

# BANSHEE

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## EDITORIAL

In 1951, the Irish Catholic Church brought down a government which offered to provide free milk for babies up to six weeks after birth. The Mother and Child Scheme, devised by Noel Browne to provide pre and ante natal care for pregnant mothers, was seen by the Hierarchy as an evil state interference with the family.

Today, 25 years later, the Irish Catholic Church is proposing that the government provide, not just free milk, not just pre-natal care for the pregnant mother, but a wage which will support her and the unborn child from conception to birth.

The Church's shenanigans are designed to ensure that the male Catholic Hierarchy keep control of the female body. Where 25 years ago they resisted State support married mother and child, they today advocate State support for the unmarried mother and child. Why?

Like King Canute, they are trying to stem the advancing tide. Women have asserted loudly and clearly a claim to control their own bodies, regardless of Church and State interference. This assertion takes two forms – the use of contraception despite state laws against it – and the desperate recourse to abortion where contraception has failed or been unavailable. 10,000 Irishwomen have gone to England to terminate pregnancy.

The Church's answer is no longer "the wages of sin is eternal damnation". The Church is now saying "the wages of sin is free milk and a petty State allowance". Keep the woman pregnant at all costs, or minor cost to the State.

Irishwomen United say to the Church and State – no offer of milk for unwanted children; no miserable wage for the unborn child.

We want *free legal contraception now*. We demand that all our children if and when we decide to have them, be born free.

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## WHAT IS IRISH WOMEN UNITED?

We are a group of Women's liberationists who believe that the best perspective for struggle against women's oppression in Ireland lies in an ongoing fight around the charter of demands printed here.

We came together originally in April 1975 as a few individual women interested in the idea of building a conference to discuss a charter; what its demands should be and how a campaign should be built.

At this conference on June 8th, attended by approximately 100 women, we constituted ourselves as a separate group, Irish Women United – the only criteria for joining to be agreement on the demands of the Charter.

Irish Women United works on the basis of general meetings (discussions and action planning, at present every week in Dublin), joint actions (e.g. pickets, public meetings, workshops, at present on women in trade unions, contraception, social welfare and political theory) and consciousness-raising groups.



# CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN

## INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL ON CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN:

Report from IU delegate to Brussels, March, '76

Restaurants in Brussels, the capital of the EEC, carry a menu which gives a special price lunch for the "Man of business." The back streets also put on a special display in the window for the Man of Business - women clad in bikinis and leather boots sit in armchairs, on raised platforms, behind the panes of glass, like dolls on display. Red spotlights focus on them as they file their nails, read pornographic books and wink at the passers-by. Special fare for the Man of Business after his cut price meal.

### Oppression of Women

In Brussels, at the beginning of March, fifteen hundred feminists from thirty-two countries of the world, held a tribunal on "Crimes Against Women". Crime was defined as immoral laws which punish women (The Irish law forbidding contraception and divorce, for example), cultures which insult and maim women's bodies (the practice of clitorrectomy in Arab and African countries), and religious, economic and political oppression of women.

### Decolonisation of Women

The Tribunal was described by Simone de Beauvoir as the first step towards the decolonisation of women. By this she meant the first step in the process of disengagement from a system, any system, which treats women as second class citizens.

### Testimony

Testimony was heard from countries as far apart as Japan and Spain, Brazil and Scotland, South Africa and America. The crimes we talked about ranged from the denial of contraception, abortion and divorce, to rape and pornography and to economic and mental crimes against women. The problems quickly fell into three categories.

### Third World

Third World, or coloured countries, spoke about the desperate economic position of black people under a white regime, and the fact that black women were always bottom of the pile. The South African delegate, for example, was a school teacher who lives in a shack with her mother, brothers and sisters and her own three children. Because she was divorced and did not have a man to be responsible for her, or an adult son, she was not allowed to rent any property of her own. (In this case, property means shack with no electricity or running water). So she had to move back in with her parents. Being black was bad, she said. Being a black woman was worse. She blamed racism as a greater cause of oppression than sexism.

### European Women

European and South American women testified about the lack of control over their own bodies. In Brazil, for example, which has a very high birth rate, very low employment, and very bad housing, the government answer was birth control.

### Sterilisation

But it was birth control of a very vicious kind. The government considered that contraception was expensive, and difficult for the peasants to understand - what woman would remember to take the pill every day? So they introduced sterilisation. One in every three woman of child bearing age in Brazil has been sterilized.

### Contraception

In Europe, by contrast, where there are liberal contraceptive laws, there is a great demand for abortion. The delegates explained the reason for this, giving important lessons for Ireland, which has not received the benefit of free legal contraception. Artificial birth control may be a fact of life in Europe, but it is a fact of which many people are not yet sufficiently aware. The governments there merely legalised contraception, and then left it up to the populace to practise it privately, without providing an adequate education programme on birth control or sufficient clinics for its distribution. This slot-machine mentality meant that many women were still becoming pregnant in ignorance, and were driven to seek abortion afterwards as a quick solution.

### Abortion

The delegates demanded abortion, not as an easy alternative to the pill or the IUD, but because of the stark and simple fact that thousands of European women were having unsafe, illegal and mostly back-street abortions. If they're going to have

abortions, the delegates said, then let's make it free, legal and safe. They provided statistics to back up their arguments.

### 1½ Million Abortions in Italy

Portugal had 135,000 illegal abortions last year, causing the deaths of two thousand women. Italy had one and a quarter million illegal abortions. Ten thousand Irishwomen went to England seeking abortions over a period of ten years. Thousands of German women travelled every year to Holland and Austria, where abortions are legal, in order to terminate unwanted pregnancies. In one South African hospital, there was an average of thirty five women per day admitted for treatment suffering from septic abortions.

### Cultural oppression

The third category of crime covered cultural attitudes to women which resulted in sexual abuse and the suppression of a woman's sexuality.

### Pornography

The Danish delegate showed a pornographic film in which a woman was raped orally, vaginally and anally by three men. Such films, legalised by the state, which men paid money to watch, gave rise to the popular male myth she said, that women were sex objects, with no feelings, to be manipulated by men. When men queued daily to see such films, and read similar books, was it any surprise that women prisoners in Chile, Iran, India and elsewhere, were daily subjected to rape by male

warders, and other forms of sexual abuse?

### Clitorectomy

If men the world over held such attitudes, encouraged by the state, was it any wonder that ninety five per cent of females in such countries as Saudi Arabia, and Ethiopia, were subjected to clitorectomy before a man would marry them? Clitorectomy means the amputation of the clitoris, a vital organ of female sexual pleasure. Without the clitoris pleasure in sexual intercourse goes only to the man. And the clitorectomy further maims the female genital organ. The woman is visually scarred, the man's body remains intact.

### Rape

America backed up the argument with statistics on rape. One hundred and seventy five thousand women were raped in the USA last year. Rape is often hard to prove, as in over half the cases, the women were raped by men they knew, however casually. Try going into a court, they said and telling the Judge that you really did not want to have sexual intercourse with the male you met at a dance or in a cafe. Try explaining that you gave in

because you feared you would be killed if you didn't. Four hundred women who resisted last year in America were later found murdered.

### Lesbians

Lesbian women testified that they were discriminated

against by both men and women. In heterosexual cultures, it was considered normal to love only a person of the opposite sex. Conditioning was so powerful that women were afraid to have even friendly relationships with

other women, lest people point the finger at them and accuse them of being 'abnormal', 'frigid' or 'lesbian'. Lesbianism had become a form of accusation, not a natural way of loving.

### Analysis

The Tribunal closed after five days on a convincing note — wherever people suffer it is women who suffer most. The next international tribunal will attempt to identify the common causes of our oppression, and suggest solutions to them. In the meantime international networks have been set up to provide communication between groups of women on particular issues.

Forthcoming issues of 'Banshee' will publish the papers read out at the Tribunal by the different countries. Topics covered will include the position of the Aboriginal woman in Australia; the single parent in Japan; clitorectomy in the Yemen; pornography in Denmark; rape in France; abortion laws in Austria; the wages for housework campaign in Italy; the economic effects of the oil boom on women in Norway; the plight of women political prisoners in Chile and the position of women on welfare in the United States.

## SUBMISSION FROM IRISHWOMEN UNITED TO BRUSSELS TRIBUNAL

Irishwomen are denied the right to contraception. It is a criminal offence to sell contraceptives in this country, to advertise them or to sell literature relating to them. The only methods of family planning legally permissible are those advocated by the Catholic Church, the Billings and Rhythm method.

