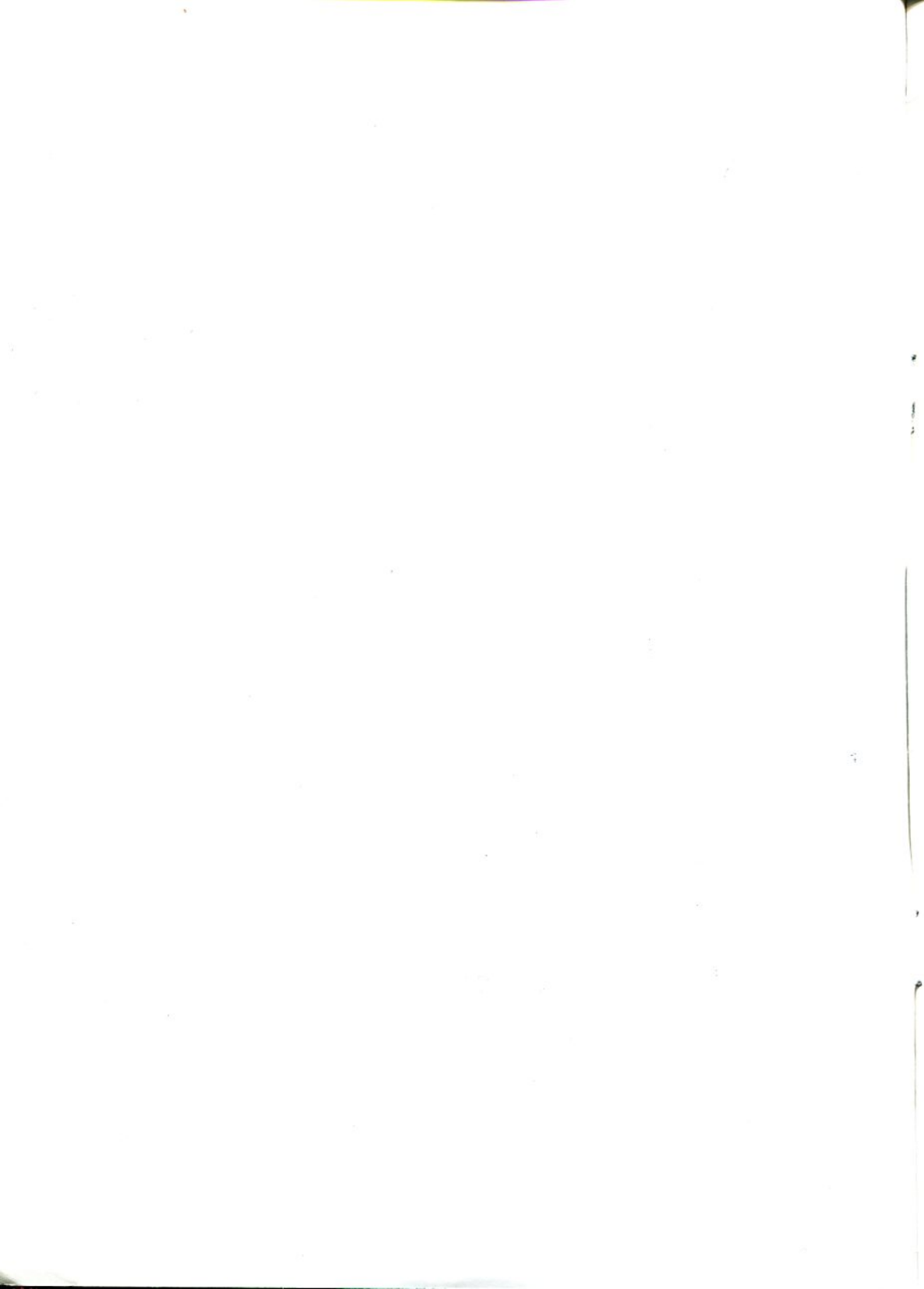


Publication of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist).



## INTRODUCTION

What is the purpose of this pamphlet? If it is to split the problem of women off, to separate women from the whole working class, then we have failed as Marxist-Leninists. For it is fundamental to Marxism-Leninism that all social life and all political problems are first and foremost rooted in classes and class conflict, not in age, sex, nationality, religion or anything else.

