



WOMEN :
in society; in the family;
at work; in trade unions;
for liberation; for socialism.

a nottm. i.m.g. pamphlet.

WOMEN IN SOCIETY.

It should be apparent to all that Women in our society are in an inferior position. Of course, some people say that Women are naturally inferior and deserve the position they are in. Others may think that Women, while not exactly inferior, do have a 'natural' instinct to devote themselves to the care of others and to the dull, day-to-day slog of housework which effectively prevents them from developing in other ways.

It is a fact however, that although the oppression of Women has been a feature of many societies throughout history. The form which this oppression has taken has varied enormously. For Example, Margaret Mead, in her studies of other cultures, has shown that despite their general physical weakness and their role in reproduction Women have played and do play vastly different roles in different societies, with widely differing responsibilities. Indeed there is evidence to suggest that in certain cultures Women have actually been in a superior position vis-a-vis Men. In other words the biological characteristics of Women as childbearers has not necessarily and inevitably led to their subordination. The oppression of Women cannot be seen as a universal inevitable or a 'natural' condition. Its roots lie in the specific economic and political structures of particular societies and its form has varied according to those structures.

In a Capitalist society such as Britain the fundamental division is between those who own and control the means of producing wealth and those who, by their work, produce that wealth. In order to reproduce this relationship between owners and non-owners the structures and institutions of this society are all organised in such a way as to defend the interests of those who own and control the means of producing wealth - the Ruling Class.

HOW WOMEN ARE OPPRESSED.Education

Our society expects different things of boys and girls and children are brought up from birth to fit in with these expectations: girls to be little house-wives and mothers, boys for a more 'outward' looking and 'active' life as the 'breadwinner'. The education system reinforces this - domestic science courses for girls, technical and scientific subjects for the boys.

The opportunities for girls once they leave school are even more limited. In 1970 only 13% of the total number of apprentices (limited as these are) were taken up by girls - and these were mainly in hairdressing. In higher education Women do not fare much better - they make up only 24% of the student population. It is not surprising then, that most Women are to be found in work requiring little training or skill, with little opportunity for getting anything better.

Advertising.

The systematic subordination of Women through such things as inadequate educational provision is further reinforced by the effects of advertising and the Media generally, in persuasively portraying a distorted stereotype of what a Woman should be.

For example, Female Sexuality is distorted and manipulated, it becomes a thing separate and separable from the person. The Female body, or appropriate bits of it, are used to enhance sales appeal. Women become a 'Dolly' or a 'Bird' or even 'a pair of tits'. Female sexuality is defined as a response to men. It is seen as something which is intrinsically passive, submissive and dependant on the definitions and actions of Men. This is reflected in the way Women desperately try to make themselves 'appealing' - to present

themselves in terms of what Men 'want' them to be - a certain shape, weight etc. going to ridiculous lengths to achieve this.

DID you know that beauty chores are like homework? Well, it's true. If you do them thoroughly, you'll earn yourself lots of Good Looks Marks!

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Advertising continually plays on all the contradictions and uncertainties in a Women's situation. Thus the right clothes makes one sexually attractive, the right deodorant or toothpaste sexually desirable, the right washing powder shows you're a good mother and wife etc. etc. In other words Women are consistently battered with an ideal they must adhere to. They must be a sexy girlfriend, a faithful wife, a devoted mother who puts the demands of the whole family before herself.

If Women don't live up to this ideal then they are regarded as being somehow, strange, abnormal. If they don't titivate themselves - wear make-up and short skirts - they're

called lesbians: if they leave their husbands and try and bring up a family alone, they're called prostitutes: if they don't have children they're accused of being frigid.

In this way Women are never allowed to forget that their primary role in this society must be as a wife and mother (past, present and prospective).

WOMEN AND THE FAMILY.

The family, therefore, is posed as the only way that Women can find their true fulfillment as Women.



The family is also posed as being in some way, a refuge from the rest of society - an island set apart. For Women it seems to provide the opportunity of escaping from the dull, mundane jobs they are forced into through lack of training. It also appears to offer her the possibility of being her 'own boss' in her own, albeit limited, domain.

Similarly for Men the family is seen as a refuge from the general system of production and the alienation of work. The family home is the place where he is fed, clothed, rested and prepared for work the following day. Not only are his general physical wants catered for, but the family also offers a man the

setting in which he can assert himself, feel himself to be boss, put someone else down after having been put down at work all day.