Despite this fact, 38,000 Irishwomen were known to be on the pill in February, 1974, because the pill can be prescribed as a cycle regulator if a woman claims to be suffering from irregular periods. A survey published in the same year showed that 68 per cent of women of child-bearing age wanted the sale of contraceptives to be legalised.

In 1968 in Teheran, Ireland voted in favour of the United Nations Human Rights Convention, which stated that couples should have the right to decide freely the number and spacing of their children and the right to adequate information and education in this respect.

The Irish High Court decided last year that women should therefore have the right to artificial methods of birth control. Accordingly, it became legal to import contraceptives into the country. However, the law remained unchanged which dictated that the same contraceptives could not be advertised or sold. The only way to acquire these imported contraceptives is through private family clinics, of which there are only a few in the country, located in three cities.

Efforts to introduce a Family Planning Bill in parliament have been defeated by both Church and State. Last year the Irish Prime Minister, Liam Cosgrave, voted against his own government's bill, which would have allowed married couples at least to practise contraception. A Catholic Archbishop declared that artificial birth control was wrong for Catholics, Protestants and atheists.

Ireland has the highest birth rate in Europe and the worst housing record. Mothers in the home suffer most from the denial of contraception. Many Irishwomen are forced to use abortion as a means of contraception. Because of the denial of contraception and the stigma of the unmarried mother, thousands of unmarried Irishwomen are forced to go to Britain to seek abortions each year. Statistics show that 8,000 unmarried Irishwomen have had abortions in England since 1968. In 1973, one in every hundred unmarried Irishwomen had an abortion. Free legal birth control is a human right which Ireland denies to Irishwomen.



# RED BIDDY



The Taoiseach, Mr. Liam Cosgrave, who last year voted against his own government's bill (which would have legalised contraception), has rebuked Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien, his Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, who recently advocated free legal contraception. As punishment for his political sin, Dr. O'Brien has been ordered to make three local phone calls daily from a public telephone kiosk. Every night he must try and place a long distance call, from a private Dublin phone, to Clonakilty, West Cork.

\*

On the first of April, 1872, Alexandra Killantaj was born in St. Petersburg, Russia. She became Commissar for Public Welfare in 1917, stating "For the woman of the past, the infidelity or loss of her beloved was the worst possible disaster in imagination and in fact. But for the heroine of our day, what is truly disastrous is the loss of her own identity, the renunciation of her own ego, for the sake of the beloved and the protection of love's happiness. The new woman not only rejects the outer fetters, she protests against love's prison itself".

\*

"Gay News" a newspaper for homosexuals, has been banned by the Irish Censorship Board. What sort of literature is considered good for the nation?

A pamphlet called "Confession for the Retarded", is on sale in Catholic churches, price five new pence. Trainable retarded children, says the pamphlet, are capable of venial sins and "those in the upper IQ bracket may be guilty even of mortal sin". In instructing priests on how to take the confession of a retarded child, the pamphlet states that he could "ask questions, and the penitent could respond by a grunt or a nod of the head".

The retarded child need not make a confession in the confession box, as retarded children may be classified as sick, and the law of the Church, Canon

910, states that "The confession of women shall not be heard out of a confessional except in case of sickness or other necessity". If we can excuse the women, then we can surely also excuse the retarded child, the Church concludes. (Available from Redemptorist publications, 75 Orwell Road, Dublin 6.)

\*

On the 7th April, 1913, the suffragette Emmy Pankhurst was sentenced to three years penal servitude for incitement. The sentence sparked off a series of arsons and attempts to wreck empty public buildings by the "Outrage-ettes", who were "burning to vote".

\*

When Red Biddy was selling the last issue of Banshee, she noticed that many married women had to ask their husbands for fifteen pence to pay for the magazine. When she approached single women and asked if they wanted to buy a copy, the boyfriend answered yes or no for them. Have you just asked your husband for the price of Banshee? Why is there no money in your own pocket? Has your boyfriend just decided whether or not you should buy Banshee? Why did he decide for you?

\*

Mr. Michael O'Leary has asked Red Biddy to publish a correction to last month's announcement that he had reached his fifteenth birthday. Mr. O'Leary will not be fifteen until next September.

\*

On the 13th April, 1950, China proclaimed new marriage laws which allowed divorce, and ended concubinage.

The Irish Catholic bishops have condemned pre-marital sex and advocated that women,

including unmarried women, should get an allowance for the unborn child during pregnancy. The wages of sin?????

\*

When Lester Piggot was beaten in the last race at Phoenix Park on St. Patrick's Day, an evening newspaper described the winning jockey as "pretty Joanna Morgan". Mr. Piggot has since pointed out that Ms. Morgan beat him, not because she was better looking than him, but because "she was Welsh and her horse had four legs".

\*

On 18th April, 1900, Maud Gonne founded the Daughters of Erin, to advance the cause of feminism, separatism and militancy.

\*

The Pope has advocated that women should retain their femininity, despite Womens' Liberation. A return ticket to Rome, with three months residence in a first class hotel, plus one thousand pounds a week pocket money, will be paid by Red Biddy to the first woman who photographs the Pope wearing a pair of trousers. A consolation prize of Brut after-shave lotion will be sent to the Pope.

\*

On April 23rd, 1969, Bernadette Devlin, member of Parliament for Mid Ulster, made her first speech

in the Westminster House of Commons. "There is no place in society for us, the ordinary peasants of Northern Ireland. There is no place for us in the society of landlords because we are the "have-nots" and they are the "haves" . . . so I organised the civilians in Bogside to make sure that they wasted not one solitary stone in anger. You may laugh. . ."

\*

Graffiti in a woman's toilet "When God made man, she was only testing".

\*

On April 27th, 1968, the Abortion Act became law in Britain.

# WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

**A Wages for Housework Campaign, which started 5 years ago, has thousands of supporters in England, Canada and Italy. The demand that people should be paid for work they do in the home raises important questions regarding the function of the family and the relationship of the woman to family and home. Forthcoming issues of 'Banshee' will examine arguments for and against the campaign. This first article argues that the demand of wages for housework serves to institutionalise and isolate the woman in a role as housewife and mother.**

In discussing the question of wages for housework it is important to avoid moral arguments regarding the "worth" of the housewife's work. There is no denying the social usefulness of domestic labour. Women work long and hard hours - an American survey estimated that on average a housewife works a 99.6 hour week. It is also obvious that the wheels of industry and agriculture could not run smoothly without the domestic chores of women. The question naturally arises; should women not receive payment for this valuable and indispensable labour. After all, domestic servants doing similar work receive a wage.

## Housewife as Domestic Servant

In reality, the call for wages for housework amounts to little more than a call to elevate the housewife to the status of a domestic servant. Admittedly, even this would be a step forward. But the comparison between a wife and a domestic servant is far too superficial. There are a number of fundamental differences between the two. The most important of these is that a servant is simply an employee while the housewife is firstly a wife (to her employer!) and mother and only in this context performs domestic labour. It is not accidental that while a substantial number of domestic servants are male, housewives are invariably female! This is hardly an unimportant distinction.

The importance of this distinction lies in the fact that by becoming a domestic servant, the

female worker liberates herself to a certain extent from the family and enters into new social relations which permit her to some extent to realise her human potential. Wages for housework would not however help her from all the negative aspects of the family; she would still be integrated into society through her role as a wife and mother. Thus a wage would not fundamentally change her current downgraded status.

## Independence from Home

Of course it could be argued that wages for housework would give the housewife a substantial degree of independence from the home. Since she would have her own money she would not be dependent on her husband and could afford to pay for the care of the children etc.

This argument is clearly fallacious. It is not logical to argue that women should be paid to do certain work, and then to turn around and argue that they would use their wages to avoid having to do this work. Although we would all like to think that this could happen, it is nonetheless an unrealistic perspective.

## Politically Dangerous

But the argument is not wrong simply because it is unrealistic. It

is wrong above all because it is politically dangerous to the fight for women's liberation. This danger can be plainly seen in the part of the argument which says that housewives would use their wages to pay others to look after the children and do the domestic chores. What is implied here is: firstly, that even if women don't actually do housework they are still responsible for it; and secondly it is implied that the principle way for women to gain their independence is to become petty capitalists, i.e. employ (probably female) domestic servants to take on the tedious work they wish to reject themselves.

