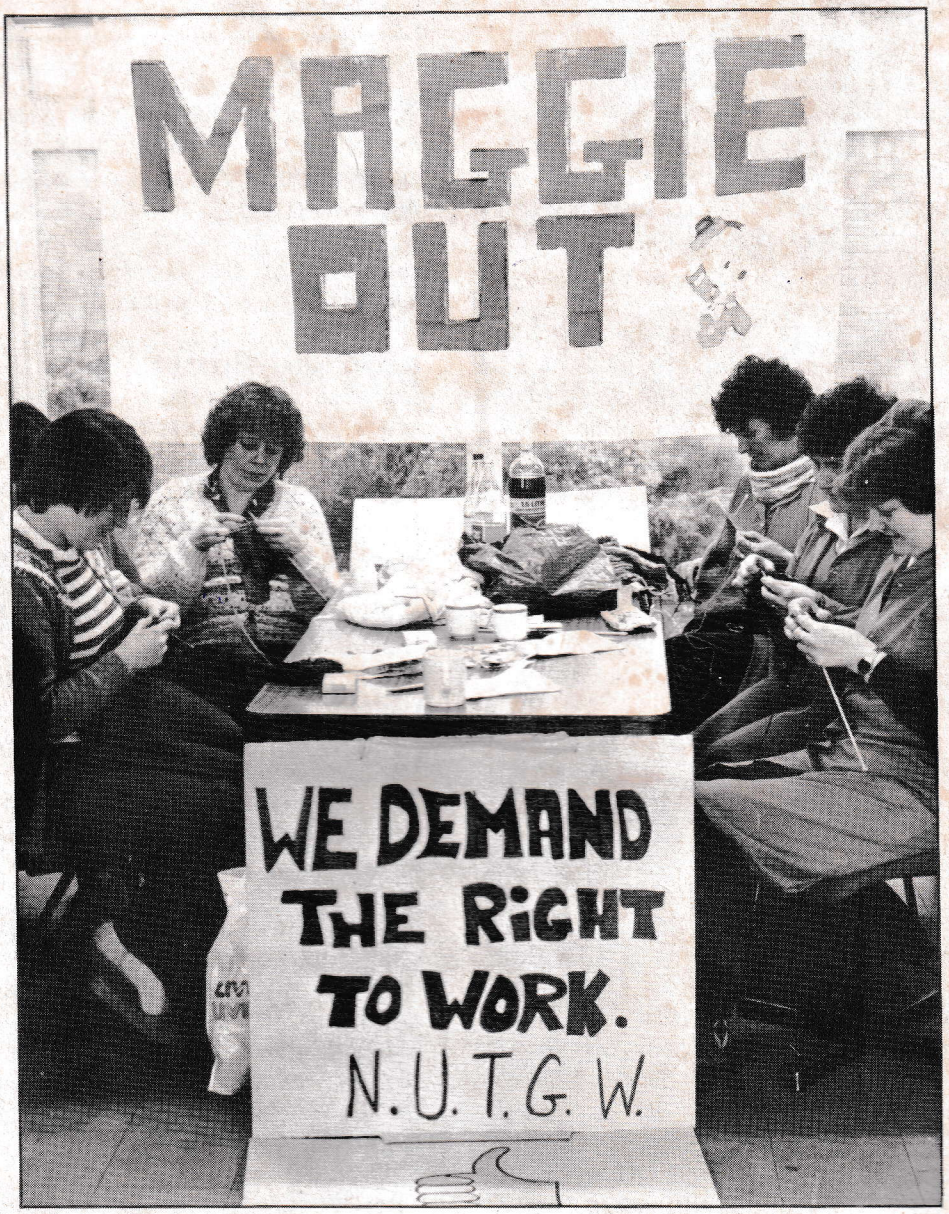

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LEE JEANS SIT-IN

BLACK WOMEN SPEAK OUT

WOMEN WORKERS: WHAT A JOKE

EDITORIAL

The Lee Jeans sit-in in Greenock has shown women's determination to fight unemployment. The People's March for Jobs, with its splendid women's section from Hitchin to Luton and locally organised women's activities along the route, was indeed a people's march, and not just a men's march.

So, as women, we are clearly making our voice heard in the labour movement and must continue to do so, in our fight for socialism and women's liberation, but we must look beyond their own oppression to solidarity with other oppressed groups.

RACISM

Often racism and sexism go hand in hand. Jaswinder Kaur is threatened with deportation, after initiating divorce proceedings against a husband who beat both her and her small son. Nasareen Akhtar and Nasir Begum face deportation for desertion by their husbands.

Meanwhile, Anwar Ditta has finally won her struggle to bring her children to Britain. It was not just the impressive *World in Action* television investigation into her case that changed Home Office Minister Timothy Raison's mind—though this unusual degree of media support should not be underrated. It was also six years of energetic and sustained campaigning. Similar support is urgently needed for Jaswinder, Nasareen and Nasira—starting with the demonstration in Manchester on 6th June and Nasira's Home Office appeal tribunal on 15th June.

The Tory Nationality Bill also has a sexist edge.

