

# WOMENS VIEW

Ireland's Current Affairs Quarterly

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INSIDE:  
WHAT'S YOUR UNION  
DOING FOR YOU?

*EEC Women's Rights  
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# Womens View

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**4** **Your view**  
*Letters*

**5** **News Briefs**  
*round the*  
**6** *country*

**7** **Women TDs**  
*Mairin De Burca examines*  
*their worth*



**8/9** **What's your  
Union doing  
for women?**



**10** **Health**  
*Cancer can be cured*

**11** **EEC — Ireland votes  
against women's  
rights report**



**12** **A woman's work..**  
*on the line*

**13/14** **The Long Dull Summer**  
*School Hols — the working  
mother's dilemma*

**15**  
**16** **Buses...**  
*Women need them most*  
**17**

**18** **Well Women**  
*a goal to work  
for*

**21** **SFWP National  
Women's Committee**  
*Into print*

**22/23** **A History of  
Women's work**  
*by Therese Moriarty*

**24/25** **Books**  
*Fact & Fiction*

**26** **thoughts on marriage**  
*A woman's poem*

**27**



**Theatre**  
*Roles for women  
what's available*

**28** **News Briefs**  
*from around  
the world*





# letters

I would like to comment on our local Health Centres and the services they provide. In particular I refer to the two hour once a week sittings in the centres by a doctor. Can it possibly be said that they provide a service to a mother with a sick child?

Firstly, one is supposed to have an appointment. So if your child gets sick on Tuesday you can worry about it until the following Monday. On attending one then finds out that if the child requires a prescription the doctor on duty cannot write one — Health Board regulations — and advises you to go to your local GP.

We are told on leaving our maternity hospitals that our new born infants can have this six week check-up with the doctor in the local clinic. This suits the mothers by avoiding the problem of travelling into town or arranging for someone to mind the other children. Unfortunately the service provided is far from complete.

On a recent occasion a mother whose child had developed dermatitis was told that she would have to bring the child back to the hospital. Was this really necessary? Surely a doctor can treat infantile dermatitis or was it because she would have to write a prescription?

The Health Centres do provide some excellent services for young infants, for example immunisation and development checks. However the service is severely limited and one gets the impression that they are prevented from providing services which will cut across the activities of the prescription issuing GP.

Why not a follow up to our

very good maternity hospital services by providing a qualified paediatrician for each area, calling to the homes of new born infants, especially first time mothers?

Health Centres could form the basis for a wide ranging range of community health services. However given the present attitudes of the medical profession we are not likely to see this development for quite some time.

Rita Walsh,  
70 Woodview Heights,  
Lucan, Co. Dublin.

I have just read **Womens View** for the first time — the Spring edition 1981. It is refreshing to find such a no-nonsense magazine with short and to the point informative articles.

The one on Hiroshima was of particular interest to me as I believe that women must become involved in the protest against the manufacture and deployment of nuclear weapons if the world is to be spared a repeat of the tragedy suffered by the innocent women and men of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and indeed still being suffered by their children.

My only disappointment in reading **Womens View** was in the article entitled "Breast Self-Examination". Why must we always assume that the expert, the professional, the doctor is male? — "She should ask *him* to teach her how to do it herself". — The time-honoured sexist scenario of helpless female being patronisingly rescued by suited, or white-coated, male, as portrayed in most television advertisements.

Language is probably the most subtle form of

discrimination against women and so demands our special attention to ensure that we don't get caught up in a male frame of reference which belittles us.

Finola Ó Siochrú  
24 Greenville Terrace,  
South Circular Road,  
Dublin 8.

I saw your book review *Who's Minding the Children* and felt compelled to draw something to the attention of your readers. I've been working in childcare for the past two years and as I am now about to set up my own playgroup, I decided to visit a few crèches in Dublin to see how they are run. Recently I visited a widely advertised crèche

The first thing that struck me was the over-powering smell of urine as I ascended the stairs, the carpet was filthy and well-worn. I was then escorted into a room which was damp and foul smelling, the whole area badly needed a coating of fresh paint, as it was very neglected. In this cold room there was an empty fireplace at the foot of which lay a small boy sleeping.

I was informed that the children played in this area but I looked in amazement as to what they played with as I saw no soft toys or games of any description.

I immediately rang the Eastern Health Board and the I.S.P.C.C. Neither of which could help because there are no laws to govern these nurseries.

I really want to expose this filthy run down place and to warn parents to think very carefully about — Who's minding the children?

Barbara Coughlan  
Dublin 12.

*I called to this creche without a prior appointment and would like to answer some of the points made in your letter.*

● *The carpet is well worn but was neither filthy nor smelly.*

● *The three rooms were bright and airy and there is the pleasant addition of a walled flat roof where the children can get the benefit of the sun.*

● *Bedding arrangements were adequate and there were lots of toys available.*

● *It is always safer to let an infant sleep without a pillow or rug to avoid smothering.*

● *As it was a warm day when I called I cannot comment on the heating arrangements for cooler weather.*

● *Most important of all, the children seemed happy and content and related well to the three childminders who were in charge.*

*We share your concern at the fact that there are no laws in this State governing children's nurseries and of course at the local Health Boards' failure to provide such facilities as a matter of course.*

Editor

The first ever Women's Arts Festival in Ireland will be held at the Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick, from September 11th to 28th 1981.

The festival is organised by the Limerick Women's Collective and all the artists and performers taking part are women. We hope that all members of the public will come and support this new and exciting venture.

The Limerick Women's Collective also needs new members — all women are very welcome to come to our meetings which take place every alternate Wednesday nights at 8.30 in the Mechanics Institute, Hartstone Street, Limerick. We are interested and involved in all issues that concern women — the festival is just one of our projects and new ideas are always welcome.

If you should require any further information or contacts regarding the above statement, please contact me at the address given below, or if time is short, Kate Hennessy at (061) 49031, or Maureen Finn at (061) 77413.

Charlotte Cryer,  
for the Limerick Women's Collective.

## Irish birth rate up

THE rate of population increase in Ireland is "possibly the most significant social statistic in modern Ireland". And despite the evidence that fertility is falling, the increase will continue because 49% of the population is under 25, and 40% under 19. Noting that the position of the Irish Government on liberalization of the divorce law and sexual equality has hardened, Charles Haughey appeared to regard any liberalization of the Constitution or laws as bargaining counters in future negotiations on Irish unity.

The vehement Irish reaction to the reference to abortion legislation in the EEC health care report has obscured other valuable proposals in it. Ireland is right to try to preserve her existing strengths, but should not try "to live in the safer pastures of former days."



## Low weight babies

ANOTHER study confirms the link between social class and birthweights. A survey of 20,698 births occurring in one year to women in the Greater Dublin area shows that the incidence of low birthweight was most common in first, fifth and subsequent births. Analysis shows that a major part of this birth order effect is attributable to social class.

## Womens Day funds for Crisis Centre

DUBLIN's Rape Crisis Centre was the beneficiary of the successful International Women's Day function in Liberty Hall.

The Committee who ran the festival, expanded this year to include all interested women's groups, put all the names of the participating organisations into a hat to decide who would receive the day's profit. The Rape Crisis Centre won the draw. The total they got after all bills were paid was £113.

## Finglas Womens Day

FINGLAS Womens Day was organised on the last Saturday in July by a group of community workers in the area who saw the need for women in this Dublin suburb to come together.

There was a full day's programme and the morning sessions dealt with further education courses for adults and women and health.

Women who had attended the local daytime classes in English and Women's Studies explained why they had 'gone back to school' and what benefit they had received. One speaker regretted that she had left school at 13 and was determined to make up for that now.

The Women and Health session was addressed by Anne Connolly of the Wellwomen Centre, and a speaker from the Family Planning Association. The lack of knowledge and understanding by many doctors when dealing with problems specific to women was raised.

The afternoon session dealt with the Womens Support Group based in Finglas South and set up by local women who found that their personal situations were greatly helped by the mutual support and understanding of the group.

Women and Politics was the topic for the evening session.

## MATERNITY LEAVE AT LONG LAST

PAID maternity leave won the force of law on 6 April when the Maternity Protection of Employees Act, 1981, came into effect, at last bringing Ireland into line with other EEC countries.

It was grudgingly conceded by the Government when the unions included it in the terms of last years National Understanding. Without this commitment and pressure from the EEC Irish women would still be struggling for it.



*Irish women would still be without maternity leave were it not for trades union pressure on the Government to bring it into effect.*

## Pointless decision

IRISH members of the European Parliament are to challenge the legitimacy of a vote which recognised that a woman has the right to procure an abortion 'as a last resort'. The Parliament also called upon the European Commission to set up a programme to reduce the number of abortions in the 10 member states partly by providing a 'broad and suitable range of reliable means of contraception'. The resolution was adopted even though the Social Affairs Commissioner, Mr Ivor Richards, had indicated that such action was outside the EEC's competence.

## Step forward

DUBLIN's Well Woman Clinic has set up Ireland's first artificial insemination service. Up to now, childless couples have been obliged to seek this kind of help in Britain.

## TOO OLD AT 27

A CASE being brought on the subject of the maximum age for staff recruitment is being followed with greater interest by very many women who are hired as temporaries by the authorities.

The case in question has been brought by Grainne O'Broin, who has been working for a local health department for ten years... as a temporary. In this instance, the maximum age for recruitment for a permanent post is 27. Nevertheless, Grainne O'Broin points out, mothers cannot return to their careers until after the age of 27 and this constitutes a form of discrimination.

If Grainne O'Broin wins her case she will earn more and enjoy security of employment, social security if she is ill and the right to a pension. As a matter of principle, hundreds of women will also benefit from the improvement in their career prospects.

The Employment Equality Agency is awaiting the outcome of the proceedings before making its comments known to the Government, which might have to amend its legislation, at least as far as it concerns the public sector.

*Job qualifications should be based on ability — not age.*



# NORTHERN IRELAND



Single parents — mainly women — face insulting queries before supplementary benefit is granted.

## SINGLE PARENTS BEING HUMILIATED

NORTHERN Ireland's single parents are facing harassment from social security snoops armed with new tough guidelines.

Miriam Titterton, a worker for single parents pressure group Gingerbread, claimed "Many of the questions now being asked are designed to intimidate and humiliate women". They are directed at the 83% of unmarried mothers who depend on state benefits for their livelihoods.

The new instruction, details of which have been leaked to the press, are supposed to be designed to help the province's growing army of investigation officers discover and bring to book the fathers of children.

Many of the queries which the DHSS officers are instructed to put to women do not contribute to this purpose. Amongst the items of personal information demanded are:-

- When was her last period?
- Did she tell the man about the pregnancy and if so where and when?
- What words were used in reply?

Miriam commented "Most women would sink through the floor if they were asked anything like that". However, Northern Ireland Council of Social Services worker Avila Kilmurray revealed that many lone mothers are asked even more offensive questions.