## Reinforcing the System

If the Womens Movement were to accept either of these two tenets it would immediately cease to be a force for genuine change - it would simply be covering up for the system as it exists at the moment and would actually reinforce that system. This is seen clearly in France where wages for housework have been introduced as part of the policy of strengthening the family to shoulder the effects of the economic crisis (e.g. cuts in education etc.). The starting point for a correct approach to the problem of domestic labour should be to criticise its individual and practised nature. Only in this way

can the struggle of the housewife be directed beyond the limited horizon of the home and family. As long as women are orientated towards the family they will be fighting in a prison cell instead of on the barricades. Just as many workers remain prisoners of the system which exploits them because they see all problems simply in terms of the conflict they experience at their place of work, so women, if their perspective is determined by their role in the family, will be unable to see how their oppression and exploitation connects with a wide variety of other political problems.

## Socialisation of Housework

Does all this mean that the womens movement has nothing to offer the housewife but domestic slavery until "the revolution comes"? Not at all, far more effective and realistic than calling for wages for housework is the demand for the socialisation of housework. Why effective? Because the socialisation of housework is of crucial importance for moulding the type of society where male chauvinist prejudices would die a quick death. This would be facilitated by proper social rearing of children and by integrating male labour with domestic labour. The importance of taking the responsibility for children away from one or two pertains to the total liberation of humanity and especially to ending sexual repression.

The socialisation of housework is realistic because it is obvious who must pay for such socialisation, not the husband or the children but by the employers and the state. They are the ones who must provide child-care centres, canteen restaurants etc. When we know who the responsible parties are it is easy to see where the money will come from. The employers must give up more of their fat profits in taxes and the state must reconvert anti-social expenditure (such as the £80m they plan to spend on the army this year) into socially desirable expenditure.

By campaigning along these lines, the womens movement can help the housewife not only to link up with all those other forces struggling to change society, but also can give her a perspective of a completely new disalienated life-style where ownership of people (women, children, employees) by others will end.



# THE PATRIARCHAL FAMILY

We are told that the family is the basic unit of society, but is it the only or the best way we can live together? Does it actually benefit its members, or is it more destructive than we care to admit? A significant number of people would say that it is actually destructive to the individuals and relationships within it. We in Irishwomen United believe that debate on the family is crucial to the whole question of womens liberation. The increasing industrialisation of our society together with the ensuing rush to suburbia has lead to a situation in which women are probably more isolated than they have ever been.

If we do not accept that the family is actually destructive, we must admit that in many instances, this bonding together of people just does not work. The facts speak for themselves: family too often means desertion, wife battering, child battering, frustration, divorce, annulment, alcoholism, isolation, sedation, Valium, Phensic, marital rape, suicide, femicide, mental torture and silence.

## THE ENFORCED FAMILY

In the following articles we explain some aspects of the family structure as it exists in rural and suburban life. The problems are only qualitatively different – oppression is the keynote in both. The article on the single-parent family clearly illustrates the pressures that are brought to bear on women who either through chance or choice do not conform to the normal.

The family system as we know it and as enshrined in our constitution is enforced on us through lack of divorce, contraception, etc. Is this what we want? Or would we rather confront the ills which this gives rise to, and courageously explore other, freer more satisfying ways in which we can live together.

Women's rebellion, which represents a questioning of the subordination of one sex to another is one of the most radical critiques of our present society. Fairly substantial archaeological and anthropological evidence exists which indicates that the earliest families consisted of a woman and her children. Early civilisation has thus been classified as a matriarchal system.

It was only with the development of agriculture and consequently that of private property that a patriarchal system in which men became the dominant sex gradually evolved. Various explanations have been extended as to why this occurred.

One explanation suggests that it was only at this point in time that the role of the male in reproduction was understood, and that in order to secure the transfer of property to their children, men found it in their interests to dominate and suppress the sexuality of women. Before this suppression of female sexuality, there was no knowledge of the relation between sex and pregnancy.

In the original Indo-European language, there was no word for paternity. Men were ignorant that they had offspring. As private property developed, inheritance and property rights were of paramount importance. The

suppression of female sexuality thus followed. Female chastity was to be ensured at all costs whether by circumcision, chastity belts or infibulation (fastening together the labia majora by means of a ring, a buckle or a padlock)!

### Roman Law

The "patriarchal family" in which men had many wives as well as concubines preceded that of the "monogamous marriage". In the patriarchal family, the bondages of the women to the family were expressed in Roman Law as the Perpetual Tutelage of women.

This ensured that when a woman's father died, she continued to be subjected to the authority of her nearest male relation. When he died the authority was passed down the line to his nearest male relation.

### The Christian Church

With the advent of Christianity the right of guardianship was transferred exclusively to her husband. The patriarchal monogamous family in which the women became subordinated only to her husband was thus consolidated by the Christian Church. In this situation, the single woman, in legal terms, at least, retained an advantage over the married women. Society severely stigmatised her because her autonomy posed a threat to monogamous marriage.

The Roman Christian ethos expanded throughout Europe and reached England with the invasions of Caesar in 51 B.C. Ireland, however, was not

invaded and the Celtic tradition prevailed. Under Celtic law, women in Ireland enjoyed freedom unknown in other European Countries. They could choose freely who they wanted to marry, they had the right to own property even when married. When deserted, they had the right to considerable compensation.

### The position in Ireland

Women in Ireland continued to enjoy these rights until the flight of the Earls in 1601 when the Roman Christian tradition was finally consolidated in Ireland. The slave-like status of the married women enshrined in Roman Law was thus imposed on the Irish woman. Henceforth, she could acquire no property. If she inherited property it became ipso-facto her husband's. The children were his by law. If she left her husband she could take nothing with her. If he choose, he could compel her to return by law or by physical force.

### The Nuclear Family

Despite increasing pronouncements of the changing position of the married woman, she is still oppressed in modern society. Industrialisation and urbanisation have led to the emergence of the nuclear family. The nuclear family which consists of the father, mother and children, is a product of the capitalist system which needs the mother to accept sole responsibility for home and children, leaving the father free to go to work.



# The Suburban Family

Living in suburbia for most women means being a mother and a housewife. The word 'housewife' is apt: she is more married to her house than to the man she once thought it was all about. The suburban housewife is not under the same acute economic stress as her working class counterpart. However, they share many other forms of oppression, the main one being isolation.

The suburban housewife can go through days without talking to anyone except her children and when she interacts with other adults it is usually with other housewives, with whom she shares oppression and the lack of a stimulating life. Consequently the topics of conversation are limited: children, housework, neighbourhood gossip.

## Housework

In the house (where she spends most of her time) the housewife is constantly occupied by uncreative and repetitive tasks which demand maximum attention and minimum concentration. She has no lunch break or any other sort of break. Her place of work is her place of leisure. Even if she gets a couple of hours in which to relax, in the evening she cannot forget the tasks that were left undone or the list of trivialities to remember for tomorrow.

As Lee Comer remarks in her book, 'Wedlocked Women' the joke that the woman lies there planning the following day's menus while her husband makes love to her is no joke to the woman. No wonder that suburban women often end up obsessive about cleanliness. They slowly become incapable of concentrating on more mentally demanding activities.

## No Break

It has often been said that most male workers have to perform equally boring repetitive jobs. True, but what divides us from them is that the housewife cannot switch off at 6.00 p.m. with all her tasks done. Half her attention is still on her children, which usually leaves her feeling guilty because she doesn't give them enough concentrated attention.

## Childrearing

The vital importance of childrearing in our society has come to be equated with the importance of motherhood. The myth that the biological mother is the only person fit to provide the love and attention that a child needs has been successfully sold in the capitalist society. Mothers have been made to believe that they will do their children irreparable damage if they leave them in the care

of others for even a short while.

## Isolation

As the suburban woman is usually separated from the extended family, such as grandparents and aunts, she is forced to share her isolation with her young children uninterruptedly. This perpetuates their dependence on her and their resentment of her (because most of her time is spent fending them off rather than concentrating on them). No wonder that clinging, demanding, nagging children have become the norm in our society. Their entire growth and stimulation is left in the care of one woman who is herself deprived of anything that is normally associated with adulthood. She is deprived of a chance to develop her own interests, an independent income (most housewives can testify to the degradation of having to beg for extra money to cover inflation), a work-place where she can form meaningful relationships with other adults, daytime access to public places like libraries, lecture halls, pubs, etc.