However, as we mentioned earlier, the family as an institution exists within a society which structures all its institutions in a certain way - in such a way as to defend the interests of the Ruling Class. Relations within the family reflect this.

"Here's your gold watch, Gertrude, for fifty years of faithful service."

Thus the wife and children are regarded as the property of the husband. For example, the Man is the legal guardian of the children and is the one who signs all the documents. A Woman's place is still with her husband - if he decides to move, perhaps without consulting her, and she prefers to stay in her own home then she is regarded as having deserted him. A husband does not even have to tell his wife his income, but she has to tell him what she earns.

Therefore, although marriage is held up as being the 'partnership of life' - all the pressures of a society based on private ownership soon ensure that it is not a genuine partnership or relationship at all, but a situation where a Woman belongs to and is dependant on the Man - socially, psychologically and financially.

The organisation of social life under capitalism is such that there is very little alternative for Women. Marriage and the family seem to offer the only defence against poverty and loneliness for Women. Thus divorcees hasten to remarry and those who live outside the family - single Women with children, gay people etc. are punished economically, socially, psychologically - for example the nonsensical notion of people 'living in sin'.

WOMEN AND DOMESTIC LABOUR.

With the development of Capitalism there has been an increasing separation the home and the place of work, between domestic labour and commodity production. Similarly within the home there is a very clear division between Men and Women's roles. The Man as 'breadwinner', the Woman as housewife an unpaid domestic labourer (although as we shall see later, the majority of Women are also employed in work outside the house)

'Protective' labour legislation has reinforced this fact - Men as 'breadwinner', Woman as domestic labourer. It has not attempted to prevent Women from working - far from it. Throughout the entire history of Capitalism working class Women have taken paid employment wherever and whenever this has been available, and have generally been used as a cheap, reserve pool of labour. However, it has undoubtedly established that the domestic labourer is the Woman and that she has the responsibility for the maintenance and reproduction of the labour force. The necessary corollary to this is the general exclusion of Men from domestic labour, thus enabling him to work long hours in poor conditions. (Something he would not be able to do if he had to look after himself and his dependants in the evening). At the same time it has been established that the Man's wage must pay for the maintenance of the wife and family.

IS HOUSEWORK WORK ?

Because housework is not paid directly does this mean that it is not necessary to the continued functioning of Capitalism ? Indeed not. As we stated before, Women as domestic labourers are involved in the maintenance and reproduction of the labour force. This means providing the members of the family with food warmth and rest in order to prepare them for another days slog at work. Doing the shopping, preparing the meals, housecleaning, washing etc. similarly aids this preparation for work. It also means bearing and bringing up the next generation of workers.

All these services are essential to the continuance of Capitalist production, however, they are not explicitly acknowledged by the Capitalist. A wage paid to a Man is supposed to cover the cost of all these services - although a family with children attempting to live on one persons wage nowadays would probably find itself with less money than they would get in Social Security & benefits. In other words then, Women are providing these services at a minimum cost to employers and the State.

Continuing this argument, some people, also concerned with the cause of Women's rights, have demanded a 'wage for housework' - as a recognition of the work Women are doing in the home and as a step towards financial independence for married Women. However, on this issue, as much as we support all moves to make Women financially independent, we must understand the way in which housework itself oppresses Women.

In general the organisation of domestic labour has changed little in the last hundred years. Millions of isolated units of three or four people going through the same old routine. Modern technology has effected domestic labour to a degree, with the introduction of 'labour saving' commodities. Now, all homes must have a cooker, refrigerator, vacuum cleaner, washing machine, iron etc. Each domestic labourer then sets about utilising these machines in the most inefficient way possible, i.e. in the isolated conditions in which she works, for the benefit of two or three other people, while millions of other domestic labourers go through identical routines for the sake of their two or three other people.

Certainly, the most immediate gain from this duplication of goods is the maximum sale of commodities. Labour saving gadgets by themselves do not reduce the amount of time spent on housework. Instead the housewife is expected to maintain higher and higher 'standards of housekeeping'.

Psychologically, housework dulls and stultifies the mind, a day-in day-out repetition of the same boring tasks in conditions where each individual is isolated from each other.

To put forward the demand - 'pay for housework' is therefore, to entrench the position of Women even further as a housewife-slave. What is necessary for the improvement of Women's position are provisions which free her from the chains binding her to the home. In other words, such things as public laundry facilities, communal restaurants, community controlled child-care facilities would all serve to free Women from their psychological and economic oppression as housewives.