Avila commented "Some investigators make moral judgements on claimants. In Derry single parents have been asked "Whose bastard have you got now". Such tactics are evidently intended to be degrading and, claims Miriam, are similar to modern interrogation techniques which are designed to rob people of their personal dignity so that they will be more willing to confide in the questioner.

Although single parents are not obliged to give any of this information, many do so to end the ordeal and because of the power which the supplementary benefit employees have to arbitrarily withhold income. One single parent told us "They can stop your money just like that and even if you do get it reinstated in the end you are left broke for weeks."

## Coleraine Refuge

COLERAINE Women's Aid desperately needs funds for their refuge for battered women. Because of the penny-pinching attitude of the Northern Health and Social Services Board, the refuge can't even afford a decent pair of sheets for the eight or nine families who live there at any one time.

So voluntary worker Eleanor Buttor has decided to take her life in her hands to raise funds. In late July she will be carrying out a sponsored parachute jump at Ballykelly airport. For those who'll back Eleanor, write to Coleraine Women's Aid, 16 Lansdowne Crescent, Portrush, or telephone Portrush 823195.

## Hospital creche

CLOSURE of the creche at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast, would be tragedy for some of the devoted hospital staff. Unless they can make other arrangements for the care of their children, they will be thrown out of work by the hospital's action and losing highly trained and specialist staff must be detrimental to the running of the hospital. Not only are there 70 children attending the creche but there are over 100 on the waiting list.

There is clear interdependence between maternity rights and child care facilities on the one hand and equal pay and the end to sex discrimination on the other, said the EOC, deploring the proposed closure. Real progress cannot be made towards equality unless such practical steps are taken. Women are not second class citizens to fill in on jobs only when no one else wants to do them.

Victoria Hospital staff fight creche closure.



## Castlereagh woman wins unfair dismissal case

OLGA Kirkham of Castlereagh, Belfast, won a sex discrimination case against Austin Reed Ltd. of Donegall Place, Belfast. Olga, who was supported by the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland, complained to an industrial tribunal that she was denied the opportunity to apply for promotion.

The post of deputy manager became vacant last year; a younger male salesperson aged 27 who had less experience with the company than Kirkham was given the job. Olga Kirkham, 46, had worked for the company for six years in the early seventies and had rejoined them in 1978; she also had experience with other retailers.

The industrial tribunal found that Mrs. Kirkham was never given any opportunity to apply for the post of deputy manager and they were not satisfied that she was ever seriously considered for the post. The tribunal said the company assumed from the outset that, because she was a woman, she could not serve in the suit department.

They considered that, if a woman's alleged lack of experience was because of her sex, then to hold her lack of experience against her was to discriminate against her by reason of her sex. The tribunal awarded Olga Kirkham £500 for the injury to her feelings.

A few months after the disputed promotion had taken place, Mrs Kirkham was dismissed from Austin Reed Ltd. The tribunal found that the dismissal was unfair and awarded her compensation.

A spokesperson for the Commission said they have received many complaints from women who are passed over for promotion. The tribunal decision demonstrates that women must be given the opportunity to apply for promotion and not be overlooked just because they were women. A woman's application had to be considered in the same serious way as a man's.

The result of the recent General Election must provoke mixed feelings in most feminists. On the plus side there is the fact that the number of women elected to the new Dáil has nearly doubled — an impressive statistic until you remember that the outgoing figure was a paltry seven and that one of them — Joan Burke — was retiring from political life.

What it has shown, conclusively, is that there is an independent women's vote. That women are not bound any longer by the way in which their husbands voted and that they are not interested in Civil War politics. In the context of Irish women and their political maturity or the lack of it, this is an important step forward.

Of course not the least of the pluses is that Garret's bribe has meant that Fianna Fail has been decisively swept out of office — a gain for feminism whatever way you look at it.

The minus aspects of the election are that all of the women are members of male-dominated political parties and that none of them have shown any courage in tackling their parties on issues of urgent importance to women. When there were seven women in the Dáil not one of them staked her party membership against her principles on feminist issues (or indeed on any other issue) and although Eileen Lemass and Eileen Desmond — to take two of the strongest feminists among them — spoke strongly in private even they trooped obediently into the division lobby behind their male leaders when the Party whip was on.

The new women have, to some extent, come through the women's movement. At the very least they are aware of it and of its influences. At the very lowest level they must know that without the women's movement and its effect on Irish society over the past twelve years their battle to achieve even the little they have would have been a much more difficult and lengthy battle. Even if they now reject that movement in deference to their party's demands the movement itself goes on and continues to influence the female electorate.

*Fine Gael's bribe had a significant effect on the results.*

Already there is evidence that the women see themselves not as feminists but as elected representatives with a much wider mandate than that of nursing the women's vote. A very noble and democratic notion to be sure and fierce impressive until one realises that a woman who will not stake her career and challenge the male-dominated parties on feminist issues will hardly take to the barricades on any other issue either.

Mary Flaherty from Fine Gael, for instance, gets annoyed when someone asks her what her position is on women's issues and ignores her raging impatience to get to grips with such matters as neutrality, the North and the economy. Perhaps she has not considered that since everyone knows what Fine Gael's policies are on these issues there is not much point in asking what their most junior deputy's point of view on them is.

But, knowing that neither Fianna Fail or Fine Gael (and to a substantial extent Labour) see the oppression of women as anything but a side issue to be trotted out at election time, journalists are

*Mairin De Burca looks at the results of the general election... and the implications for the women of this country*

interested to know if the new women deputies have any plans for changing that neglect into something more progressive.

No one expects the women deputies to confine their activities to questions affecting women. Indeed the WPA would support them on the grounds of their sex if they performed no useful function in the Dáil at all. But, as it has been pointed out ad nauseam, women make up over half of the world population. Male deputies are not interested in feminist demands as a priority — even the best of them. What possible objection is there, therefore, if women make these demands their priority? How is this to be seen as categorising women or putting them into stereotyped roles within the legislature?

When male representatives show a serious interest in ending discrimination against women as a priority as well as an abiding dedication to the ending of partition or whatever, then it will be unnecessary to expect or ask of women deputies that they should put feminist demands at the top of their list. This is not to say by any means that the rest of the list should be blank and the claim that it is is simply another anti-feminist smear.

DISAPPOINTMENT at the weakness of proposals from the Irish Congress of Grades Unions led to their report being referred back to the incoming executive Committee for a programme of positive action.

From the Belfast conference of the ICTU last year the Executive Council was charged with examining ways of increasing the activity of women in the trade union movement, and to take positive steps to assist this.

But when the report came back to the 1981 conference in Cork it recommended none of the basic demands of women in the trade union movement

The minimum expected was a proposal for an annual women's consultative conference, along the lines of the Women's TUC yearly conference in Britain, and the appointment of an equality officer for Congress.

The small number of women delegates who attended the annual conference of Congress fought hard to get the report fully accepted as a policy document. As well as issuing a weak report, the Executive Council recommended that it should be taken as a discussion document.

This was strongly opposed by women delegates who insisted it be taken as policy, but that it be remitted to the incoming Executive to present a stronger programme of action at next year's annual conference.

The Federated Workers' Union of Ireland adopted a policy on women at its June annual conference. It was agreed to hold a special consultative conference on women annually during the next three years, and that this conference will elect a women's advisory committee for the union.

The debate centred on a report from the General Executive Committee with a number of additional resolutions and it was the longest debate at this year's conference.

The report dealt with obstacles to equal participation by women in the union, and

*THE ITGWU plans to set up a woman's advisory committee in the autumn as the first step in its programme of positive action on equality for women.*

*The union is committed in principle to appointing a woman equality officer, but is in no haste to do so until the advisory committee is permanently established.*

*And while reserved seats for women on the National Executive Council got a sympathetic hearing the union wants more debate before launching on the substantial rule changes that will be necessary to do this.*

*The main emphasis in the coming year is on education, training and communications. The ITGWU already has an extensive education programme for its members and aims to extend and expand these.*

*All of these moves began with last year's annual conference, which debated Equality for Women, the most all-embracing document yet produced by any union in Ireland.*

*As a follow up the ITGWU called a special delegate conference on positive action on equality. It was held last December and over 100 delegates attended, most of them women.*

*Branches were urged to hold special meetings to discuss proposals, and invited to submit written summaries of their views.*

*The report of this conference, which offers a programme for action laid the foundation of the NEC's proposals to this year's conference in Killarney.*

most of the recommendations concentrated on education. The report gave full support to special courses run for women at the Irish Congress of Trades Unions, where the FWUI usually sends the largest contingents.

No specific remedies were contained in the report for union officials to take to tackle inequality in the union or at work and speakers suggested branch sub-committees on equality and placing equality on the agenda for each meeting as simple moves in this direction.

Reserved seats for women on the Executive was curiously included under

Propaganda in the report, which rejected the idea as 'of doubtful benefit' to women members.

Resolutions called for a campaign of positive action in the union and at work, and proposed that equality clauses should be included in each agreement. Other proposals were for special training courses for women members from the union and a creche for annual conference organised well in advance instead of at the last minute.

The Working Women's Charter of the Irish Congress of Trades Unions was fully endorsed.

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# WHAT'S YOUR UNION DOING FOR WOMEN

WOMENS VIEW TAKES A LOOK AT SOME OF THE DECISIONS AT RECENT ANNUAL CONFERENCES.

# DO MEN CALL THE TUNE IN YOUR OFFICE?



## THE NUJ FIGHTS FOR EQUALITY!

NUPE, best known for its established policy of reserved seats for women on the national Executive, plans to install a women's officer as part of its development towards equality for women in work and the union.

Women make up a large part of NUPE membership, many of them working in the traditionally low paid sector of the public service.

Since 1975 NUPE has set itself on a campaign for equality as part of its re-organisation towards a more democratic union structure. That is how it set up the five reserved seats on its 26 strong Executive. Women may still stand for election for other seats on the Executive but five women are now guaranteed seats by election.

Each year the number of women on the Executive has risen. In six years the all male executive has been changed to one third female. And this year's bi-annual conference elected women as both Vice President and as Treasurer for the first time. So NUPE looks forward to having its first woman President in 1983.

A further step has been building women's advisory committees in the regions.

The first of these was set up in Northern Ireland more than a year ago. It meets twice monthly as a sub-committee of the Divisional Council which represents NUPE's 9,000 members in Northern Ireland.

About two thirds of the members in Northern Ireland are women and the advisory committee is surveying the impact of the union's equality policy among its members.