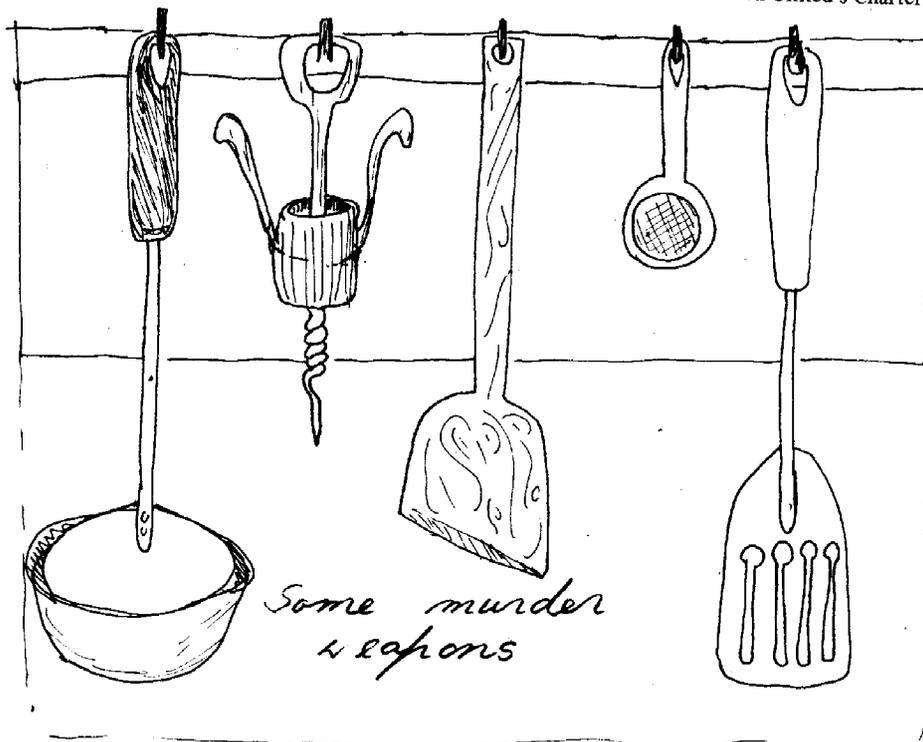
## Myth of motherhood

The women's campaign must obviously centre around the demand for state-provided child care facilities and socialisation of housework (as laid out in Irishwomen United's Charter).

Along with this campaign we must explore among ourselves the possibilities for co-operative child-care (which has been seen to work successfully in the USA and on the Continent), where several families care collectively for their children operating in shifts. Thus the myth of motherhood gets exploded and we can show that young children actually benefit from close loving relationships with adults other than their mother and that women when they are allowed to fulfil themselves outside their function as housewife and mother, become happier and more interesting both as people and as mothers.

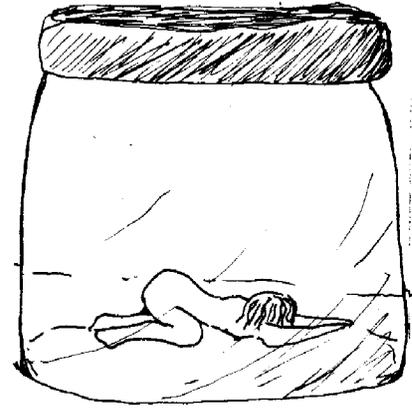
## THE AVERAGE DAY OF A MIDDLE CLASS HOUSEWIFE

- 8.00 Rise - Change/dress children
- 8.20 Prepare breakfast
- 8.30 Eat - feed children
- 8.50 Wash children - on 'potty' etc.
- 9.00 Breakfast dishes & clean kitchen
- 9.15 Vacuum living room/bedroom
- 9.30 Play with children - read books with them, etc.
- 10.30 Make beds
- 10.45 Go shopping locally; stop in park for 15-30 mins - children on swings/play ball/ etc.
- 12.00 Load washing-machine
- 12.05 Hang out nappies done previous night.
- 12.15 Personal reading/writing letters/playing with children
- 1.00 Prepare lunch
- 1.15 Eat - feed children
- 1.40 Children on potty/changed etc.
- 2.00 Children down for nap. Read - listen to music - generally potter around - read newspaper brought in at lunchtime - hang out laundry in yard.
- 3.00 Get children up - generally watch children playing - sometimes in park/strand/back-yard.
- 5.00 Prepare dinner - set table
- 5.30 Eat - feed children
- 6.00 Children on potty/changed
- 6.15 Chat with Owen - things during day/bills/etc.
- 6.40 Dinner dishes washed - clean different part of flat e.g. bath tub/kitchen floor - on rotation basis.
- 7.15 Put nappies of the day in washing machine
- 7.30 Children bathed/prepared for bed
- 8.00 Story-time and bed-time for children
- 8.15 Cup tea - chat with Owen - music - write letters - reading - discussing - printing photographs - "Camera Club" once a week
- 11.00 Cup tea - 11.30 retire



# Home at the range

## -the Irish Countrywoman



### THE RURAL FAMILY

One of the greatest problems in Ireland to-day is the decline in rural populations and the exodus of young people, particularly women, to urban areas. In our own fight for liberation one of the biggest obstacles we face is traditional attitudes concerning the role of women, firmly entrenched, through being accepted for so long. A look at the traditional role of women in rural Ireland will perhaps throw some light on many of the reasons for the former and help us cope with the latter.

#### Position of Women in Rural Life

Until the comparatively recent industrial boom of the fifties, Ireland was a predominantly rural society with strong ties of tradition and attachment to familiar ways of life. Sex roles were clearly defined and, for the most part, unquestioned. Many studies point to the subservient position of women in Irish life. Indeed women were looked on as mindless creatures –

all the major decision of their life being made for them by men i.e. who they should marry, where they could live, what they could own, etc.

#### The dowry system

The dowry and matchmaking systems are among the more extreme examples of the subservient position of women. When a girl reached marriageable age, her father set about making a suitable match for her, and a girl's marriage prospects depended not on her personal characteristics, but on the size of the dowry her father could pay to her prospective father-in-law. Girl children were therefore regarded as a future drain on the family's resources and a man with a houseful of daughters was considered unlucky. (Indeed in India today where the dowry system still exists and 90% of marriages are arranged, the birth of a daughter is regarded as bad luck. The psychological effect on women, of their very existence being a drain on family finances, need hardly be underlined.

#### Inheritance

The inheritance system made male succession automatic, except where there were no male children. In the latter case, female heirs were expected to make a suitable match so that the farm could be taken over by a male. An inheriting son was expected to postpone his own marriage until all his sisters were matched and doweries provided for them.

If a suitor couldn't be found for a girl by the time the heir eventually married, she was expected to disappear and become a priest's housekeeper. If she remained at home she was often regarded as a kind of failure and a nuisance by the family. Very often by the time an inheriting son was free to marry he was in his forties or fifties. The matchmaking system



often resulted in a marriage between an older bachelor and a young girl whose main function was to provide an heir to the farm.

#### Male authority

Within the farm family, the father was patriarch. Brody, in a study of Clare and West Cork in 1971, points out that all of the recurrent work on the farm was carried out by women – such as milking cows, all housework and the more unexciting aspects of farmwork. The winter "rest" – much of the work being seasonal – was the male prerogative. Women were expected to carry out a monotonous round of household duties, child-bearing and rearing, throughout the year with no respite and little help or co-operation from the men. Male authority in the house was unquestioned and while a husband might consult his wife on many issues, formal equality was

almost never acknowledged. Remote from the children, particularly the girls, he was treated with an awed and sometimes terrified respect. Young girls learned to be subservient to their brothers, to put the needs and wishes of the males in the household first – even polishing their shoes on a Saturday night.

#### Egg Money

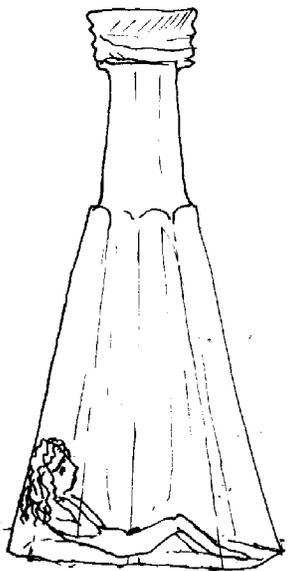
Women did, however, retain one vestige of independence, the income from farmyard enterprises such as poultry. This "egg money" was an important psychological mainstay for many women – it was the only "independence" they had. Daughters were often given a "start" in Dublin or London with some of the egg money.