However, within the vast working class of this country, there are different sections with specific problems which arise out of the class conflict. Very often the ruling class tries to swell our perception of the differences between these sections beyond all proportion, in order to pit one section of the working class against another.

Women form just such a section. Everybody knows that throughout the world women suffer discrimination, and its roots go so deep that even China and Albania are still fighting the problem. Women are right to fight against oppression wherever it occurs. But it is important to recognise the ideology which encourages and needs such discrimination as the ideology not of the male sex but of the ruling class. Such discrimination is an attack upon the whole working class for two very good economic reasons both described by Marx. First there is the "cheapening of labour power by the sheer abuse of women". Secondly, that many women go out to work is used by employers as an excuse to pay their menfolk less than a breadwinner's wage.

The woman in the home also works for the capitalists, in bringing up a family of workers.

It follows that "The proletariat cannot achieve complete freedom, unless it achieves complete freedom for women" (Lenin). And by the same token women will never be free without the emancipation of their class. The two are part and parcel of the same struggle. And wherever women engage in a struggle which weakens the ruling class, and strengthens their own class, whether or not the struggle appears to be specifically a women's struggle, they advance the revolutionary movement and their own emancipation one step further.

## WOMEN AS WORKERS

### Women who go out to work

In Capitalist society the question of equality, advancement and the ultimate emancipation of women has always been bedevilled by the evangelist approach of "do-gooders". In our industrial country, women have always been part of the working life of the country, especially in industry. And wherever they work, in a factory, in the home or in any other form of employment, women have never wavered in their loyalty to their class; they have never been a source of reaction or backwardness. If they are accused of not struggling hard enough it is because of our social system which condemns them to slavery. Where they have been in work and have clearly seen the need to struggle they have not vacillated or lacked courage. The industrial history of Britain shows this. But always they have suffered from the interference and attempted mis-direction of allegedly advanced women, often well meaning and articulate but not part of the struggle. Britain's history has shown it as the most advanced capitalist society and it is women who have suffered the greatest burdens of it.

A minor but significant event was the Bryant and May's Match Strike; exposing at the height of Victorian affluence the appalling conditions of the match workers in London. The women revolted but it was the upper class Mrs. Besant who took the credit. In the beautiful struggle recently at B. S. R. East Kilbride, Scotland, women workers by their courage and tenacity without any superior lady to tell them how, defeated an employer who had defied the trade union movement in the United Kingdom and Ireland. This was not an economic struggle but one for dignity of workers and dignity of Unions. Women in Leeds and Bradford in the clothing industry, did not win a complete victory for wages and conditions but terrified their employers, who had enjoyed an easy run, and shook their unions. Especially in the Motor Industry, in Fords in

the "Sewing Machine Strike" the women, only 600 out of 60,000 work force, repudiated agreements and began a struggle on equal gradings - the basic struggle was equal pay. Here we should kill the constant excuse that it is men who hold back women, do not assist them, ignore them. This has happened, but on this occasion because of the women's clarity and tenacity they were wholeheartedly supported by the men. The greatest advance economically for all women in industry, especially in engineering, was made by the Ford women workers. The frightened reaction of the employers and the Labour Government to this struggle was shown by the introduction of the Equal Pay Act, a despicable device to behead a burgeoning struggle. In the jungle of capitalist industry, only by constant struggle have men advanced wage levels; the inequality of men's and women's wages will only be removed by

such increasing struggle on the part of women.

The question arises: Why have women not been more involved in this form of struggle? We must jettison the evangelistic approach and talk about equal emancipation and equal pay. Out of 25 million workers in this industrial country, more than one third are women. Capitalism here would die without those wage slaves. There is no such thing as equal pay in Britain. Even those sectors of workers, teachers, civil servants, medical workers, London Transport conductors, where allegedly there is equal pay, women do not have the same opportunities; higher skills, free choice of vocation, advancement in any trade or profession are barred to them.

Wherever they are, whether they be capstan operators, typists, workers in the needle trade or in shops, teachers, nurses, catering workers or any other field of work, however small in number, they must seize every opportunity to demand higher wages as men have always had to do. If typists are in short supply they must ask for more; if there are too few press operators they must strike and say "We need more money". In the clerical field they should ignore the iniquitous agency system with its contemptible advertisements for "swinging girls"; they go to work to eat and to pay the rent, not with the hope of marrying the managing director;

without them the offices would close, so they should demand a proper wage. The membership of women in unions against their working population is approximately one in four compared to one in two of men. This should not make the men complacent. All militants, all class-conscious workers, all Communists should recruit into Unions and rectify this situation. Women are beginning to know the necessity; there is a slight increase in women's membership of unions - a very good sign.