*The Equality Working Party of the National Union of Journalists was strengthened by this year's Annual Delegate Meeting which voted to bring the EWP into formal existence in the union rules.*

*But hopes of greater advances by women in the NUJ were disappointed at the rejection of a proposal to hold an annual women's conference and the setting up of a women's council. And reserved seats for women on the National Executive was rejected though a vote was passed regretting there were no women on the NEC last year.*

*The Equality Working Party which is elected each year at the ADM campaigns for and monitors women's progress towards equality in the industry. They represent the*

*union on other issues and have published a number of pamphlets giving guidelines on maternity leave, images of women and a negotiating handbook for equality.*

*It has been foremost in defending the union's policy on abortion which has caused some controversy among the Irish members.*

*The main energy for changes for women came from a conference organised by the EWP in London and where a large number of Irish women members attended.*

*Northern Irish members of the union have an equality group but so far there is none in the South. In spring the NUJ held its first education course for women only to train women branch and chapel officers.*

# Health

**IN 1976 — THE LAST AVAILABLE FIGURES — 43 WOMEN DIED FROM CERVICAL CANCER. THIS IS A FIGURE THAT COULD BE ELIMINATED. RIGHT NOW NO URGENT SMEARS ARE BEING TAKEN.**

CANCER of the cervix (neck of the womb) is the second most common form of cancer occurring in women after breast cancer. It occurs most frequently in women between the ages of 35 and 65 years. The immediate cause of this cancer is not known, but the disease is rare virgins and the incidence rises with the number of pregnancies.

Since the neck of the womb can be easily examined, cancer of this organ can be fairly easily detected at an early stage. It is a slow growing cancer so the sooner it is detected the greater likelihood there is of a cure. When it is treated early three out of four cases of cancer of the cervix can be permanently cured.

The cancer can be detected by a 'smear' test. This involves taking a smear of secretions inside the woman's vagina and from the neck of the womb and placing them on a glass slide. It is easy, quick and completely painless. The glass slide is sent to a laboratory where it is examined by a pathologist. The result of the test is sent to the woman's doctor or clinic.

This test will often reveal cancer before there are any external signs and before it has had a chance to spread. Other non-cancerous conditions may be discovered that need treatment. But a single test that shows no cancer is not a guarantee that cancer will not develop in the future. The smear test should be repeated regularly every one or two years.

The most important symptom of this cancer is any unusual bleeding or blood stained discharge from the

vagina. It is NOT normal for bleeding to occur between the usual monthly. Nor is it normal to bleed after sexual intercourse or after a bowel movement. And any bleeding after the change of life is abnormal.

All abnormal bleeding is suspect since cancer of the neck of the body of the womb may develop without symptoms or pain. So always go immediately to your doctor with this bleeding. And keep having a smear test regularly, especially if you are aged between 45 and 65 years of age, and sexually active.

---

*THERE is still a six and a half month delay before the results of a cervical cancer smear is returned from St. Lukes Hospital laboratories, Dublin.*

*The delay was first highlighted by the Dublin Well Woman Centre in April, whose clients were suffering great anguish because of it.*

*The hold up on the tests was simply due to a staff shortage in the labs — two extra technicians were needed to deal with the workload.*

*Thanks to the birth control clinics protest the Department of Health has given the money for the extra workers, who will only cost around £15,000.*

*But it will still be about a year before the smear tests will be done promptly at St. Luke's. Training the*

*technicians takes between six and nine months, and then they must work for a period under supervision*

*Unnecessary delay can cause clinical problems. Some women may become pregnant while waiting results and treatment is impossible until after the baby is born.*

*Many more women in their thirties and later are having their first smear. The cancer could have progressed quite far by the time their smear is done. A further six month delay can be critical.*

● Cervical smear tests should be done every two years. All the 'family planning' clinics do them as part of their regular service or by appointment.

● Your own doctor will do these tests, but they usually send women to get them done in a hospital out-patient clinic which adds an extra visit.

● Health centres in Northern Ireland include smear tests in their services but those in the south do not.

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## IRISH CANCER SOCIETY

5 Northumberland Road, Dublin 4.  
Phone (01) 681855.

The Dublin society has films and lectures on Breast Cancer and Cervix Cancer which are available free of charge to women's organisations from the Information Officer of the society at the above address.

**I**rish politicians have long proved themselves adept at dragging their heels on most issues which affect women in this country.

The many improvements which have taken place in women's situation in the last decade have resulted from hard and consistent campaigning by women themselves — with support from their trade union and socialist allies — and generally in the teeth of indifference, if not downright hostility and obstruction, from most of our legislators.

One of the more powerful weapons in the armoury of the women's movement during this time has proved to be EEC directives. Such directives have helped enormously in getting onto the statute books laws relating to equal pay, equal opportunities and, more recently, maternity leave, while social security is the subject of a directive to come into force in 1984.

Last February the European Parliament also adopted a report and accompanying resolution prepared by their ad-hoc Committee on Women's Rights. This should prove a useful lever for improvements on a number of different fronts: employment, working hours, education, legal rights, childcare, participation in public life, and others.

Unfortunately, this comprehensive report of fifty-five paragraphs got little prominence in the Irish papers or news bulletins. Instead the media showed an hysterical pre-occupation with just three paragraphs from the report relating to abortion.

These three paragraphs were carefully worded and stressed a need to reduce the number of abortions taking place, yet all of our Irish members in the European Parliament voted against the ENTIRE report, as did a large majority of the Christian Democrats and seven of the eleven European Progressive Democrats (the other four abstained). In spite of this the Report was adopted by the Parliament.

## Irish members of EEC Parliament vote against Womens Rights Report

By *Triona Dooney*

**T**his was a blow to the Christian Democrats, whose hostility to the Report runs far deeper and wider than opposition to abortion. Evidence of this is a document on family policy which they are currently promoting within the Social Affairs Committee.

This document expresses a view of women which runs strongly counter to the entire thrust of the Report from the Womens Rights Committee. It is critical, for example, of the "new position of women in society and their wish to work" and expresses concern at the falling birthrate and the increasing use of childcare facilities. Its view of the family is an extremely traditional one, making no concessions to the aspirations of women as individuals.

It will be interesting to monitor the progress of this document and in particular to note the reception it gets from Irish M.E.P.s whose vote against the Womens Rights Committee Report may prove more significant than was at first apparent.

In the meantime the follow-up work to the Report from the Ad Hoc Committee on Women's Rights goes ahead. The European Parliament has asked all its committees to look into areas that fall within their competence and to establish priorities for action. In addition the Standing Liaison Group (formerly



*Mark Clinton, Fine Gael TD and member of the European Parliament "finds fault with the report because it would make it easier for women to go out to work".*

the European Committee on Equality) is assisting the EEC Commission to prepare an action programme concerned with legal equality, practical equality and general social policy measures.

There is considerable reluctance to allocate staff and resources to the action programme, which must undermine the programme's effectiveness; but pressure is mounting for the 1982 budget to provide for the establishment of a European Equal Opportunities Committee.

*Within the European Parliament the Irish M.E.P.'s are aligned as follows: Fine Gael with the conservative bloc which includes the Christian Democrats; the Labour Party with the Socialists and Fianna Fáil with the European Progressive Democrats.*

# A woman's work ...

Carol Bradley works at Greenpoint Appliances in Newry, which employs 184 workers of both sexes. Its parent company, Glen Electric, has an almost exclusively male workforce of 174 men and only 3 women who are canteen workers.

‘ We make kettles, bathroom heaters, towel rails and panels for oil-fired radiators, elements for kettles. I’m an assembly worker on the oil-filled control panel line.

We’re on a set bonus, which is based on a certain target every hour or day. As a team, there’s four on our line.

The set bonus means nearly one job a minute. It doesn’t leave much time for thinking. It’s a very fidgety job too. You have to concentrate on it all the time.

Now the ratio of women to men workers is more than 60—40%. There are no men on the assembly lines, they are on the heavy metal cutting machines or enamelling kettles. Usually there’s ‘‘Floorboy’’ jobs for the young men filling up boxes of screws etc. These young fellas would get us the nuts and bolts and things when we needed them.

We’re classed as light assembly workers and they are classed as general factory workers. Even though there is a high skill element in the women’s jobs, the men seem to prefer doing the less skilled work.

As a matter of fact I think there’d be more of a kick up if a boy was taken off his job and put on an assembly line. Not from the women

— from the men. You know their bonus is still more than ours, because we haven’t yet received the full equal pay award. So as about 75% of the workforce either receive full bonus or share in it because of waiting for work etc., they still earn more than us.

Half of the shop stewards of the ITGWU in the factory are women. One of the areas we’ve had improved through the union is facilities. Now there are five toilets for women, three for men but when I started it was the reverse. After the girls kicked up a row the shop stewards went to local management who changed things without a fuss.

One other area needing attention is the lack of creche facilities in the factory. Although there are a few part-timers, a woman who starts to bring up a family generally has to leave.

I think that the women of the factory now find it easier to bring up problems because there are women shop stewards. It’s interesting also to see that it’s the women who attend union meetings. Usually it’s the single men and young girls who run off and it’s the married women who stay behind for the meetings.

I remember when I first started attending branch committee meetings. I was scared of my life, the eyes glued to me — ‘what’s this, a woman here’. Now I’m just getting settled in. I’m trying now, when an issue is raised, to think ahead, to try and get my say in before someone else gets in.

My boyfriend doesn’t like me being involved in Trade Unions! But as far as I’m concerned I’m in it for as long as they’ll have me, and he can do all the shouting he can about it.



*The assembly line requires full concentration when you’re part of a team that has a target to reach.*

It’s funny you know, at school I never heard Trade Unions mentioned. It was like a kind of dirty word. My parents were all for it though. My mother’s father was a trade unionist, chairman of the local branch of the ITGWU. My mates gave me a bit of slagging when I was first elected — you know, here’s the big woman — attend to your work, ‘here’s the union woman coming’, type of thing. Now they come with problems and they’re kind of closer to you. I can understand them



## SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

# The Long Dull Summer

BY CATHERINE MAGUIRE

**N**OT LONG ago I took my two daughters to see "Nine to Five." The scene they remember was your man being hauled across his room on pulleys, a prisoner of his three female employees. The scene I remember was the one where Lily Tomlin was on the phone, still typing with one hand, intoning over the office clatter "There's enough for everyone to have a peanut butter and banana sandwich....no, I don't want to say hello to the dog...bye-bye, smooch-smooch..."

Ah, variations on a theme: "Tell her I said it's your turn..." "So what if she called you a pig, don't mind her..." "No, you cannot..." "Tell me the rest of the programme when I get home..." "Which skirt of mine? What kind of a costume?

Why didn't you tell me before now?"... and "You hang up first; okay, then I'll hang up first; all right, you hang up first this time....bye-bye....kiss, kiss..."

I reflect hurriedly on such things because summer is here again. Whatever arduous arrangements can be worked out during the school year (don't start coughing, you know children of working mothers can only be sick on week-ends) the summer stares ahead, nine blank weeks when the baby-sitter's on holiday, the friends are on holiday, the relatives are on holiday: and the kids are on holiday.

So, of course, are the parents, but not for nine weeks. The strategical countdown begins some time in March: week one to three, what about the summer school again?