#### Social Activity

In traditional Irish life women were excluded from most social activities and at best could be said to be on the periphery of a male-centred society. Because of the physical isolation of many farms, very often the woman's only outing was to Mass on a Sunday. The men went to fairs and markets, men went to the pubs, men went "rambling", even shopping; while the women stayed at home to darn socks and set the breakfast table for the morning.

#### Change

Though many of these extremes of male domination have disappeared or changed today and more enlightened attitudes are beginning to prevail, it is against this background of a male-dominated society that Irishwomen, particularly those in rural areas, today find themselves. Women have protested, they have left areas where traditional attitudes still prevail and moved to the cities. Are things any better there, many would say no – the biases are not as obvious. We've still got a long way to go.





## THE SINGLE WOMAN – THE NUCLEAR THREAT

The single woman is superficially the most independent woman in Irish society.

If she has reached the age of 21 unmarried, no parent is responsible for her, no husband owns her. Society and the State, however, both consider this an undesirable state of affairs: if we are to believe the popular media, she is single only because she hasn't been lucky enough to "catch a husband".

Her luck is strongly influenced if not actually determined, by her clothes, cosmetics, sex-appeal, shampoo or whatever the latest husband-bait is. Not all women are victims of this propaganda: a liberation woman may not want a permanent relationship with one man: she may prefer her own, or women's, or various men's company; she may prefer to have a baby of her own than a husband of her own. Unfortunately, at this point, we must stop and face the realities.

### Lack of contraception

In this country, at this time, the sale of contraceptives is illegal. The single woman's choice, therefore, goes back a step, from the position of having a sex life of her own choosing, and deciding whether or not she wants a child, to a decision whether or not to have a sex-life at all, and risk unwanted pregnancy – an invidious choice! If we examine these latter two options, and their consequences, we shall see that society, by its attitudes, and the State, by its oppressive legislation, totally circumscribe the life of the single woman in Ireland, so that her "independence" is largely illusory.

### Vocation to marry

Many single women choose not to have sexual intercourse at all for fear of pregnancy; the lack of availability of contraception leads many of them to accept the Catholic Church's attitude to this question: that it is a woman's "vocation" to-marry-and-have-children, that contraception is evil, that sexual intercourse is a reward for getting married. These ideas are shouted at them from the pulpits of the churches they still faithfully attend. The media reinforce this propaganda.

The combination of these forces with sexual frustration, leads them to join the unhappy throng of husband-seekers who subscribe to the philosophy behind that propaganda. They appoint themselves expose as much of their bodies as society tells them they may, and sell themselves to the highest male bidder.

### Shop soiled goods

If, on the other hand, a single woman opts for Vatican Roulette then this society of ours really has her where it wants her, whether she conceives or not. In rural society at least, if not also in the cities, if a woman has a sexual relationship with a man which does not end in marriage, then she will be rejected as "shop soiled goods" and stigmatised as a "spinster" for the rest of her days.

If she gets pregnant, it is probably, in this society, the worst thing that could happen to her. What happens most often in such a situation is that the woman loses her job – there is, of course,

no protective legislation; she is rejected by her family; it is quite common for siblings, not just parents, to throw the girl out on the street.

### No abortion

If the mother and the father of the child do not want to marry the woman has two options initially; to terminate the pregnancy, or to give birth to this unplanned child. There are no facilities for obtaining an abortion in this country, so the pregnant woman must go to England, if this is her choice. The fierce hostility to abortion, the denial that a woman has any right to control her own body in this matter, frequently makes the abortion an unnecessarily traumatic experience.

### No income during pregnancy

If she decided to give birth to the baby, and has been unlucky enough to have lost her job on account of her pregnancy, she will probably have to live on her wits until the last six weeks of her pregnancy, when she may try to live on the £6.55 per week generously provided by the State for six weeks before and six weeks after confinement – she also gets £4 from the State when her baby is born – a life-supporting income that!

Then comes her next Hobson's choice – to put the child up for adoption or to raise the child herself. 70% of children born in this country to women who are not married are placed for adoption, largely because most of these women have no real alternative. Raising the child

herself is a daunting task no creches, no child-care facilities, no tax relief to engage someone to care for the child. You have to be a man to need a housekeeper in this country; after all, if you are a woman, you should BE a housekeeper, shouldn't you?

One of the cruellest punishments inflicted by Society on the woman in this situation is society's punishment of the child. The child is described as illegitimate. In Law she/he is described as *filius nullius* (child of no one). The child has no legal right to a name at birth; the mother's name may be acquired only by usage. The "illegitimate" child enjoys almost none of the rights or privileges of the "legitimately" conceived child.

### Control our bodies

This dismal litany has to stop somewhere. Celibate churchmen, with sterile minds and archaic ideas must stop dictating to Irishwomen whether, when and how they may express their sexuality. The government must stop toadying up to those autocratic sexist bishops and face up to their responsibilities. They are our elected representatives, not altar-boys; it is time they listened to the voice of half the electorate, and recognised that women are human beings, that they have a right to determine and express their own sexuality. They have a right to control their own bodies, that parenthood is a social function, and should be legislated for accordingly, regardless of the marital status of the parents.

# "I've Started Another Pregnancy"

"Really Mrs. Smith, you will have to do something". The apparently anxious voice of the doctor was falling on deaf ears, as I knew that Mrs. Smith was a very religious person. "This is your eighteenth child", continued the doctor, "and we cannot be responsible for your health any longer. You're 42 years of age and I would love you to see your inside. Please tell your husband I want to see him when he visits you today."

of modern living.

Her husband was, to be fair, a working man, but that's as far as it went. His job, he thought (and she in fact thought so too), was to provide the money for the home. They never went out together, as finance was too low, and he thought she had enough to do in the home with the children. She had them as that was her responsibility. That is not to say that he didn't avail of all social activities himself.

## Pregnancies: A Blessing from God

Being in the bed next to Mrs. Smith in the large maternity hospital, I couldn't help but overhear. I have known Mrs. Smith a long time, and on occasions she has been of great comfort to me in my pregnancies. She was a genuine sincere person, a lady in my esteem but like us all she had conflicting confused religious morals which she followed ardently under the illusion that pregnancies were a blessing from God. I would go along with that to a certain extent, but you must take into account that Mrs. Smith had sixteen of her eighteen children born alive, lived in a two bedroomed Corporation house. How she existed is a phenom-

## Maternity Smock

I don't know the outcome of Mr. Smith's appointment with the doctor, concerning his wife's health. Wholly concerned on his part I'm sure. But Mr. and Mrs. Smith never discussed such things. He never knew she was pregnant until she started to show, and put on a maternity smock about the fourth month. "Are you pregnant?" he'd ask then. "Yes", she'd say, and the discussion ended with that.

Exactly five months after that conversation between her and the doctor, I bumped into Mrs. Smith down at the school. I was in a frightened, confused state of mind myself.

## God is Good

"Oh, Mrs. Smith, I'm glad I met you."  
"What's wrong, Jean," she said, "you look very worried?"  
"I'm terribly upset. I've started on another pregnancy and I don't know what to do".  
"But Jean, my darling, how many is this for you?"  
"Nine", I replied.  
"Sure you're only thirty years of age, Jean", she said. "Look at it this way. I know your means are low and that things are hard for you. But look at me. I was the same and I've survived. God is good, Jean. Trust in Him. He will reward you".  
I walked slowly up the road with her as she tried to comfort me, but this time I got no solace from her words.

Three days later, I met Mrs. Smith again, this time in the bus going into town. "Hello Jean" she said vaguely, and as we conversed on the way into town, I noticed she wasn't her usual self.

"What's wrong?" I asked. "Are you not well?" She did look very pale.

"Remember when I met you the other day at the school?" she said. "Well, you were so upset, I didn't like to mention it to you, but I'm expecting again myself".

## The Pawn

I gasped. I couldn't believe it. For once I couldn't say anything. She continued, "Life, Jean, is indeed hard. I haven't got enough to get them a dinner today. I'm on my way now into the pawn; maybe they'll give me a few bob on these things", she pointed to the parcel she had.