WOMEN AT WORK.

As we have noted above Women are not simply domestic labourers but also workers outside the home. Women have long been used as a reserve pool of labour, to be drawn into work in times of full employment, war etc. only to be thrown out again when they are no longer needed. However, they are not only this. Women are also a necessary part of the labour force. Today, altogether, 9 million Women are in paid employment - that is 38% of the total workforce.

At work, Women are in a notoriously inferior position to that of men. Because Women's main social function in Capitalist society is defined as being a wife and mother, her activity as a worker outside the home has been regarded as being of secondary importance. This type of argument is constantly used as a justification for not giving Women the same opportunities for training as those open to men. Thus Women are, inevitably, concentrated into unskilled and low-paid jobs, with very little opportunity for improvement.

Another argument used against Women is that since the man is the main 'breadwinner', the money that Women earn is therefore 'pin-money' a 'bit-extra' for luxuries etc. This completely ignores the fact that more and more Women have to support themselves and, in many cases, a family as well on their single, meagre wage.

EQUAL PAY.

Many people acclaimed the passing of the Equal Pay Act 1970, (which only comes into full force at the end of 1975) as the final victory in the long struggle by Women workers for Equal Pay. However the scope of the Act is very limited indeed. It provides for equal pay only where Men and Women are employed, interchangeably on the same job, or where the job has been given an 'equal value' on a job evaluation exercise.

Now it is very unusual throughout the whole of industry to find Men and Women employed on the same job and there is considerable evidence to show that employers have been using the five years before the Act comes into full force to divide out Men's and Women's work even further, to reword agreements and generally wriggle their way out of any commitment to Equal Pay.

On the question of equal where a job has been given equal value under a job evaluation exercise. We must first of all realise that we live in an economic system that constantly deprives us of the full value of our labour power, and in addition that 'value' means not value to the worker or to the community but solely to the employer.

Secondly, job evaluation is not a scientific technique. It reflects all the prejudices of the society we live in. So that, for example, in most job evaluation exercises physical strength is assessed at a higher level than manual dexterity. In other words the jobs where Women predominate are likely to be given a lower 'value' than those on which Men are employed.

It is possible, given Trade Union 'policing' of job evaluation at every level, that Women workers may gain increased wage rates. However, we must remember that job evaluation grades jobs as 'eggs in a packing station' and has the effect of setting everyone against each other in their determination to maintain their position one rung above the chickens below.

In short, job evaluation is by no means a clear cut way to equal pay and depends always on Trade Union vigilance to turn it to their advantage.

The Equal Pay Act does not go very far in promising any improvement in the general conditions of Women workers. It completely fails to take up the question of discrimination in education and training, which is one of the main reasons why Women are so badly off. Because of the general lack of training, the majority of Women are employed, and increasingly so, in unskilled and consequently low paid work.

Another factor operating against Women is that they tend to predominate in those sectors of industry where the wages of Men are generally lower than average. This means then, that even where Women throughout a whole industry gain pay comparable to Men, they would still remain in that desperately general category of 'low paid workers'.

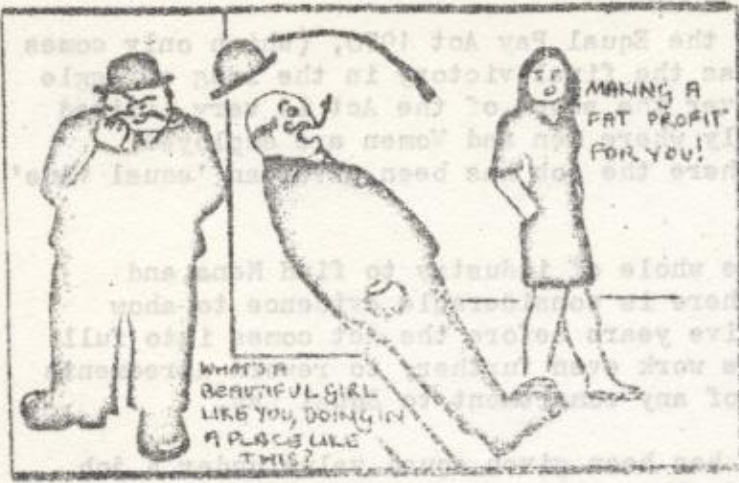
A recent report has conclusively shown that 'progress' to equal pay has indeed been pretty minimal. But worse than this it shows that in the last year the 'pace' at which Women's rates were improving relative to Men, actually slowed down. It follows from this then that Women cannot depend on the Equal Pay Act to guarantee them any real improvement in wages or conditions

EQUAL PAY AND THE PAY FREEZE.