Expensive. Last year one of them got poison ivy and the other already showed signs of boredom with tie-dye and clay ashtrays. The sports-school might do from week four to six, except that someone else's child developed galloping inferiority complex there and anyway, no one from the school is going... and that's expensive too.

In the year in which Ireland has finally introduced legislation on paid maternity leave, it may seem cavilling and ungrateful to complain bitterly about the inadequate, indeed, non-existent, facilities for childcare arrangements for older children. One step at a time has been the religious chant of the decade, and married women only account for 7.5% of the Irish workforce (Labour Force Survey, 1977); let us begin by securing the paid maternity leave and then move on to pushing, cajoling, and whinging about creches and nurseries for the preschoolers.

**M**arried women in the workforce grow older, and so do their children. We can't say too often or too loudly that just as paid maternity leave is a meaningless gesture unless facilities are there for childminding after the new mother returns to work, so even infant creches and playgroups are of minimal benefit without the scheme for follow-up care throughout the childhood years.

A recent report on the position of women in the European Community states that social services for the family are in some form of crisis in every member state, so we are not alone. While women advance steadily on the labour front, the system of education and support lags behind.

It is a problem I personally rage against every time I pass the shuttered school in July and August. There is the accommodation, idle and unused — the familiar and, I'm happy to say, beloved environment which might be usefully turned over for games, sports, art and drama all summer long at minimal cost to the taxpayer.

What happens instead is familiar to every couple who've tried to rear a family and maintain a working life in this country. Private entrepreneurs step in and offer something, two weeks, July or August, from 10 am to 5 pm (let's see now if I get in late to work, can you leave early to collect them) and the going rate at the moment is about £25 per child per week — not including transport, lunches and additional hidden extras.

It is not much wonder that an increasing number of us elect to do a Lily Tomlin on the whole problem leaving the kids home at least some of the time and minding them telephonically from the job. It may be cold comfort to know that even in America, where the proportion of working mothers vastly exceeds our own, many women end up with the same dodgy solution.

In 1975, Dr. Hyman Rodman, a professor of psychology at the University of North Carolina, conducted a survey on 'How Children Take Care of Themselves' and discovered that the tactics mothers used to supervise children in absentia were remarkably similar despite the number, sex and age of the children — though most of the children concerned were between seven and 12 years old.

**T**hese tactics were outlined in an American magazine "Working Mother" and for the benefit of all those faced with the dilemma this summer I'll mention the specific list of rules.

No opening of the door was a near universal rule, as was never telling a phone caller there was no adult in the house. Nine out of ten mothers had an at-home neighbour on tap whom their children could phone in an emergency, and seven out of ten mothers said they phoned their children from work regularly to check matters.

About seven out of ten mothers listed fire as their major worry, and forbade the children use any electrical gadget apart from the

television, radio or record player; and five out of ten said they were firm about a set list of chores children were to complete — feeding pets, setting the table, sorting the laundry — in order to keep idle hands occupied.

**T**he responses to Dr. Rodman's survey make both harrowing and heart-warming reading. A child's fear was the hardest thing an absent mother had to cope with — lightening during a thunderstorm, a mysterious clunk from the central heating system, a delivery man at the door persistently ringing the bell. On the other hand, increased sense of self-reliance and responsibility were listed as definite bonuses for children who could successfully manage on their own.

The problem that didn't appear to exist — thanks to the telephone — was the one most opponents of working mothers brandish, the loss of emotional contact. You can't actually hug people who are ringing up to tell you they won the race, painted the best picture, tidied all the books, etc., but with repeated practice you can convey the hug verbally.

The problem that remains, and the one that won't be satisfactorily resolved short of proper childcare facilities for children of all ages, is that just because kids are safe and emotionally secure doesn't mean they're happy, learning, enjoying, growing and stretching as children are entitled to do. Dr. Rodman's survey showed that more than half of the self-minding children spent most of their time watching telly, and that the consumption of junk foods and comics was quite high.

Quite true, a mother on the premises doesn't ensure that children wouldn't do just the same. That's the whole point — well run and child-orientated facilities don't merely meet the needs of working parents, they can meet the real needs of growing children, and make the time spent at home by the family happier for everyone.



## NOW YOU SEE THEM

WOMEN depend on public transport much more than men. For many female workers, housewives and mothers of young children the bus or train is the only way of getting to shops, schools, offices and factories. So women have a special interest in public transport — and a special reason for defending it.

THE service CIE provides is not adequate. But there is no point in blaming the bus crews or complaining to the rest of the bus queue about faceless men in CIE management.

IF you have spent hours waiting in the rain for a 16 or 46a that never came the chances are the Government was to blame. For years successive Governments have refused to give CIE the money it needs to buy more and better buses and trains to open up new road and rail routes.

GOVERNMENTS have also refused to introduce a transport plan which would reduce traffic in the cities and so speed up the bus service. And CIE has not been allowed to compete in the profitable areas of transport — like road haulage — yet has been expected to run vital but uneconomic social services without losing money.

AND on top of this the Government has cut back CIE's subsidy to £65 million at the same time it spent more than £1 million on chauffeur driven Mercedes for thirty Government Ministers!

NOW more than ever CIE is under attack. Private businessmen would like to run the profitable routes themselves and their friends in Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are anxious to help them. If this happens many women, especially in rural areas, will find themselves stranded simply because there is no money to be made out of giving them the means to travel.

**NOW  
YOU  
DON'T!**

**..BUSES..BUSES..BUSES**

**WHAT  
BUSES!**



9.30.am

"Where are we going Mammy where are we going?"

"We're going to Granny's so hurry and get your coat on.

"Why Mammy why it's not Sunday?"

Because Mammy wants to get her hair done that's why and Granny is going to mind you and the baby now hurry up or we'll miss the bus.

9.40.am

"Hello Mrs.H. off into town, you'd better hurry I saw the bus up at the terminus."

Oh heavens, come on Séan hurry up or we'll miss it.

"Wait Mammy ~~wait~~ my face is open."

Oh come on I'll fix it on the bus. Oh no it's pulling out we'll never make it and it'll be ages before there's another. Come on Séan we may as well walk down to the village we'll get one quicker there.

10.15.am

"Hello Mrs. is there a bus due soon do you know"

I hope so we're waiting here nearly a quarter of an hour and we're drenched.

"Here it is Mammy here's the bus"

Quick son put out your hand while I fold up the buggy.

"Both sides now please both sides of the bar."

Come on Séan you take my bags and on you get.

"Okay Mrs. I'll take the buggy up you come. Seats upstairs now seats upstairs."

Come here Séan come here, we'll stay downstairs so I can keep an eye on the buggy. Brendan's Mammy had their buggy taken on the bus just a few weeks ago.

"But there's nowhere to sit Mammy there's nowhere to sit".

"Here Mrs. you can sit here I'm getting out at the next stop".

Oh thanks very much come on Séan stand beside me hold on to the bar.

10.40.am

"I'm tired Mammy I'm tired I want to sit down".

Shush son we won't be much longer we're nearly there.

"Why are the men getting out Mammy why are they getting out?"

Oh no, they must be changing crew I hope we're not kept waiting long.

10.50.am.

Oh heavens I wish they'd hurry the baby's due a bottle and she'll start getting cranky. At this rate I'll be out all day and I'll get nothing done.

"Here's the busmen Mammy here's the busmen".

Oh thank heaven we won't be long now son.

11.00.am

Right Séan our stop is next hold on to the bar getting out.

Oh darn the conductor is upstairs I'll have to manage the buggy myself. Here Séan you take the bags and mind yourself getting out. Next stop please next stop.

4.00.pm

Come on Séan get your coat on we want to get home before the crowds.

"Oh goody are we going on the bus again Mammy I love the bus don't you Mammy don't you!!!"

Pic. by Derek Spliers (IFL Report)



# Womens Clinics for Womens Complaints

*“I’d never go to the doctor with this — he’s such a busy man.”*

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*Katy Gardner, a Liverpool doctor, explains how well women clinics are introducing British women to a fuller and more responsive health service. She suggests more radical ways that the present functions of these clinics can develop.*

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THE National Health Service is based on a unique system of health care relying on the GP as the gateway to other services. Recently too, there has been increasing emphasis on the GP working with a team of health workers to provide whole person health care. Thus we should expect that the National Health Service should be orientated towards preventive medicine and community care. But this is not so because the medical profession for historical reasons has always been orientated towards disease, and having taken control of “health”, is reluctant for reasons of self-interest to relinquish that hold.

One of the main areas of take-over has been the area of reproduction and women’s health (in the 19th century, such disasters as the massive increase in maternal mortality resulted from the hospitalisation of childbirth before anything was known about sepsis and infection). Women have constantly fought the medical profession for control of our own bodies.

Women are the major consumers of health care because:

- at present we assume the main responsibility for contraception;
- women encounter the medical profession during pregnancy and childbirth;
- we still assume prime responsibility for well and sick children;
- Women’s anatomy seems more complex than men’s and more likely to cause health problems;
- traditionally women have been seen as “frail” and doctors have capitalised on our so-called weaknesses by inventing treatments for “the vapours” etc. (for rich women only, of course). Although the day of “the vapours” has gone, women still tend to see themselves as ill more often than men — at a time of crisis women will go to the doctor — men will go to the pub. Today women still often bear the brunt of society’s crises: unemployment, lack of nurseries, etc., in isolation in their homes.

I do not see well woman clinics as an alternative to women’s self-help groups, or to women at home or at work organising to fight for a better health service — but as an important part of that struggle. I believe the aims of a well woman clinic should be (and this represents a more radical view of their functions than most provide at present):

★ To reach women who normally stay clear of doctors for class or cultural reasons, or who are intimidated by male doctors, or whose doctors are not interested in “women’s complaints” and do not have the facilities to deal with them.

★ To educate women about self-help — breast examination, remedies for thrush, prevention of cystitis (80% of which can be prevented by self-help methods) etc.

★ To function as a sympathetic advice and referral agency for any problems that come up — be they gynaecological problems, housing problems or whatever.

★ To screen women for cancer of the breast, cervix, ovary, etc.

★ To raise the consciousness of women about health care; to put pressure on the medical profession to provide a health care service orientated towards the needs of women.

★ To publicise themselves through Community Health Councils, women's groups and the Labour movement. To involve the local community and be responsive to its needs.

★ To be involved in health education — especially in discussion locally about health. In some areas, e.g. Deptford (South London) the idea of a neighbourhood health worker has emerged, and such a person could work closely with a well woman clinic.

★ To train personnel — nurses, doctors and paramedical workers — in the ideas of self-help and prevention and in examining "well women". I see no reason why any woman with a basic training in dealing with health problems related to women, contraception etc., could not do many of the things such as cervical smear tests and IUCD fittings that are at present done mainly by doctors. (This is already happening in places like Sweden, China and Tanzania).

★ I believe that well woman clinics should be run by women for women and that this is a historical necessity at the present time.