If we turn to the more recent scene in industry generally, particularly engineering, there is to be seen a form of guerilla struggle which has embraced an enormous number of workers, far more than has ever been reported in the capitalist press. All manner of tactics have been applied, from straightforward demands to employers to overtime bans, go-slows, strikes and occupations. Throughout in every factory where women as well as men are employed, the women must have been also involved. One would hardly think so from reports. The men must analyse the strategy and conduct of these struggles and rectify this omission. Failure to publicise the activity of the women has helped to bring disastrous results in the final National Settlement. First in conducting the battle, which arose from the refusal of their Trade Unions to continue national negotiations with the Engineering employers and turning the struggle back to the separate factories, the most important issue, one calculated to involve all, was the demand for equal pay. This goes almost by default in the result, a piece of sectarianism of the male members which will do incalculable damage to the interest of all workers. The National Agreement provides, and not until 1973, £18 a week for women workers. The Employers argue that this is an advance to equal pay - 90 per cent - but it is 1 per cent less than was achieved in 1964 and the 1 per cent back is an even greater setback psychologically than materially. And even worse, the 90 per cent is related to the male labourer's rate, so now women, skilled though they may be, are to be classed as labourers. Girls and juniors will also receive 90 per cent of boys as juniors. Both are learners- why the difference? Boys will receive £8.75, girls probably doing the same

work £7. 65. But, of course, neither boy nor girl can live on these wages. Parents will subsidise the employer, once again capitalism has the double exploitation.

There cannot be emancipation, there cannot be equality except when women and men of the working class are united without reservation in the basic political fight. Examples are given from industrial women workers because it is from their struggles at the point of production where they are most powerful and united, that the wage rates improve of all women, including professional women, and of course men. But it is only through revolution and the achievement of socialism that women will have true equality. Both men and women will discard the prejudice, the lack of understanding, the selfishness towards each other that capitalism breeds.

Stalin said that women were a great reserve for the working class. The Communist Party of Britain (M. L.) says that women are part of the army, in the ranks of the working class.

### Women who work at home

The woman at home cannot be ignored as if she was divorced from politics - marriage is no protection from the capitalist system. The capitalists have three main reasons for keeping the housewife tied to the home. First, she is a member of the working class, highly skilled yet not paid by capitalism. She scrimps and saves to make the man's meagre wage go round - feeding and looking after today's wage slaves, producing and bringing up tomorrow's. In effect, he husband's boss pays one wage and gets two workers for it.

The bosses have a second reason for being happy with this system. Whenever there is a need for a cheap labour force, as in the war, for example, they can bring women into the workforce, and send them back to the nursey when it suits them. (In 1943, 43 per cent of women were in paid work; in 1949, only 39 per cent still went to work.)

Thirdly, capitalism cares only for profits, not for people, so labour saving devices, which could help with some of the drearier tasks of the housewife are inefficient, soon break down, and are

too expensive for many women. Another result of this attitude is that capitalists do nothing to help the large numbers of mothers who have to go to work from sheer economic necessity. So many working women need nurseries for their children and so many children need nurseries to further their development, but under capitalism nurseries are few and beyond the pockets of most women workers.

So the housewife is a vital part of the working class. She is the one who sees how small the wage packet is in relation to the food and clothes the family needs. She knows where her loyalty lies - with her working husband and children against the boss. Her family looks to her for support when they go on strike or occupy the factories, for without her co-operation they know they're lost. In the recent miners' strike, the women were beside their men every inch of the way, and deserve half the credit for the victory. Unemployment affects women both in the home and on the job.

But women are relatively isolated when they stay at home and their struggle against the ruling class cannot be so effective as when they are at work. How can these women help in the fight for Socialism? There will be issues which affect them directly, which they can and should get involved in, such as rent strikes and campaigns concerning their children's welfare. As any woman knows, though, the fight is between the workers and the bosses, and the only way she is going to solve any of her long-term problems is by joining with her husband and fighting for a living wage and a fairer economic system.