Exactly nine months later myself and Mrs. Smith were back in the same hospital. We both had baby boys.

## Dead

Three years later, Mrs. Smith was dead.

She had eighteen children and the Church nor state never cared. Reserved and tied to the kitchen sink, conditioned and manipulated to believe that this was her cross in life, and she was to carry it bravely.

## Injustices to Women

This story is true and I could relate many more like it, some even worse, in this large suburban corporation estate. The injustices inflicted upon these women cuts me to the very heart.

I would ask any one of these members of the Dail or Church to come into any of these homes and take over for one day the woman's role in the home. I wonder would things be changed then.

In the meantime it's very hard living in the realities of this harsh and cruel world, and to suffer the indignities inflicted upon us by the low mentality of those governing our church and state.

The doctor who told me I was pregnant again at this time, aged thirty two and about to give birth to my eleventh child, said to me "Are you going to keep this up? Thirty two years of age and have a look at you. You're in bits.

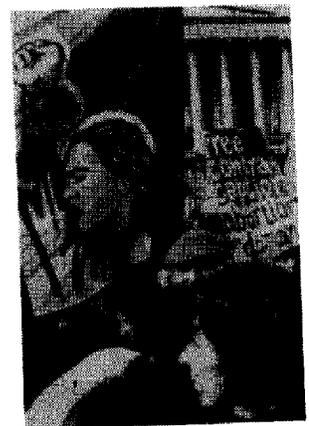
I'd love to show you your inside". I wasn't really sure what he was talking about. I couldn't figure out what he meant. "There's a big hole left in you now", was how he explained it to me.

## Daughters Take Over

What happened Mrs. Smith's family, you want to know?

One girl left the factory and the other left school early to take over running the home. As soon as the next two girls were of age, they left school early and took over, letting the first two go out again into the factory.

They were women, after all!



# LETTERS PAGE

Sylvia Boole,  
ADAPT,  
P.O. Box 673,  
Dublin 4.

"May I say on behalf of Adapt that we are not a womens' organisation, but a parents organisation, and while we agree with a lot of your aims we do not agree with them all. However we can agree to differ on a few points, and we wish you well with Banshee, which we found of great interest. Subscription enclosed.

Anna Movies,  
4, Rosmeen Gardens,  
Dun Laoghaire.

"First of all I would like you to know how interesting and informative I found Banshee, and would like you to put me on your mailing list. . . Irishwomen seem always to have been so traditionally meek and submissive and have never featured in decision making outside or even inside the home. I know it was

because they were worn out having kids always had to please because of the same kids. . . but perhaps Barry Desmond had a point when he said that none of the government realized that there would be any protest (over equal pay) "

Catherine Bedaridax  
13 Rue Jacob,  
75006, Paris  
France.

"I send you all my encouragements for your struggle".

Ms. Maureen Black,  
66 Wellington Road,  
Cork.

Dear Banshee,  
I feel you are making a tactical mistake in placing abortion so high in your list of priorities before mothers and wives. Many people who would be in complete sympathy with all your other aims won't read any further.

Ms. Clare Hooke,  
Ridge House,  
Ballybrack,  
Co. Dublin.

Dear Banshee,  
It is sickening to see all the rubbishy magazines on the newspaper stalls and new ones coming out every day. It makes me sad to see girls stuffing their heads with "Honey" etc. Thanking you for Banshee.

Dear Banshee,  
Its great to see a feminist magazine at last! I was especially glad to see the Article on the Catholic Church, the oppressive nature of this institution cannot be over-emphasized.

The article on the constitutional position of women, while it makes depressing reading, was a necessary 'eye opener' for many who can drift into complacency because they are not constantly reminded of the utterly degrading position of women in Ireland, after all, why not fight if we know

that we have nothing more to lose than being worth the price of a good racehorse? (£14,000, loss of 'services' case)

Sisterly greetings,  
H. Nolan.

Judy Johnson Flaherty,  
Knockauns,  
Cloonminda,  
Castlereagh,  
Co. Galway.

"I would like to have my address in the letters column of Banshee asking interested women in my area to contact me. . . . I haven't been to any Galway meetings of Irishwomen United as I live forty minutes from the city."

Nuala Feric,  
Administrator,  
Cherish,  
2, Lower Pembroke Street,  
Dublin 2.

"We have much pleasure in enclosing our subscription and wish your organisation every success, including 'Banshee'.

## BANSHEE

Most of recorded history talks about patriarchy, as if the human race was always ruled by men. But a lot of evidence from archaeology and anthropology which has come to light in this century claims that in fact the recognition and authority of the father is a fairly modern development, and that for most of its history the human race has lived by matriarchal principles.

We believe that we, as women, have a right to know our own history. We also know that most of the investigation and telling of that history will have to be carried out by women. Men like to investigate and talk about other men. The following is what we have found out about the "Banshee".

Banshee is a fairy woman. The fairies were a real Stone Age people who inhabited Northern Europe before the arrival of the Celts. They were a pastoral people who had no knowledge of agriculture. Their religion and social organization was matriarchal and they developed those magical powers and medical skills for which the witches, centuries later, were burned.

In Ireland the Fairies were probably originally the "Firbolgs", the "little people" who were the first settlers in the land, and who

retained an ancient knowledge that even their conquerers, the Tuatha de Danann, with their Iron culture and knowledge of farming could not fully understand. Some of the Fairies intermarried with the invaders, but most of them took to the swamps and outlands, where they carried on their own particular culture. Some Fairy tribes still existed in parts of Northern Europe in the seventeenth century.

The Fairies worshipped nature and studied its laws. They developed herbal medicine and hypnotism for healing, and they harnessed the forces of nature to bring about events which would seem miraculous to us now. This is what is known as magic. From their knowledge of the power and manipulation of thought-force they could communicate mentally with one another, sometimes over large distances - the process which we now call telepathy.

In accordance with matriarchal principles the women were sexually free, and could relate with honour and respect to numerous men. This is polyandry - a word almost unheard of in patriarchal society. All children were considered legitimate.

Woman was central in the religious rites of

the Fairies - being seen as the regenerator of life, biologically and psychically, and reflecting her position within the matriarchal tribe. All Stone Age religious statues depict the deity as female.

The Fairy culture, with its female religion, its fascination with psychic and natural forces, its happy attitude to sexuality and its knowledge of medicine, was carried forward and developed in witchcraft by the people of mediaeval Europe. And as such it still survives today - in spite of many centuries of persecution from a masculist authoritarian Church and State.

Whereas patriarchal myth blows up man so much, that Adam even gives birth to Eve, anything to do with the female and matriarchal culture is denigrated. Patriarchal description of the Fairies has reduced their stature to about three inches, their magical powers to flimsy wings that allow them to hop around, and the Banshee is described as a ghost who wailed at the death of nobility. In fact, the fairy woman was no ghost, and the matriarchal culture to which she belonged was egalitarian, and regarded every human being as noble.

The Fairies saw death, not as loss, but as part of the natural cycle of birth, death and rebirth. They believed that after death the soul was reincarnated on a higher plane, and that the letting out of emotion at that crucial time would allow the soul to pass more easily to its next life.

If we express ourselves, our loves, our hates, and our desires at this time we will more quickly bring about the way of life that we want. Thus Banshee cries the death of oppression and the rebirth of Woman.

# FATHER CHURCH

## Female Saints.

Who are the females whom the Churches hold up as an example to women? The cornerstone is sex and the denial of it, from Mary the virgin mother through Maria Goretti the virgin martyr, to all the virgin nuns who reach the sainthood.

'Saint Maria Goretti, a modern virgin martyr', is the title of a typical pamphlet to be found in Catholic churches. Maria's life, we are told, "will be an inspiration to modern girls. In their hands lies the future of mankind".

What must the modern girl do in order to preserve the glorious future of man?

The language used to describe the event which led to the consecration of this twelve year old girl, Maria, compares with the script of a third-rate pornographic film. The scene is entitled, appropriately, 'The Agony'. On a hot summer day, we are told, in the upstairs room of a small peasant dwelling a youth repeatedly asks Maria to "surrender herself to him". She replies "No, no, no, it would be a terrible sin and you will go to hell. God forbids it". The maddened youth draws his stiletto and threatens her, hoping to overcome her resistance by fear. (Men, sex, surrender and fear are all linked together).