But the question is, what do we do now — this year, next year? The answer is — women cannot wait until general practice is more responsive and more health centres have women doctors and other health workers to run well woman clinics. Women want better services NOW. Even in the current atmosphere of cutbacks, several areas have started well woman clinics as an Area Health Authority-run service (in the same way as Infant Welfare Clinics).

There are, of course, other services available to women for screening. For example, the Women's National Cancer Control Campaign provides a screening service housed in caravans which can be taken to any part of the country at the request of a trade union branch in a workplace or an Area Health Authority. In addition, some family planning clinics provide screening as well as general advice and counselling, but this is not widely advertised. In fact, it is often not advertised at all — which means that only those women who know about the availability of such services benefit, and women who are working fulltime, or who are intimidated by clinics anyway and don't ask questions, never find out about them.

I am lucky enough to work as a GP in a health centre where we run our own well woman clinic. We would like to incorporate a discussion group into the clinic, but so far this has not worked out. What we do offer is time to talk as well as a checkup and screening for breast and cervical cancer, a cup of tea, lots of books to borrow and leaflets to take away on various subjects, many of which we have written ourselves, and a friendly and (we hope) informal atmosphere. I believe there is a place for such clinics within all practices.

This belief is not simply based on ideas about what women want and need in the abstract. I work part-time in a Brook Advisory Clinic and both here and in the well woman



*Ultimately Well Women Clinics should be run by women for women, — but women want better services NOW.*



clinic we hear constantly, "well, I never would bother you in the normal course of the surgery..." or "I'd never go to the doctor with this — he is such a busy man", and then out come the problems which have bothered and tortured the women concerned for months or sometimes years.

For example, we saw a woman recently who had been raped 20 years ago, had never dared tell anyone about it, and had worried for years that she might have got VD or been damaged internally. She had never dared have intercourse with anyone since that time. We were able to have a long discussion and see her several times afterwards and she is now planning to get married. It may have been partly the possibility of marriage that gave her the courage to voice her fears, but I think it was also the ability to talk in an informal atmosphere with sympathetic listeners.

Another idea that we can pursue because we are in general practice and have records of all women on our list, is screening by sending for women by letter and follow-up visit,

to come to our well woman clinic for a cervical cancer smear and to air any problems they might have — again, we discover women who have been battling with dysmenorrhoea (period pains) or cystitis on their own for years and can offer support, advice and treatment if required. So far about 50% of women we have sent for have come — and we have all enjoyed the clinics!

Some of my colleagues feel that we should be concentrating on improving standards of care in general practice and see well woman clinics as a diversion. I do not see it in this way, as I believe campaigns around well woman clinics are about far more than just setting up a clinic, and have a far greater impact than this, for example, on the local community and the medical profession. There is a lot of interest currently among health workers in the ideas of these clinics, and I believe it has sprung from the success of the campaign to date. Of course we are in a defensive situation at present, and in Liverpool we are faced with a proposed 10% cut in family planning services and of £4 million in the Area Health Authority budget

— but unless we think positively as well as defensively, we will never achieve positive change.

So, in conclusion, this is what I think is most important about well woman clinics — not just that they provide a service which is urgently needed, but that they are an important step on the way to a more sensitive and democratic health service.

*A fuller version of this article first appeared in LINK (No. 30) Autumn 1980.*

#### **FURTHER INFORMATION:**

Women in Medicine—Joyce Leeson and Judith Gray. Tavistock 1978.

For Her Own Good—B. Enreich and D. English. Pluto Press 1979.

The Best Place for Screening is the GP's Surgery. *Modern Medicine*, 19.4.79.

Islington Well Woman Clinics: Information from River Place Centre, River Place, London N1; Manchester Community Health Council, 1 St. Anne's Churchyard, Manchester 2.

(Manchester CHC have just produced an excellent booklet on well woman clinics which discusses the whole basis behind well woman clinics' relationship to the women's health movement. Well Woman Clinics Proposals for Manchester, 40p inclusive of p&p from the above address.)

## **WOMENS CLINICS: The situation in Ireland**

*Health clinics committed to women's dis-ease, like those described by Kate Gardner, have been slow to develop in Ireland.*

*They have grown out of the work of the birth control clinics which means that their services are almost entirely outside the health service in the South and remain under-developed in the North.*

*The only well woman clinic operating in Northern Ireland is in Newry. Reports indicate it is fairly traditional in the service it provides. But it is able to offer time and sympathetic staff to deal with the women and their problems.*

*Most women's health care is done through the health centres in the*

*North, and women often turn to the centres for service rather than to their own family doctors. These health centres are fully integrated into the National Health Service.*

*Since the birth control clinics in the South are quite independent of the limited state health service or the semi-state health insurance scheme, women can only find such health care at a price.*

*While nearly all of the clinics offer extra services to contraception, such as pregnancy testing, cervical smear tests and regular breast examination, there is a growing trend to offer a health service to women that will last from menarche (the start of periods) to the menopause.*

*Dublin as usual fares best. The two IFPA clinics in Dublin offer services that include psycho sexual counselling and menopausal advice among their range.*

*The organisation that claims to be*

*Ireland's first really comprehensive health centre is the appropriately named Dublin Well Woman Centre, who opened their second Dublin centre in mid-July.*

*Their spacious northside clinic in Eccles Street gives an even wider range of services than previously. Ante-natal classes and two post-natal classes hope to fill some of the gaps in existing hospital classes. Yoga classes aimed at middle-aged women and group counselling for depression are on offer at the new centre. They have started vaccinations against Rubella (German measles).*

*So far there are no plans to try and bring their work into the state system, and they see any integration in the future as quite impossible, since the clinics are technically operating illegally at present. But this means such services are restricted to women that can pay for them.*



*National Women's Committee members: From above Maura McInerney (Limerick), Councillor Liz McManus (Bray); Hilary Rock (Galway) and Triona Dooney, Party Spokesperson on Women's Affairs.*

## *SFWP Womens Committee propose radical change*

DURING the recent election campaign the Women's Political Association again appealed to women to vote for women — still under the illusion that women TDs do more to promote the needs of women than will men.

Whether they will or they won't is neither here nor there as these women TDs must accept the discipline of their respective parties and neither the Fine Gael/Labour Coalition nor Fianna Fáil have progressive policies with regard to women's rights.

Little fault could be found with the Labour Party's own views on women's rights but unfortunately there is no way they will find an outlet for these views within the Coalition.

In contrast to the record of these parties, SFWP have always promoted radical change in all spheres for women and will shortly publish a pamphlet detailing the major innovations required to improve the quality of life for Irish women.

Our regular readers will recall a report in WOMENS VIEW (Winter '80) on the National Womens

Conference held by Sinn Féin The Workers' Party late last year. The conclusions of this Conference were presented to the Party's annual conference in March and they will form the basis of the pamphlet.

The report dealt comprehensively with Women and Health, Home, Work, Law, Education and the Media and during the coming months will be updated prior to publication by the National Womens Committee.

The Womens Committee of SFWP was set up a decade ago and is active at all levels of the Party structure. Comprised of representatives from branches all over the country the Womens Committee can influence all policy decisions and ensure their benefit for the progress of women.

This is most important with regard to the work of the Party's elected representatives in the Dáil and in local government. In the absence of major reform at government level there are still many changes which can be made within the Health Boards and other local government areas to the benefit of Irish women.



ROSIE HACKETT, life long official with the ITGWU from its early days and HELENA MOLONEY first official of the Irish Women Workers Union. Below: NORAH CONNOLLY O'BRIEN (recently deceased) at a meeting in Liberty Hall in 1919.



# History

# Neglects

# Women

*Therese Moriarty*

**I**f you want to know where you are going you need to know where you came from'. This has become the watchword of labour history and Irish women are discovering the same as the tasks before us raise vital questions about our past.

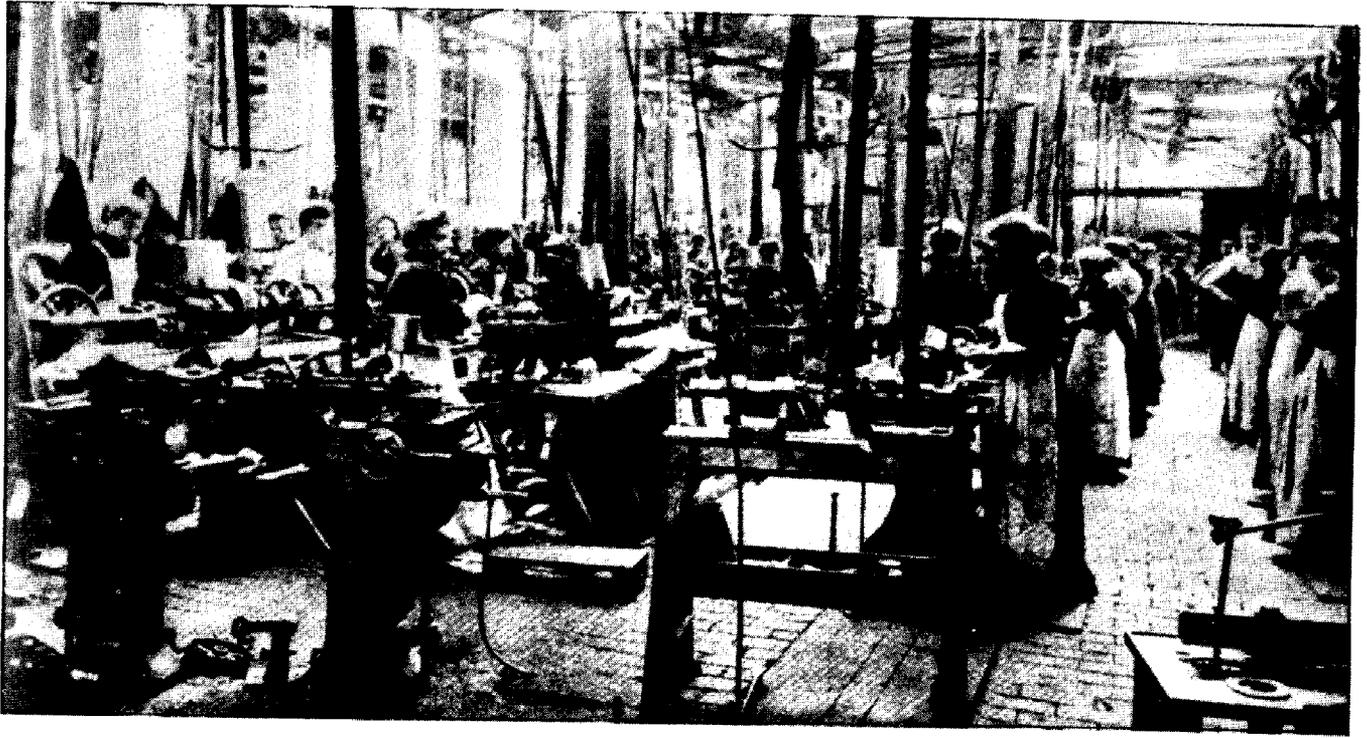
Working class history has generally meant the history of working men. When women figure in this history they are the wives, mothers and daughters of these men. The Trade Union Women's Forum aimed to correct this male bias with a conference on the history of Irish women workers organised jointly with the Irish Labour History Society.