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR WOMEN

Capitalism does not provide education out of charity or because the ruling class likes the idea of people getting cultured. Rather education is a long-term investment for the capitalist class - the money poured into it (out of the workers' pockets in tax anyway) produces skilled, scientific and research workers, professional workers, efficient workers of all kinds who are a source of enormous profits.



Women and girls have for long been part of this plan as a source of cheap unskilled and semi-skilled labour, and by and large they have come to accept the level of education and types of jobs that have traditionally been available to them. Too often, because of economic and social pressures, the "choice" is to leave school at the earliest possible moment for a dead-end job. Where a girl does stay on at school she will concentrate on those subjects which will help her in those types of jobs for which she is destined - as a clerk, a typist or in the lower grades of the civil service. This has important implications for girls who go into higher or further education, where girls have to compete heavily for places in the arts field. Also, recent expansion have taken place mainly in the field of science and technology at the polytechnics and technical colleges. Here in all courses boys outnumber girls as follows :

Advanced courses

Engineering	600 : 1
Building	360 : 1
Science	6 : 1
Social Administration	8 : 1
Business Studies	8 : 1

Non-advanced courses

OND	2 : 1
ONC	12 : 1*
City & Guilds	31 : 1*

\*These two cover many of the courses taken by students released from industry.

So in general girls don't tend to use school subjects and interests for further study. Indeed, although there has been a steady increase over the years in the number of women working, we find the alarming state of affairs in which the proportion of women skilled workers, technicians and professional workers, has actually decreased (Manpower Study no. 6. D. E. P.)

That girls are so reluctant to invest in education and skills can be explained partly by immediate economic pressures and partly by the fact that they believe work is not to be their central life task; it is to be temporary until they get married when their job will be that of housewife and mother. They think if they work it will be by choice, for pin-money. But the facts show that this is no longer the case. Since 1960 there has been a very marked trend appearing in the working lives of the majority of women: the majority of women return to full employment around the age of 30 after a short period of child-raising. This means that the average woman has at least 35 years of employment, most of it uninterrupted. 55% of working women are still working in the peak child-caring years of 25-29. It is clear that young girls are not aware of the changing pattern of women's lives.

### Training at work

There is little opportunity for the young women workers to retrieve lost opportunities. For education is now at the discretion of the employer who will not let her out for training unless it will result in more profits for him. Of the 1 in 15 girls who get an apprenticeship, three-quarters of these are in hairdressing or beauty salons, where it is absolutely essential for the performance of the job. Only 1 in 4 girls get systematic in-training for 1 year or more. They are generally given partial training and then paid as unskilled. But even this information is exaggerated as the figures are obtained from the employer who interprets the word 'training' in his own fashion. Training is often the word given to the age-old practice of 'sitting next to Nellie' and needless to say, there is no Further Education at colleges or recognised qualifications attached to this 'training'.

In fact 10% of girls receive day-release compared to 40% of boys. It seems generally the case that the more women are employed in a particular concern, the less women are sent on day release. For example :-

In the distribution industry there are around  $1\frac{1}{2}$  million women who form over 50% of the workers - 2.3% receive day release.

In textiles there are around  $\frac{1}{2}$  million women who form 52% of the workers - 3.4% receive day release.

In clothing and Footwear are  $\frac{1}{3}$  million women who form  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the workers - 2.1% receive day release.

And these figures are typical of other industries like banking, insurance, printing, etc.

What we must not lose sight of in looking at these figures, however, is that merely encouraging girls to complete more heavily with the boys is no real answer. Even if there were sufficient opportunities for all in our education system (which there are not) a capitalist society could not provide jobs for so many skilled people. The real shame of education in capitalist society is that it must be restricted to the economic needs of capitalism, thereby wasting the enormous reserve of skill and talent in the working class which, if not fettered by capitalist relations of production, could be source of wealth and well-being.

### WOMEN UNDER SOCIALISM

It is unnecessary to describe the oppression, the degradation of the majority of people, especially women, living under feudal conditions in colonial or semi-colonial countries. In Albania the Turkish conquerors imposed the veil and purdah, age-old superstition was encouraged by the ruling class to preserve child marriage. In China one can still see occasionally a very old lady with bound feet, a reminder of the past. But above all the women shared the poverty of their families, the illiteracy, the hunger, the disease; they watched their children suffer.