At last he lays hands upon her, where upon the glorious virgin and martyr, who is all of twelve years old, makes her final refusal: "You may kill me, but you shall not have me". (Such language for one so young).

"Blinded by fury he drives the stiletto again into her body as though she were a piece of wood". (The sexual imagery testifies more to Church attitudes than to literary skill). Maria falls bleeding to the floor, gathering her garments about her. She is modest to the end.

The papal decree, making this female child a saint, states: "She had this choice put before her, either to save her life with the loss of her virtue, or to preserve her virtue with the loss of her life".

Thus should the modern girl save the modern man. Naturally, she wouldn't dream of saving herself by a well-placed kick in a sensitive area. That makes for neither good example nor sainthood.

Bernadette of Lourdes and Catherine Laboure share a common background with Maria Goretti. They knew not man, in peace or in violence. Bernadette and Catherine both had visions of the Virgin mother, in which the immaculate conception figured heavily. Both subsequently faded silently into the nunnery, leaving priests and bishops to take over the show.

Every woman should be a virgin mother or a silent nun. The first is impossible to attain, and the best we can do is bear babies before rushing off to the alter rails to be churched. Having dutifully produced like animals, we must go and be cleansed in sacramental ritual. The Bride of the Brute must become again the Bride of

Christ. Better still, be a Bride of Christ without giving birth at all — if you have survived beyond the age of twelve to make the choice.

The ultimate model is Theresa of Lisieux, patron saint of the missionaries. The pamphlet tells us that she had a great longing to be a priest, which of course she couldn't be as she was only a woman, so she did the next best thing — Theresa became a nun and prayed for priests.

She was nonetheless not devoid of ambition. "You know I have always longed to be saint", she told her mother superior, and she turned to the Scriptures for guidance. There she found the words "Whosoever is a little one, let him come to me".

Undeterred by the male pronoun, Theresa wrote "I must be little and become ever smaller", and embarked on the path to female sainthood. How did she achieve her elevation? When the other nuns splashed her in the laundry, she offered up this minor irritation as a gift to God. When an



old nun rattled her rosary beads, the pamphlet continues, Theresa heard the rattling as music and listened to it joyfully. In the dining room she concealed her tastes so well that the cook would say, when there was anything left over "Sister Theresa will eat it". Finally she died, at a young age, of tuberculosis. On her death bed she was loth to take expensive medicine, succumbing eventually to the temptation with the suggestion that any unused medicine should be sent to the priests in far-off missions.

Thus, we are told, she became a saint — by getting splashed in the laundry, listening to rattling rosary beads, eating all the leftovers and leaving some medicines behind. Theresa, the meek, self-effacing nun did not even need a vision. Self-abnegation and self-denial is the contemporary condition of female sainthood.

*Virgin mother, virgin martyr, virgin — a woman must choose. For men, the path of power, fame and bright thought.*

## *A Modern Virgin Martyr*



# OUTREACH

## Women in other countries

### INDIA

Parents in Punjab will be liable to imprisonment and fine if they add a third child to their family. A law to this effect is being prepared. A similar measure has been contemplated by Haryana State but there is a concession to parents having two daughters — they can have another try for a son.

Maharashtra state has already announced that it is considering compulsory sterilisation after the birth of two children. However, there is no talk of compulsion in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya, and Rajasthan the four states where the birth rate is the highest and the standard of living is the lowest in India.

### ENGLAND

A British MP, Nicholas Fairbairn, has called for tax fines for people who in future have more than two children. He urged the Government to take active steps to encourage the responsible limitation of reproduction and to urge other governments to do likewise.

Mr. Fairbairn warned that resources were insufficient to support any increase in the world's population. "It is essential that drastic measures be taken to reduce unintended reproduction for without that, there will be no life worth living in two generations. If everybody had only the number of children they wanted or could afford to conceive, the problem would solve itself."

He suggested worldwide distribution of the Pill; fiscal penalties for having more than two children; financial incentives for vasectomy; and if necessary, centralised

population control with compulsory sterilisation of males who refuse to exercise self-control in reproduction.

### AMERICA

The safest form of contraception for women is the diaphragm or condom, with abortion as back-up in case of failure, according to a report published in February by Dr. Christopher Tietze of the Population Council in New York.

The pill for women over 25 is reckoned to be twice as dangerous as relying totally on an early abortion as a method of contraception.

### GERMANY

West German women now only need to take one Pill to be protected for a year against unwanted pregnancy. The Pill, which must be placed by a doctor in the womb, releases daily doses of progesterone through a plastic membrane. The maker Chemie Gruenthal, said the main advantage is that it has fewer harmful side effects because it works locally and can be removed when pregnancy is desired.

### ITALY

A referendum to repeal the law against abortion will be held in Italy in mid-June. Although abortion is a crime, punishable by prison sentence in that country, statistics published by The University of Pavia show that Italy has 1½ million abortions per year, or one for every live birth.

Statistically, this means more than two in the lifetime of every Italian woman.

One aspect of the problem which most incenses the feminists is the fees demanded



by backstreet practitioners and doctors for illegal abortions. Some doctors, they say, charge as much as £500 a time.

### NORTHERN IRELAND

As far as thousands of working women in the North are concerned, equality of pay is a joke, the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement says. Most women in the North work in trades like textile manufacturing, hair-dressing and in small shops, where there are few male workers to compare wages with and where the equal pay legislation at present has little value.

In April 1975, the new earnings survey showed that the average gross weekly earnings of all adult male employees in all industries and services was £53.25 — in April 1974 it was £41.54. In 1975, the average wage for adult women was £33.76. Last year this was £24.70.

The WRM appealed to women workers to apply for union membership to protect their rights to equal pay.

### IRAN

The Shah of Iran recently ordered Iranian women to celebrate International Women's Day not on 8 March, like the rest of us,

but on 27 February, the day he granted them the vote. The Shah's sister, Princess Ashraf claimed at the United Nations International Womens Year Conference in Mexico that Iranian women have now gained full freedom and the ability to participate in political life. But the two political parties have been dissolved into the new Resurrection Party, subscription to which is obligatory. Protest is met with arrest and torture by the political police SAVAK. Amnesty International estimates the number of political prisoners at 45,000. Some 4000 of these are women.

The average female wage in industry is 30 rials (20) per day, half to one third of the male wage. 30,000 women still weave carpets by hand for 10 - 15p per day, and 60% of women who work in the agricultural sector earn about 20p per day.

80% of Iranian women are illiterate — in the countryside this figure is higher. In law, fundamental inequalities exist between men and women. The man is very definitely the patriarch in the family — he can marry more than one wife, and his testimony in any dispute holds twice as much weight as the woman's. A wife cannot even travel without her husband's permission.

# RUMBLINGS

## IT'S BEAUTIFUL — BUT IS IT ART?

On Thursday, March 11th theatrical history was made at the Project Arts Centre. A luncheon audience demanded an 'encore'. The occasion? The final performance of WOMAN'S EYE VIEW, a feminist revue devised and presented by the Trinity College Women's Liberation Group. As the clapping and shouting continued, the cast on stage exchanged desperate glances. What were we to do? We had permitted ourselves to hope that audiences would not be altogether hostile; we had dared to anticipate that we might even succeed in pleasing some of our sympathizers; but never in our wildest dreams had the possibility of an audience asking for an 'encore' occurred to any of us. We were unprepared — and totally non-plussed. In a moment of inspiration our guitarist struck out a few chords of a song known to most of us, and after a couple of rousing choruses of 'They ain't gonna bind our minds no more', we managed to extricate ourselves from the situation with fairly good grace and retired behind the wings to

collapse with relief. It was all over! The irony of those final moments seemed in retrospect a fitting climax to a show which from the start had been characterised by curious contradictions.

### Make-up

Take the make-up. Our Women's Group had never discussed the question of make-up — and we had never consciously realized that most of us never wear any. So it was a strange experience to sit in front of the dressing-room mirrors, watching each other applying make-up (with an astonishing degree of skill and dexterity!) and see familiar faces transformed before our very eyes into an image of the women each one of us might have been had we never become involved in Women's Liberation and opted out of conventional ways of 'being a woman'. The mask donned for performances intended to communicate a feminist message, gave us a glimpse of each other (and ourselves) as women still belonging to a world whose values we were attacking. It was a fascinating experience and showed us what an interesting exercise it can be for the members



of a Women's Liberation Group to confront each other in make-up and to discuss the thoughts and emotions this evokes.