The Forum is involved more usually in current issues affecting women in the trade union movement. So it was an ambitious step into the uncharted territory of Irish women's history by the Forum — and more surprisingly — for the Irish Labour History Society too.

It really doesn't need saying that the history of Irish women, and working women in particular, has been neglected. What books exist about Irishwomen, such as *Daughters of Erin* or *Rebel Irishwomen*, owe more to the hagiographical traditions of Irish national biography than to any effort to incorporate women into a history that has excluded them.

Little work has been done to popularise the lives of women fore-runners in trade unions. We still know more about Constance Markiewicz than we do about Delia Larkin. A very small circle indeed are familiar with the work of Louie Bennet or the Countess' suffragist and socialist sister, Eva Gore Booth.

Nor are there any satisfactory answers yet to 'what the women were doing' in the main political or social movements of the past. Recent work on the Cumann na mBan, the Ladies Land League and the Irish women's suffrage movement remains shut away on the library shelves in our universities



*Semi-skilled women workers in a bicycle factory prior to the First World War.*

**A**nd third level colleges in Ireland feel no pressure to bring in women's historical studies, since students seem nowhere to have raised this as a demand. So the achievement of the Forum in mounting such a successful conference is particularly marked.

The range of information presented at the conference reflects on the impoverishment of a labour history that fails to draw on this and excludes the experience of women from the class.

Sheila Lewenhak, author of a number of books on women and work gave the introductory lecture. She gave an overview to explain how women's work received such low status and low pay. Four workshops dealt with women in higher education, women in industry, Ulster linen workers and industrialisation and women in the west of Ireland.

Irishwomen worked predominantly in the textile industry, not only as linen workers in the mills but also as outworkers in the sweated trades. And rural households were

rarely dependent on agricultural labourer's wages only. Lacemaking and embroidery, shirtmaking and knitting by women brought small cash payments. Domestic service was the most predominant employment for women. And just as industry employed only a small part of the Irish workforce except in the north east, the same picture holds true for women's work.

Schools and seminars like this show how the narrow definitions and specialisation such as the separation of social or economic history, can break down under the need to construct a more total and all embracing picture of the past.

And they show how much of what we take for granted in our past, like the sexual division of labour doesn't always fit the reality of our history any more than it does our present.

The history of working women that takes into account the working wife, the economy of the household, the development of sexual identities, the origins of unequal pay and the division of labour challenge the idea that the

working class evolves smoothly, without contradiction or that there is a continuous progress in socialist thought.

We need a history that can integrate women in this way so we can understand our present better to move forward and that can be a source of strength and encouragement to us in this task

**T**he success of the conference proved that this need is deeply felt. But so far there has been no news of any efforts to take the Trade Union Women's Forum initiative a step further. And since the Forum is so heavily engaged in current events it hasn't the opportunity or energy to put its main emphasis on the past.

A small crib — the five pounds fee aimed at financing an expensive conference and encouraging women to attend as delegates was expensive for those who couldn't get union sponsorship. Surely organisers of events mainly directed at women should introduce an entrance fee fixed more realistically for the unwaged.

## REAL LIFE PROBLEM BUT POOR FICTION

It may be deemed "the most explosive women's book to come out of Ireland" but I do not think it can be paid the compliment of having dealt adequately with its subject matter. Here is a fictional story which deals with the pregnancy experience of an unmarried Irish woman in 1970. It cannot be taken as the story of the average Irish single woman who finds herself pregnant.

Brig O'Mahony is thirty years of age, she lives in a comfortable Dublin flat and has quite a well paid job. Her parents are both dead and she has friends whom she can rely on for support right through her pregnancy. Not without difficulty she manages to keep on her job, and works right up to a few weeks before the birth. She decides in the beginning that she is going to keep her child.

Certainly her nine month's of pregnancy were difficult and painful. Yet as one reads through the book, one cannot help feeling impatient with her. She often acts immaturely for a woman of her years and intelligence. On the other hand, nobody doubts that it is quite a traumatic experience to find oneself in this position no matter how mature one is. The child's father, whom Brig now discovers is already married offers her no support. She is continually worried that she will lose her job and she has great difficulty in finding a suitable place to live.

And yet this story is not nearly as tragic as that of many unmarried pregnant women in this country even today. *CHERISH* which was founded by the author following experiences quite similar to the heroine, has

done tremendous work over the past decade both in the help it offers to single parents and in the way it has helped highlight the acute double standards upheld by Irish society. Women are now protected by legislation and cannot be fired from their place of employment as was the case in 1970. However, protective legislation does not mean that all difficulties are surmounted. It can still be a very painful experience for an unmarried woman to continue to work while pregnant. Attitudes have changed somewhat over the past decade but we are still a very intolerant society.

One has only to compare Brig O'Mahony's situation with that of a much younger woman, living at home and on a low income, or a student relying on a student grant or assistance from her parents to realise how much more tragic her situation could be. Many women have little choice but to travel to Dublin, Birmingham or London where they hope anonymity will make life a little more tolerable. Many women spend the last months of their pregnancy with a family where they are expected to do housework in return for shelter. In many instances such families offer tremendous support to the girl but often it can be considered a cheap form of labour.

Society still places a tremendous pressure on the unmarried pregnant woman to consider adoption. Since illegitimacy is the legal status still granted to a child born outside of wedlock, because the unmarried mother's allowance is so

low and creche facilities so un-satisfactory, and since it is so difficult for women with children to find suitable living accommodation, more often than not the mother decides that for the child's wellbeing adoption is the only answer.

Often too a girl will be accepted back into her family only if she allows her child to be adopted so that the neighbours can't find out. Is it not barbaric of a society to expect a woman to carry her baby for 9 months in her body, give birth to the child, nurse the child for some days or weeks and then sign a document — which takes the child away from her to be reared by people she does not know — in the knowledge that she will never see her child again?

Brig O'Mahony escaped this most shattering experience which many women in Ireland, even today have to endure. However, were she a younger woman, living at home or in a less well paid job she might not have been in a position to opt other than for adoption.

No matter how disappointed one may be with the book, one has to admire the determination of this woman who decided to stand her ground and face the consequences of rearing a child as an unmarried mother in the Ireland of 1970. Maura Richards and Cherish have made it possible for other women to do the same.

Mary Diskin



*CHERISH* has helped many young Irish women to cope with the pressures of pregnancy and rearing a child on their own. Maura Richards, one of the founders of *CHERISH*, tries to air these problems through her new novel *TWO TO TANGO*.

*TWO TO TANGO* in paperback available from all major bookshops.



Sister Stanislaus Kennedy

**'WHO SHOULD CARE!' The Development of Kilkenny Social Services 1963-1980** has recently been published by Turoe Press. Sister Stanislaus Kennedy, a professional social worker with Kilkenny Social Services, tells us the story of how a small group of people came together and planned and worked to make their community a caring one.

While pointing to the vital importance of the natural caring unit of family, friends and neighbours the author acknowledges the need for organised community care and stresses the need to change and reshape structures to enable them to continue to respond to the needs of the people.

In paperback — and very pricey at £6 — the report is available from all major bookshops.

## WOMEN-RITE

The Northern Ireland Womens Rights Movement has published the first issue of their newsletter entitled **WOMEN-RITE**. However, both the format and the title are provisional and there are plans afoot to improve both during the coming months.

It is a rather basic production consisting of about 20 stencilled sheets but the quality of the articles is very high. Indeed there is more reading matter in this stapled collection than in most of the glossy monthlies.

Although the N.I.W.R.M. has its head office in Belfast both the movement and the publication benefit the women of the whole Province, and **WOMEN-RITE**

is envisaged as a channel of communication for all the women of Northern Ireland.

This first issue has articles on The Pros and Cons of Abortion, the Baby Milk Controversy in developing countries, local news reports, Maternity Rights, Legislation affecting women and events and services at the Belfast based Womens Centre. Contributions on any topic of interest to women are welcomed for future issues, also news of meetings and events being organised by womens groups.

Copies of the newsletter are available from the Womens Centre — no price is mentioned — but contributions will no doubt be accepted!

### THE WOMENS CENTRE

16—18 Donegall Street

Belfast (Phone 43363)

Open Wednesday to Saturday

10am — 12 noon

— Wednesday & Thursday also 2—4pm —

### LOOK WHO'S CHOOSING FOR US!



"Nowhere do women have the absolute right to control their own fertility" — this amazing fact introduces an article on the international situation which is included in **OUR STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL**, a pamphlet published by the National Abortion Campaign in Britain and covers the history of the campaign for a woman's right to choose since its inauguration in 1975 to fight the proposed Anti-abortion bill.

Although dealing with the British situation the experiences covered in the pamphlet have many parallels with the situation in Ireland, and of course directly affects the women of Northern Ireland.

The pamphlet is available from the NAC, 374 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1 for 40p which includes postage.

## IRISH WOMENS PLAN OF ACTION

The long awaited report of the Irish National Women's Forum has just been published by the Council for the Status of Women. The Forum itself was held on the weekend of November 15-16 last year, covered the topics of Health, Education, Employment, Law, Rural Development, Women in Conflict situations, Media and Communications — and was dogged by controversy from the start.

At the opening session in the RDS the then Taoiseach Charles Haughey was heckled and subjected to a barrage of abuse on issues as far ranging as contraceptives and the Provisional women prisoners in Armagh.

The Forum was convened so that Irish women could contribute to formulating a National Plan of Action, as part of the World Plan of Action for the next five years, developed at the UN World Conference of Women held in Copenhagen in Summer 1980.

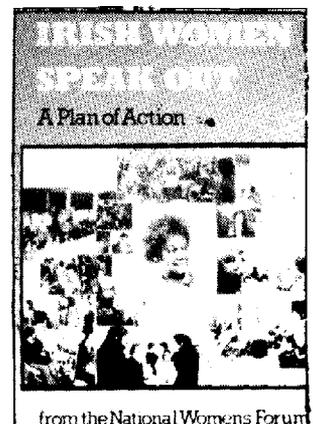
Ireland is the only country so far to have followed up with a National Forum. Over one hundred women were involved in organising the Forum and publishing the results which were presented to the Irish Government.

The decision to publish a full report of the proceedings at the Irish Forum is to be welcomed and hopefully will

be taken as a precedent. Any gathering of that considerable size at which women were encouraged to discuss their oppression and formulate demands must represent a plus whatever the deficiencies of the Forum.