Socialism has brought freedom and dignity to women, who earned it. In the U. S. S. R. of Lenin and Stalin, the women made their full contribution to revolution. All the world knows of the heroic efforts of the women of Leningrad who worked, while starving, manufacturing guns and then went off as fighters to defend the city. It was the whole community of Leningrad--women equally with men, who defeated the Nazis. In Albania also, as Comrade Enver Hoxha has stated, the women won their emancipation with their blood. The Nazis hanged some women partisans, but countless others came forward to take their places. In China, women peasants, factory workers, professional women fought for the liberation of their country and for revolution. These women have paid in blood for their freedom, and shown the world what women can be. At this moment the women of Vietnam are proving that there is no division between freedom for women and freedom for all people.

In Albania and China women have equal rights with men, in law, in education, in government, and equal pay. Women can hold high office, they can be directors of factories, employing men and women, or of communes or state farms. But laws are only a beginning, and indeed it will be necessary to reeducate the entire class, replacing bourgeois ideology with respect for people.

Under socialism, husbands and families are encouraged to play their full part in the running of the home. Work shifts and transport are organised to suit the needs of women workers. Having a baby does not destroy a woman's career as it usually does in Britain. When she is able, she can return to her career without loss. Working women with children are helped by the development of nurseries at the place of work, so that the mother can visit her child regularly. Restaurants and canteens, shops and markets are cheap and convenient.

As for child care, under socialism it is not simply the case that men will help women with the children. All the people recognise that the children are everybody's future, and all share the joys and responsibilities that this recognition implies.

What we can learn from the women of all these countries is that their rewards can only be gained through struggle. No-one can give us what we haven't earned. As British women our future lies with that of the British working class. When struggling for the working class we are promoting our own struggle as well as learning the truth about ourselves. We are strong, firm and resolute. We are in this struggle to the end.

We have so many bourgeois ideas to combat and clearly many of these ideas will linger on after the revolution, and complete eradication will take years. But we are learning, the working class is learning. Wherever there are struggles you can find us and wherever we are we shall struggle.

#### WOMEN AND THE PARTY

Women workers need the leadership of the party of their class just the same as do men workers. That should go without saying. But in addition, the workers' party is the only organisation of any sort which is working for real equality of the sexes and an end to the special oppression of women under capitalist rule. Workers do not put their faith in any reformist or escapist, feminist "solutions" for women. No reforms within the capitalist system, or utopian communities, or new "life-styles", can bring equality and an end to oppression so long as we are ruled by the capitalist class. In fact they can be diversions from the struggle for these ends, if ever workers are persuaded to split up to concentrate on sectional issues.

We say that only by tackling the fundamental question--which is that of state power--can workers get in a position to tackle all the secondary questions that affect women, such as inequalities in the law, in education, social and family life, etc. In its struggle for state power the working class cannot afford the disaffection of any of its sections. When sectional inequalities, such as those which affect women, prove an impediment to struggle, the class must direct its efforts toward removing

them. Here lies the importance, for example, of the fight for equal pay. The same process goes on under much more favourable conditions during the period of working class power. As the class has no interest in oppressing any of its sections, women can gradually win their struggle for equality throughout all spheres of life. They have a great stake in the proletarian revolution.

But the Party cannot sit by and rest on the assumption that women workers must support it in their own interest. Lenin said:

"...the women of the working class will not feel irresistably driven into sharing our struggles for state power if we only and always put forward that one demand, though it were with the trumpets of Jericho. No, no! The women must be made conscious of the political connections between our demands and their own suffering, needs, and wishes. They must realize what the proletarian dictatorship means for them: complete equality with man in law and practice, in the family, in the state, in society; an end to the power of the bourgeoisie."

This applies as much in Britain today as in Russia when he wrote. The Party goes out to win women workers. This means first of all dispensing with any remnants of the old ideas that women are by nature reactionary, or unpolitical, or must be led by men, etc. All of which are vile slanders. We must recruit to the Party all those fine women leaders in struggle throughout all sections of the working class. The women workers' struggle is covered in the Party paper and other publications. The Party's supreme task in all this--which must never be forgotten--is the ideological development of the women workers of Britain. Hesitancy can but aid the enemy.



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