### Working collectively

We learned many other things too, like how to work together and co-operate in a genuinely collective way. The task we had set ourselves was a straight forward one — to communicate a feminist message in as entertaining and persuasive a manner as possible. From the beginning we viewed it as a political and a practical matter, and not primarily (or, it occurs to me now, even incidentally) as an aesthetic one. This fact — which we had not consciously grasped — was forcibly brought home to us by an incident at one of the rehearsals. A dispute broke out regarding the conclusion and the implications of one of the sketches. To the amazement of the person in charge of lighting (a professional) used to the theatrical ways of going about things and expecting the 'director' to step in and decide the matter!), the problem was resolved by having recourse to a fifteen minute debate and a vote! Not, it would seem, the standard procedure for settling artistic questions, albeit a democratic one. It is perhaps characteristic of the whole enterprise that no other way of dealing with the situation should occur to us. There WAS no director. No one individual had ultimate authority or control. Throughout, it was a question of individuals spontaneously taking responsibility for things that they saw needed to be done.

### Poems, songs, readings . . .

Our material represented an amalgamation of items

contributed by different members of the group — poems, songs and readings which had impressed themselves on peoples' minds as a particularly forceful or apt expression of aspects of women's experience. The revue provided an ideal opportunity to share these with each other and to communicate them to a wider audience. Sketches were evolved by acting out and incorporating ideas that just occurred to us as we went along. Like a hoard of magpies, we raided wardrobes, shoe cupboards and the Women's Centre for costumes and props. And throughout the entire enterprise we were getting to know each other better; we were learning what strong ties develop between a group of people motivated by the same ideals and working together on a project to which they are totally committed. As we enthusiastically (if not altogether melodiously) sang our way through 'Move on Over', we understood — or rather experienced — what solidarity and sisterhood can mean. Above all, we now know how exhilarating it can be, and how important for self-confidence, for women to succeed in carrying through a group project completely without male intervention or assistance.

We hope that our audiences enjoyed our revue; we hope that we communicated to them something of our way of seeing things; we hope that they too shared in our sense of solidarity and commitment. If we succeeded in conveying any of this, then I think we also managed to learn something at least about political theatre, and what a valuable role drama can play in furthering the cause of Women's Liberation and in reaching out to our sisters.

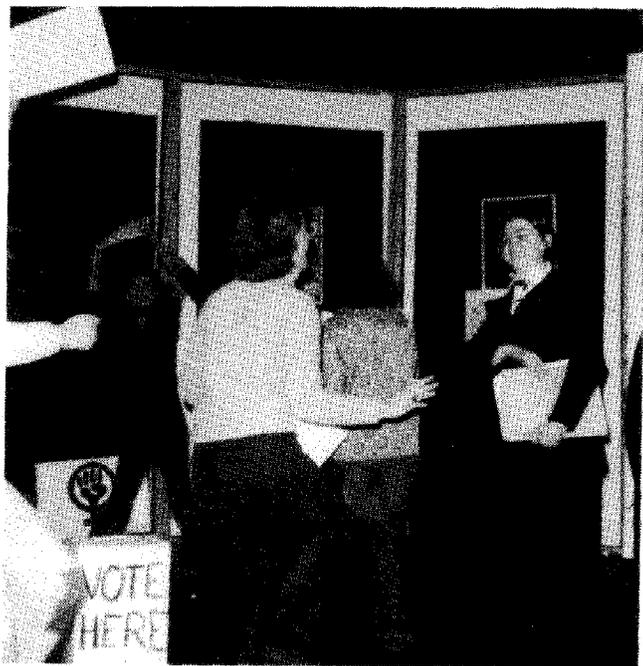
## MORE PUBS TO BOYCOTT

DOLLYMOUNT INN, Dollymount — Women not served at all  
BLACK SHEEP, Coolock — Women not served at all  
FAGAN'S BAR, Upr. Drumcondra Rd. — No Pints served to women in Loung and Bar exclusive to males

### — AND A CHIPPER . . . . .

For the dubious pleasure of parting with 20p for a single and 15p for a portion of beans after 9 p.m. at DI MASCIO'S in MARLBOROUGH STREET, you'll have to have a male in tow. Dogs and pushcars are not allowed at any time and after 9 p.m. the axe falls on "unaccompanied ladies".

Are they afraid we'll attack the long ray!





# IRISH WOMEN UNITED CHARTER

## PREAMBLE:

At this time, the women of Ireland are beginning to see the need for, and are fighting for liberation. This is an inevitable step in the course of full human liberation. Although within the movement, we form diverse groups with variant ways of approaching the problem, we have joined together around these basic issues. We pledge ourselves to challenge and fight sexism in all forms and oppose all forms of exploitation of women which keep them oppressed. These demands are all part of the essential right of women to self-determination of our own lives — equality in education and work; control of our own bodies; an adequate standard of living and freedom from sexist conditioning. We present these demands as the following women's charter.

## 1 THE REMOVAL OF ALL LEGAL AND BUREAUCRATIC OBSTACLES TO EQUALITY:

1 i.e. with regard to tenancies, mortgages, pension schemes, taxation, jury service, equal responsibility for children, social welfare benefits and hire purchase agreements.

2 The right to divorce.

The Constitution should be reviewed with a view to examining the role of women and updated to eliminate discrimination against women.

## 2 FREE LEGAL CONTRACEPTION:

1 State financed birth-control clinics.

2 The right to a free, legal and safe abortion.

## 3 THE RECOGNITION OF MOTHERHOOD AND PARENTHOOD AS A SOCIAL FUNCTION WITH SPECIAL PROVISION FOR:

1 State support for programmes implementing the socialisation of housework, i.e. community laundries, kitchens, eating places etc.

2 State provision of an adequate place to live, irrespective of sex, age, number of children and marital status.

3 The provision of local authority, free of charge, twenty-four-hour nurseries, giving every satisfaction in respect of hygiene and education; to be staffed by trained personnel and under the control of the communities in which they are located.

## 4 EQUALITY IN EDUCATION— STATE-FINANCED, SECULAR, CO-EDUCATIONAL SCHOOLS WITH FULL COMMUNITY CONTROL AT ALL LEVELS, SPECIFICALLY:

1 An end to enforced conditioning of sex roles through curriculum, teaching methods and materials (i.e. textbooks, games etc.)

2 The provision of local pre-school centres for all desiring to use them

3 An end to segmentation of education, to be replaced by fully comprehensive second and third level schools, incorporating both technical and academic learning.

4 Ending of discriminatory barring from particular courses traditionally relegated to men; encouragement for women to enter these courses through programmes of reserved places, etc.

5 Funding and encouragement of a Women's Studies Programme at second and third level.

6 Provision of free creches on campuses

7 Provision of a women's centre on campuses

8 Equal access to further education for all women, regardless of age or marital status.

## 5 THE MALE RATE FOR THE JOB WHERE MEN AND WOMEN ARE WORKING TOGETHER:

Where the labour force is wholly female, the jobs done by these women should be upgraded and a national minimum wage implemented, linked to the cost of living increase. We reject the use of job evaluation techniques for the purpose of negotiating pay claims.

The right of women to have access to all types of employment, including all types of skilled, and promotion regardless of marital status, pregnancy or maternity.

The right to training and re-training for all occupations including apprenticeships, and the present system of apprenticeships to be restructured. That it be compulsory for all employers to make readily available day release courses, with pay, for all employees.

Working conditions to be, without deterioration of present conditions, the same for women as for men: in addition, the institution of worker-determined flexible hours. The removal of protective legislation should not be a condition to gaining equal pay, and should be extended to include men.

The right to statutory maternity leave of twenty weeks with full net pay; additional leave with pay in cases of illness connected therewith, the right to attend pre-natal and post-natal clinics as required.

Prohibition of dismissal from employment on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity.

Employers to ensure that every effort is made to facilitate employees who are pregnant insofar as the latter's duties are concerned, the guarantee of reintegration into employment without loss of status or service, the right to further training or re-training after statutory or prolonged maternity leave, and the option for equivalent forms of paternity leave.

## 6 State provision of funds and premises for the establishment of women's centres in major population areas to be controlled by the women themselves.

## 7 The right of all women to a self-determined sexuality.

SISTERHOOD IS POWERFUL

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**Organisation:** Irish Women United

**Date:** 1976

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