This book contains the Plan of Action which evolved from the activities and discussions at the Forum. The strength of the Plan lies in the fact that it reflects concerns voiced by Irish women of all ages, backgrounds and experiences and as such is a unique document.

**IRISH WOMEN SPEAK OUT** is a well produced book and good value at only £1.32p.



Published by Co-Op Books it is available from all main bookshops or direct from the Council for the Status of Women, 56 Merrion Square, Dublin 2, plus postage.

# The Red Haired Man's Wife

I have taken that vow —  
And you were my friend  
But yesterday — now  
All that's at an end  
And you are my husband, and claim me  
and I must depend.

Yesterday I was free,  
Now you, as I stand  
Walk over to me  
And take hold of my hand.  
You look at my lips, your eyes are too bold  
Your smile is too bland.

My old name is lost  
My distinction of race:  
Now the line has been crossed  
Must I step to your pace?  
Must I walk as you list, and obey and  
smile up to your face?

All the white and the red  
of my cheeks you have won;  
All the hair of my head  
And my feet though they run  
Are yours, and you own me and end me,  
Just as I begun.

Must I bow when you speak,  
Be silent and hear,  
Inclining my cheek  
and incredulous ear  
To your voice and command, and behest  
hold your lightest wish dear.

I am a woman but still  
am alive and can feel  
Every intimate thrill  
That is woe or is weal  
I aloof, and divided, apart, standing far  
can I kneel?

Oh if kneeling were right  
I should kneel and not be sad  
And abase in your sight  
All the pride that I had  
I should come to you, hold to you, cling  
to you, call to you glad



*Published in the Irish Citizen, 1912, journal  
of the women's suffrage movement.*

by James Stephens

If not I shall know  
I shall surely find out  
And your world will throw  
in disaster and rout  
I am a woman and glory and beauty, I  
mystery terror and doubt

I am separate still  
I am I and not you  
And my mind and my will  
As in secret they grew  
Still are secret unreached and untouched  
And are not subject to you.

# Stage, TV & Radio

## What's available for women

BY SALLY  
CURRAN

IN REVIEWING contemporary Irish drama, the role of women remains shadowy and undefined by and large, tending to stereotyped characters being portrayed. There are in fact too few parts, good or bad, available to most actresses. In the Abbey Theatre alone last year there were 96 male roles presented as opposed to 46 female roles over a twelve month period – a good two to one ratio. This is not to single out the Abbey for special criticism, but to merely give an account of the situation at hand.

Much the same prevails at most theatres in Dublin and around the country. The majority of female parts written and portrayed tend to fall into recognizable categories – Irish mum, inevitably long suffering and inclined to moan, the neighbour lady, either a bitch or a figure of fun, the tart down the road with a heart of gold, and finally, the young girl, pretty, sweet, and – hopefully – still a virgin (not as necessary as it used to be!)

This is not to say that there have never been excellent roles for women. William Shakespeare wrote many immortal roles that are still being played all over the world. Granted there are fewer roles for women in his plays, but in his day, the 'actresses' were men. The Restoration comedies and plays that followed in the next century contained some of the best parts ever written for actresses.

It is only with the rise of the middle class that audiences were generally 'treated' to female characters, created to confirm prevailing myths or prejudices.

Outstanding playwrights such as George Bernard Shaw, Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams have written excellent and believable characters, but many, if not most authors have tended to reflect the pervasive thinking on women. In Hollywood, there have been a few half hearted attempts to portray the modern woman, all wrapped in celluloid, but even these efforts would not have taken place without extensive pressure from various women's groups.

The BBC television has, to its credit, put on many fine productions with actresses in credible parts, but RTE, until recently, has shown a reluctance to produce many dramas with good roles for women. With the extensive budget cuts now required,

the situation can only get worse. Many fine actresses will continue to find themselves out of work in their chosen profession. There will, of course, be work in commercials which often require a good deal of acting ability and some training.

Inevitably, many of the roles in the commercials will fall into traditional stereotypes of *dollybird*, *perfect wife* fussing around house and husband, *flustered ninny* worrying over what household product to use and so on. Even in advertisements and crowd scenes, the traditional fill-in for out of work actresses and actors, it is interesting to note that many more men will be required than women.

Much of the problem stems from women's lack of power in most dramatic fields. While there is at least one woman in charge of a production company and a few female directors in the theatre, there are few employed in an administrative capacity. There are several female stage directors, but indeed it is seldom that stage directors get a say in most productions.

In radio and television much the same situation prevails as regards this overall lack of influence. There are no female directors as of this writing in the Department of Drama at Telefís Éireann, although there have been several good ones in the past and, interestingly enough, one of the first heads of drama at Telefís was a woman. In the drama section in radio, there is only one woman director. The woman's voice is seldom heard, if only by a process of elimination.

What can be done to remedy this? There is the obvious lack of an accredited School of Drama in this country. While the Brendan Smith Academy, the Betty Ann Norton School and the Irish Institute of Drama and the Allied Arts do conduct classes, they only scratch the surface. The Focus Theatre has a programme to train Directors and classes for actresses and actors, but it has a long waiting list.

Without a concrete programme to train and attract women as well as men with courses for production, direction, playwriting, as well as acting, the dramatic arts in Ireland will remain predominantly a male domain and we will all be the poorer for it.



Two well known faces on the Irish stage. FIDELMA CULLEN (above) in the title role in "Deirdre of the Sorrows" and KATE FLYNN as May in "Footfalls". (Pics. courtesy of Press Office, Abbey Theatre, Dublin.)



## Magilligan workers victory

JEAN Wilders and Maud Crampsie have succeeded in an equal pay claim against the Ministry of Defence. Both women worked as cleaners at Milligan Camp near Limavady. They compared themselves with Thomas and James Mullan who also worked at the Camp and were paid £1.45 a week more than the women.

The work involved sorting and distributing laundry, checking for breakages and general cleaning duties at the camp. The tribunal considered that Thomas Mullan, who had been at the Camp for 16 years, had more responsibility than either Mrs Wilders or Miss Crampsie. However the tribunal decided that the work done by the women was broadly similar to that done by James Mullan and that they were entitled to the same rate of pay as him.

At the time of the hearing, both Jean Wilders and Maud Crampsie received £55.60 a week while the Mullans received £57.05. The Equal Pay Act allows successful claims to be back-dated for up to two years. In the case of Jean Wilders and Maud Crampsie, it was decided that their equal pay award should be back-dated two years from the date of their tribunal application in May 1979. So their successful equal pay claim will mean over three and a half years back pay. Both women were backed by the EOC



## Neutral tax system demanded

A CALL for a fair tax deal for married women came from the N.I. Equal Opportunities Commission urging changes in the system of taxing the income of married couples.

In reply to the Government Green Paper *The Taxation of Husband and Wife*, the Commission criticises the present system as offensive to married women and totally inappropriate in the 1980's.

The Commission supports treating all taxpayers as individuals in their own right and recognising real needs and responsibilities, such as caring for children, by cash benefits.

The present tax system discriminates on grounds of both sex and marriage. A

husband is assumed to own his wife's income, her earnings are added to his for tax purposes, and he is responsible for declaring her income to the Inland Revenue.

Many married women feel offended by this treatment and over the years the Commission has received a number of complaints about it. A married man receives a higher basic tax allowance just because he is married, regardless of the couple's family circumstances.

At present a married man takes home over £4 a week more than a single person or married woman on the same gross earnings.

The Commission wants to see reform of the tax system to make it neutral regarding sex and marital status.

*Married couples must be taxed as individuals.*



## Labour tribunal system needs overhaul

WIDE ranging changes in the Industrial Tribunal system are recommended by the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland. The changes which are called for cover access, speed, informality and low cost. They include proposals to avoid legal terminology, etiquette and practice, and to substitute a round table approach for the more usual dock and bench of the courtroom, more in line with the Labour Court in the South. And the Commission also highlights the need for familiarity with the content and sympathy with the spirit of the laws which are being operated.

Industrial Tribunals are the main arena for the adjudication of an individual's legal rights in the workplace. An Industrial Tribunal consists of a legally qualified chairman and two representatives, one drawn from a panel of employers and

the other from a panel of trade unionists. Hearings are held in a dozen or more centres in Northern Ireland.

The role of Tribunals is to decide whether a legal right exists or not and the Commission strongly believes that the tribunals should remain a totally distinct operation. The Commission supports the view that an Industrial Tribunal is the proper forum for the hearing of equal pay cases and those sex discrimination cases concerning employment. But it recommends certain changes in the Tribunal system to ensure public confidence that the handling of the cases is consistent with the aims of the legislation.

The Commission's recommendations for improvement of the system are on a practical, down to earth level. They include the following:

## Maternity benefits proposals

A CONSULTATIVE document, *A Fresh Look at Maternity Benefits* issued by the Department of Health and Social Security got an angry response from the Northern Ireland EOC.

Britain's maternity benefits are among the least generous in the European Community, consisting mainly of a maternity grant of £25 (unchanged since 1969), a National Insurance allowance of £20.65 a week payable for 18 weeks (11 weeks before birth and seven weeks after) and maternity pay, to qualify for which a woman must have worked for the same employer for two years (or for five years if part-time), payable at the rate of 90% of the weekly wage for six weeks.

The British Department of Health and Social Security is proposing to replace the present system of three payments by other options involving a larger grant only or a combination of a grant and an allowance. Both Commissions oppose these options on the grounds that expectant mothers might receive even less money than at present.

- ★ The issue of a simple, step-by-step guide to tribunal procedures.

- ★ The use of a new, well-designed application form.

- ★ The appointment of more tribunal chairmen and back-up staff.

- ★ A two month time limit in which written decisions must be issued.

- ★ Training for all tribunal members.

- ★ The appointment of a larger number of women and younger people.

- ★ The establishment of a special division of the Industrial Tribunals with responsibility for equal pay and sex discrimination cases.

They have sent their proposals to the Department of Manpower Services which has overall responsibility for the industrial tribunal system, to all tribunal members and to other interested parties.

## NATIVE AMERICANS

WOMEN of all Red Nations (WARN) has published an alarming report on the disastrous state of health among the Red Indians living in US reservations.

WARN points out that their monstrous living conditions are either the result of intentional official policy or at least are being silently tolerated — both of which are, according to UN Resolution 260 A of 1948, tantamount to a policy of genocide.

According to records compiled by the hospital in Pine Ridge, the tribal seat of the Oglalasioux in South Dakota, 38 per cent of all pregnant Red Indian women have miscarriages. The WARN report shows that the rate of miscarriages, stillbirths and infant mortality in this second largest reservation of the US are 6.5 times higher than the average number in the whole of the US.

60 to 70 per cent of all newly born babies in the Pine Ridge reservation are either prematurely born or suffer from serious malfunctions such as respiratory disorders caused by underdeveloped lungs. Average life expectancy stands at 47 years.