But the main thrust of the Bill is racist, rather than sexist. It deprives children born here of their automatic right to citizenship. Instead, they must prove that one parent is a British citizen or legally settled here. Commonwealth citizens settled here before 1973 can no longer register as British citizens, but must apply for naturalisation, which is expensive, discretionary and dependent on a 'good character' and language test. Worst of all, the new and practically meaningless category of British Overseas Citizenship will leave many East African Asians, Malaysians and Indians virtually stateless.

UNITY

So united action against the Nationality Bill and other forms of racism is urgently needed. But what do we mean by unity?

LINK

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cover photo: Morning Star

There have recently been many examples of black people fighting back against their own oppression: the demonstration against the Nationality Bill, the march against police and media inaction over the Deptford fire and the response of the black community to police harrassment in Brixton.

After the Brixton uprising, the Brixton Defence Committee asserted the right of black people to organise autonomously. Many blacks were openly hostile to the while left, while the insensitive vanguardism of some left groups hindered, rather than helped the development of a united struggle.

Similarly, many black women have found the women's movement unresponsive to their needs and preferred to organise separately in black and Asian women's groups. Some of these problems are raised by the Brixton Black Women's Group in this issue of **Link.** They are complex issues, which require more thought and discussion. There are no easy answers.

Now black people have extended their challenge to the whole of the left. As Communists and feminists, we should be well equipped to meet it. As feminists, we have learned that those who experience oppression are best able to fight it. As Communists, we know that no oppressed group can win in isolation.

The *British Road to Socialism* outlines a strategy of alliances in which we must be "ready to listen and learn as well as to provide strategic leadership." Let us not underestimate the amount we have to learn from black women and men and their fight against oppression. This is not only the basis for real solidarity but will also strengthen the progressive movement as a whole.

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Much of our time and ...rgy at present is devoted to asserting these principles in the face of hostility or incomprehension. Only if they are accepted can the serious work begin of examining the many instruments of women's oppression of which language is one.

Dale Spender demonstrates how language assumes that male represents the human norm. To be female is to be different—and worse. Consider a few words. 'Courtier' retains its original meaning. 'Courtesan' was once an equivalent term. 'Sir' is a form of respect. 'Madam' can mean a brothel keeper. Compare 'master' and 'mistress'. Compare the different overtones of 'bachelor' and 'spinster'. Think of the connotations of 'effeminate' and 'emasculate'.

Have you had to counter those 'personchester' jokes? Dale Spender examines the world outlook embodied in the word 'mankind'. She quotes Elaine Morgan who, in her work *Descent of Woman* said she longed to find a book beginning: "When the first ancestor of the human race descended from the trees, she had not yet developed the mighty brain that was to distinguish her so sharply from other species."

Compare that with Erich Fromm who wrote that man's vital interests were "life, food, access to females, etc"—a dead giveaway. *Man* means man—not you sister!

Using such terms as 'mankind' we all "think male" says Dale Spender, a fact she has demonstrated by experiment.

Otherwise, there is a clash of images. Could we, without such a clash, she asks, say that "man devotes more than 40 hours a week to housework" or "man has difficulties in giving birth"?

She quotes another experiment in which many hours of conversation were taped. It was found that 98% of interruptions in mixed sex conversation were made by males. Just as men have made the language, so they assume the right to control women's use of it.

"Try interrupting a man. Try talking about what you want to talk about for as long as it takes you to say it. It is seen as a hostile act. You are dominating and bitchy," said a woman at one of the consciousness raising sessions which are quoted.

There are a few glimpses from a very illuminating book. I can only urge you to get it or, since at £4.95 it is rather expensive for a paperback, make sure that your library obtains it.

FLORENCE KEYWORTH

Morning Star

Unlike the majority of women's pages it stands unequivocally with the Women's Liberation Movement . . ."

Yvonne Roberts
in "OVER 21"

CPGB NATIONAL CONGRESS

We would like to give space in the next LINK to pre-Congress discussion. (The Executive Committee will publish its draft resolutions after its meeting on 11th and 12th July.)

Please send in your contributions by Saturday 15th August to 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY—and keep them short! (Not more than 500 words please.)

FAMILY IN THE FIRING LINE: A DISCUSSION DOCUMENT ON FAMILY POLICY
by Jean Coussins and Anna Coote
NCCL/CPAG, March 1981, £1.20

This comprehensive and stimulating pamphlet represents the long-overdue entry of feminists into the 'family debate'. The authors argue that those concerned to extend women's rights have for too long allowed the family to be defined in a narrow, traditionalist manner.

They show how the ideology of the family has been used to drive women out of the labour force and back into the home, while cuts in social services and cash benefits have actually *discriminated against* families with children. They also show how the labour movement has colluded in this process, by bargaining for a family wage and accepting the stereotype of the male breadwinner and female dependant. Most importantly, the authors call for a new family policy, based not on the conventional sexual division of labour, but on freedom of choice—with parental leave for either parent, adequate financial support from the state and the extension of communal facilities, such as eating places, nurseries and social centres, for those who want them.

It is a book that is useful both for its thorough analysis of present government policies, and for its bold new strategies, at a time when Tory attacks could easily lead us into the trap of a purely defensive stance, which fails to question the quality of provision or examine possible alternatives.

Available from CPAG, 1 Macklin Street, London WC2B 5NH; or NCCL, 186 Kings Cross Road, London WC1X 9DE.

CAROLINE ROWAN

COME INTO THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Join

The Communist

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