Clearly the effects of the Equal Pay Act on progress towards the removal of discrimination in basic male/female rates are, not to put too fine a point on

it 'disappointingly small'. In the light of this the decision embodied in Phase II of the Governments Pay Freeze legislation, not to invoke clause 9 of the Act - requiring Women's rates to be brought up to 90% of Male rates

by December of this year, is to add insult to injury. The governments alternative, that in order to obtain an 'orderly progress' existing differentials may be reduced by up to one third by the end of 1973 outside the pay limit if necessary, as well as being completely inadequate is an ideological cover-up. This is because the Government is allowing the employers to recoup the whole of any 'equal pay' pay rise via increased prices - thus 'proving', or so the Govt. hopes, once and for all that wage rises, especially Women's wage rises, are really the root



cause of price increases and inflation!

The general picture that emerges then is that Women's wages are only just managing to keep in step. The latest Govt. figures for the year ending April 1972 showed that full time Women manual workers averaged £16.60 a week compared with £32.10 for men, an improvement of 1% over the previous year and indicating that the earnings gap may confidently be expected to close just about the time present school leavers are due to retire!

WOMEN AND THE TRADE UNIONS.

It should be obvious by now that the only way in which real gains for Women workers will be obtained is by Women going onto the offensive, Women standing up for themselves through militant trade union activity, Women intensifying the struggle for Equal Pay seeing it as a necessary part of the general struggle against low-pay and the Pay Freeze.

Sections of Women workers have shown themselves to be very militant on these issues. For example, the Ford sewing machinists



"Don't get too complacent about the Women's Liberation Movement. The Army couldn't take over if WE want on strike!"

demonstrated by their organisation and determination what gains could be made on the equal pay front. A similar situation arose amongst sections of Night-Cleaners in London. These are a group of workers, who by the very nature of their work, are scattered and very difficult to meet, never mind organise into a Trade Union. Nevertheless, despite all these difficulties an intense unionisation campaign was mounted, culminating in a strike by cleaners which succeeded in closing down several Government offices and which won improved conditions of work and pay for the Women.

However, the degree of political and organisational awareness demonstrated by these groups of Women is, unfortunately, not reflected right across the work - force.



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Although 2¹/₂ million Women workers are unionised - making up 27% of all trade unionists. They play very little part in the decision making process of the trade unions and are scarce at all levels of union organisation. For example, out of 1,400 paid officials there are only 25 Women (2%). These trends are unfortunately, all too faithfully reflected in the three industries employing the majority of Women in the North area: Boots, Players and the Hosiery Industry.

This lack of involvement in union activity stems, mainly, from two factors. Firstly, as we have noted above, work is regarded as being desisively secondary to a Women's responsibility in the home. Therefore many Women do not regard the struggle for improved conditions at work as being of prime importance.

Another reason why Women have not become involved to any great degree has been the complete failure by the trade unions to in any way come to terms with the dual role of working Women - that of being a worker and a housewife at the same time. They have ignored the special demands that are placed on Women by their home situation which has led to a de facto situation of discrimination within the unions. What is needed here is the provision of facilities so that Women can attend union meetings and take an active part in union affairs in defence of their own interests.

Trade unions are a part of Capitalist society and as such reflect all the prejudice, discrimination and sexism which is prevalent throughout the rest of society. Thus there is no guarantee at all that Male trade union officials will stand up in defense of Women trade unionists. Indeed there are very good reasons why, due to their own negligence and blindness coupled with the strong collaborationist pressures which inevitably underpin their role as brokers between capital and labour, they may actually negotiate their Women members into even worse positions. For example, in the bacon curing industry USDAV completed a regrading agreement last summer which simply put the Women bacon curers into the bottom grade. Other trade unions have been quite content to sit back and wait for 1975 to magically produce equal pay for Women.

It is obvious then that strong organisations of Women inside the unions, are absolutely vital to defend Women's interests. In periods of unemployment Women are always subjected to the call 'Women out first', therefore organisation is needed even to defend their right to work. Similarly Women must ensure that their general situation in regard to pay is improved. This means not only intensifying the struggle for equal pay but also moving out and generalising the struggle into a movement against low pay and the pay freeze.