Studies carried out by Minnesota University and the US Department for Environmental Protection show that the ground water in the Pine Ridge reservation is highly contaminated by pesticides and insecticides, due to deficient sewage installations, and by poisonous industrial waste, recklessly deposited on the prairie land.

Although this contamination of the drinking water in the reservations has been an established fact for years, no countermeasures have been taken, nor have the indigenous Sioux tribes been warned about the fatal danger involved.

The Women of all Red Nations have set themselves the aim of systematically unmasking this decimation and oppression of their people

## New Hong Kong law

AFTER a stormy debate, a new abortion law was passed in Hong Kong's legislative council recently by a 40 to seven vote. Under the new law, abortions will be available for victims of rape or incest, provided the offence is reported to the police within three months of the event.

Legal abortions will also be available if two doctors advise that the baby could be born seriously handicapped. Abortions will be legal up to 24 weeks gestation.



*Native American women and their children are more at risk than any other section of the US population.*

## BELGIUM LEADS

SET up in September 1980, Belgium's new ministerial committee for women's status has held its first meeting.

The committee asked the Minister for Justice to draw up a bill that would improve existing legislation on the nationality of married women and their children. The new law will be in line with the principle laid down by UNO that nationality should not be altered by marriage.

Three ministers (Employment, Social Security and Public Health) will be reviewing the whole system of protection for women at the time of motherhood. It has already been agreed that maternity leave may be prolonged if the infant has to remain in hospital.

The ministerial committee also agreed to a proposed royal decree which will extend the right to long leave for family reasons to men, a concession previously granted to women members of the civil service only.

## GREECE

GREEK women's groups have had to cope with many difficulties over the past decade and they have needed a lot of courage to overcome them.

First of all, the colonels' eight year old regime did not promote the growing awareness among women. Those women who were aware of the issues and well organised gave priority to the struggle for democracy. This meant that Greece played little part in the great interflow of ideas and radical changes in mentality that marked the early 1970s in Western Europe for the feminist movement.

When parliamentary democracy returned in 1975, women had to devote their energies to patching up their organizations again — a thankless but vital task. The work was all the more difficult because there was an intensive movement for remodelling the political parties in Greece at the same time.

Since 1975, new women's organizations have been created, the largest of these are attached to the political parties.

# "If only."



And in Germany it is becoming increasingly common for a father to stay at home to look after a child who is ill. By law, fathers are entitled to five days' paid leave, just like mothers, to look after their children of 8 and under. According to the figures for 1978, 10,427 fathers obtained this leave in 31,652 cases of illness.

German women's organisations are urging that every parent be entitled to ten days' paid leave and that the age limit for sick children be lifted.

## Polish elections

ZOFIA GRZYB, elected to the Politburo of the Polish United Workers' Party, is the first woman to hold such a position on this influential committee in Poland or any other socialist country.

Zofia is from Lodz, a town with a history of working class activity. In 1971 women textile workers struck for higher wages. Zofia, one of the leading trade unionists on the Politburo is a forewoman in a shoe factory and a member of Solidarity. At the emergency congress of the Polish communist party Zofia spoke about working conditions in the factories.

## Women for Peace

A WOMEN's march for peace left Copenhagen in June for the 750 mile walk to Paris, cheered on by four thousand people who came to see them off.

The sixty Scandinavian women who started the march will be joined by others over the 42 days it will take to walk to Paris.

A three day festival in Paris for peace and disarmament will commemorate the 36th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



**IN  
THE  
NAME  
OF  
LIFE**



*Women's  
International  
Democratic  
Federation  
Poster*

## CATCH 22!

A NORTH London waitress, fired because she has four children, won her case of unfair dismissal before an appeals tribunal

Ursula Hurley, 30, lost her job in a Kentish Town bistro after only one night when her employer discovered that she was a mother. His policy was not to employ women with young children because he thought they were unreliable.

Ursula initially brought charges under the Sex Discrimination Act before an industrial tribunal — which ruled against her because it found the employer's policy was not to hire *anyone* with young children.

In reversing the earlier judgment, the appeals committee said evidence indicated the employer had no policy against employing men with children. "All the evidence shows his policy was not to employ women with children."

The desirability of women with young children going out to work was not at issue, the Committee said. "It is up to each mother to decide. Employers may not discriminate against them just because they are mothers."



*Employers are discriminating against women just because they are mothers. Are all men employees childless?*

## BELGIUM

ON 7 MARCH a demonstration took place in Brussels against the impact of the economic crisis on Belgian women. Organized by an umbrella group of trade unionists, socialists and feminists, the demonstration protested against the accelerating rate of female unemployment plus the discriminatory measures being taken by the Belgian Government in the area of social security for the unemployed.

On 1 April 1981, the Government reduced payments to certain categories of the unemployed. While not overtly aimed at women, these cuts affect women more than men. The cuts are based on the concept of head of family, a category to which only 5% of women belong. Those not in this category are categorized either as "cohabitants" — anybody living with another person with an income of more than £125 a month — or as persons living alone.

A whole series of other restrictive measures is envisaged, e.g. jobs must be accepted within 25 km of where someone lives, which imposes impossible burdens on mothers of young children; unemployment benefits are to be regarded as part of the taxable income, which in turn affects other areas such as council house rents which are based on taxable income.

This type of discriminatory measure may be contrary to an EEC directive on equality in social security, due to be implemented by member states before 1985. Perhaps the Commission could be asked for a statement on a situation which seems to represent a backward step.

## EEC survey

ALMOST 13% of all women in paid employment are acutely aware of discrimination, show an EEC-wide survey, and though Irish women say they can find work easily, promotion, retirement age and taxes are the main disadvantages they face.

The study, *European women in paid employment: Their perception of discrimination* was carried out at the request of the European Parliament's Commission for Women's Rights.

## Spaniards choose Divorce



*Spain's referendum legalises divorce.*

DIVORCE is lawful in Spain again 42 years since General Franco outlawed it after the Civil War of 1936-39.

The Congress of Deputies approved a law allowing divorce on grounds of mutual consent after a one to two year official separation, desertion or adultery.

Opposition and Government deputies voted down a move by the Senate to restrict the divorce laws by giving judges the power to refuse divorce if it would harm one of the partners or any children involved.

Strong objections to a divorce law came from the Conservative members of the Christian Democratic Party and from the Roman Catholic Church.

One million separated Spaniards are expected to apply for divorce as the new law comes into effect.

Divorce in Spain was first legalised in 1932 under the Republican Government but banned by Franco since 1939.

The only European states where divorce is still illegal are the tiny republic of San Remo, Malta and Ireland.

## Less Italians

A SHARP fall in the birth rate is the only hope for a solution of Italy's economic and social crisis — and that of Europe as a whole — according to the Rome Institute for Demographic Research. Its chairman, Signor Luigi de Marchi, said that the Italian population in terms of consumption and pollution caused as much ecological damage as would 2,000 million to 3,000 million Indians or Chinese packed into the peninsula. How these views are to be reconciled with those of the Roman Catholic Church and the national cult of the bambino, remains to be seen.

## Women at risk

A EUROPEAN conference attended by 200 women from 17 countries gave an excellent analysis of the relationship between women battering and the general oppression of women as well as the position of the movement within the broader womens movement. For the activists in this area, woman battering is not an individual or relationship problem but an extreme form of the oppression of women.

The attention paid to women battering in any particular country was discovered to be related to the state of the women's movement in that country.

Economic dependence on women perpetuates this problem. Society is organised so that large numbers of women have no income of their own, outside of the "family income", which is usually controlled by the man. Women are forced into unequal dependent relationships with men, which make them extremely vulnerable to violence.

Dangers facing the movement to end women battering include the conflict between the political work needed to end this problem and the practical burden of running refuges.



Swiss women achieve equality in law.

## Switzerland

SWISS agreed by a handy majority to write the principle of sexual equality into Switzerland's Constitution.

The amendment proposed by Parliament was backed by all the political parties and says men and women are equal before the law and should receive equal pay for equal work. Voters approved by 60.3% to 39.7% but the turnout among the country's 3.9 million electorate was just 33.5%. Swiss women first won the right to vote on Federal issues only ten years ago.

Because a constitutional amendment was involved, the proposal required a majority both of the popular vote and of the 26 Cantons (states).

While 17 of the Cantons voted in favour, nine voted against — all smaller rural Cantons mainly in German-speaking Switzerland.

Generally Swiss women receive 30% less money than men and employers argued that their equal pay clause would spell economic trouble for many businesses.

The argument was rejected by the political parties and trade unions on the grounds that many jobs were suitable only for men.

In a side vote, the small Canton of Obwald, one of the original Swiss states when the confederation was established 690 years ago, removed the crime of concubinage from the statute books.

Obwald is one of the three Swiss Cantons in which women still lack the right to vote on local affairs.

## More women joining trade unions

THE 51st TUC Women's Conference was held in Southport, England. During the course of two days over 37 motions were discussed, including equality within trade unions, positive action to overcome job segregation, the Equal Pay Act, part-time workers, women's right to work, women's unemployment and expenditure cuts.

Also on the agenda were the rights of women from ethnic minorities, maternity rights, education and training opportunities for women and taxation. For the first time ever the agenda included a motion dealing with the problems facing working women in South Africa.

Women now comprise three out of every ten trade unionists. Yet there has not been any corresponding jump in the number of women on trade union committees or women delegates to annual conferences. While some unions have taken special steps to involve their women members more actively in the work of the unions, much still remains to be done.

The Sex Discrimination Act allows special provision to be made by unions where it is considered that women's representation on decision-making committees does not reflect the balance of the membership. But additional seats created for women can only be filled on the basis of co-option, not election.

For many years the trade union movement has had a charter of aims to better the position of women in the workforce and as members of the community. But equality within individual unions remains to be achieved.

There are almost four million part-time workers in Britain,

*The involvement of women at job level is not reflected on*

85% of them women. These workers tend to have poorer wages and working conditions and are less likely to belong to a union. The rights and interests of part-time workers need to be protected through the collective strength of the trade union movement.

In the past trade unions often ignored their needs. In order to overcome prejudice and help both union and part-time workers the TUC has drawn up the following priorities for part-time workers which it is urging individual unions to adopt:

- Entitlement to benefits such as sick pay, pensions and paid holidays on the same basis.
- Inclusion in job security agreements.
- Adequate meal and tea breaks.
- Inclusion in training schemes and no bar on promotion.
- Extra payment for unsocial hours.
- No discrimination against part-time workers when redundancies occur.
- Special provision for one-parent families, the physically disabled and those who have primary financial responsibility for dependents.

A special leaflet has been produced aimed at recruiting part-time workers into trade unions.

From the 1981 Congress there will be five women's representatives on the General Council of the TUC.

It will, of course, remain open for women to be nominated for any of the other 39 seats, but it is a sad fact that only one woman has ever been elected to the General Council for a trade group seat — and she had been on the Council for several years as a women's representative.

*trade union committees or executives.*



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