THE CHALLENGE OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION.

During the past few years we have seen the rise, growth and strengthening of the Women's Liberation movement in this country. This has organised itself in a general way around the very basic issues of Women's oppression. Women have joined together, initially over a personal sense of anger and frustration at the way that they, individually, are treated. This personal understanding of their own oppression has, in some cases, now developed into a more general understanding of the way Women are oppressed in Capitalist society. From this understanding significant numbers of Women have come to accept the need for activities which not only substantially improve the position of Women but which also challenge all the traditional concepts of the role of Women.

In Britain the Women's Liberation movement has by and large been grouped around the following four demands :

- 1, Equal pay now.
- 2, Equal training and job opportunities.
- 3, Free contraception and abortion on demand.
- 4, 24 hour community controlled child care facilities.

These four demands have been accompanied by different levels of activity at different times but they have generally been influential in cutting the ground away from the old well established myths about Women - that they are backward dependant creatures incapable of organising themselves.

However, the Women's liberation movement is by no means homogeneous. There are many currents of opinion within it as to what Women's Liberation is and how it can be achieved. For example, there are those who believe that Women's liberation will be achieved by campaigning and winning certain reforms within the Capitalist framework - removing the most blatant forms of discrimination against Women e.g. the anti sex-discrimination bill, while leaving the basic structures of society untouched.

Then there are those who see Men not merely as agents through which the oppression of Women is mediated, but as the main oppressor itself. Many of these Women believe that the only way Women will be liberated is to cut themselves off completely from Men.

We must recognise that the oppression of Women is deeply rooted in the structures of this society based as it is on private ownership and the exploitation of labour power. The winning of limited demands may well improve the condition of Women to a degree and should be supported as such, but the basic economic and social oppression of Women will remain unchanged. Similarly, it should be clear that the situation of most Men in our society is not enviable - to be in an inferior position is worse, of course, but simple equality is not enough. The Liberation of Women (or most Men) is not possible within the structure of this society.

Thus the fundamental need to change the structure of society and of attacking the tenacious ideological forces must be recognised if Women are to be liberated.

THE WAY FORWARD.

The Women's Liberation movement has shown that real gains for Women can be won and thus self confidence be increased, by Women organising themselves, standing up for their rights and going onto the offensive to achieve them.

However the Women's liberation movement cannot achieve its aims in isolation. The struggle for Women's liberation must be linked to the general struggle against the system which relegates Women to an inferior position.

This means linking up the struggle in the home and work situations of Women. It means taking the ideas of and demands of Women's liberation into the organised sectors of the working class and demanding trade union support for action which strengthens and improves the position of Women. Taken up in this way demands ranging from free abortion to action against rising prices can obtain a tremendous social weight. It also means that Women should involve themselves in the struggles of other oppressed groups - both nationally (claimants, black people, victims of repression etc.) and internationally (especially the struggles in Ireland and Vietnam.).

If the fight against the sexual exploitation is to be waged both at home and at work. Then this means demanding free contraception and abortion on demand, so that Women can decide for themselves just when they want to have children. It means demanding facilities which relieve Women of their total responsibility for child rearing - we need not only freely available community controlled

nurseries, but also more generous maternity leave. Such demands go part of the way to ensuring that Women are not prevented by their domestic responsibilities from participating in trade union affairs. This de facto situation of discrimination against Women can also be combatted by the provision of child-care facilities at union meetings and having branch meetings at a time when Women can attend.

Once involved in trade unions we mustn't be content with sitting back and waiting for the officials to lead campaigns on equal pay, low pay, against the freeze etc. For, apart from a few exceptions they have shown by their general level of inactivity their unwillingness to lead such struggles. What is needed here is a through process of democratisation within the unions so that the interests of all members, especially Women, are fully represented at all levels - as shop stewards, on negotiating committees, as representatives to Trades councils etc. More than this 'Women's action groups' are needed to consider the particular interests of Women members - such issues as pensions, sickness benefits and social security are relevant as well as the wider issues mentioned above. These action committees to be fully participatory at the rank and file level and formed within particular unions and with Women from different unions organised at the local level.

Other localised and essentially ad-hoc activities, involving Women's liberation groups and Women organised in trade unions, covering a whole range of issues but at the moment, perhaps, concentrating on equal pay and the pay freeze, will undoubtedly be necessary as the struggle to educate and organise Women develops.

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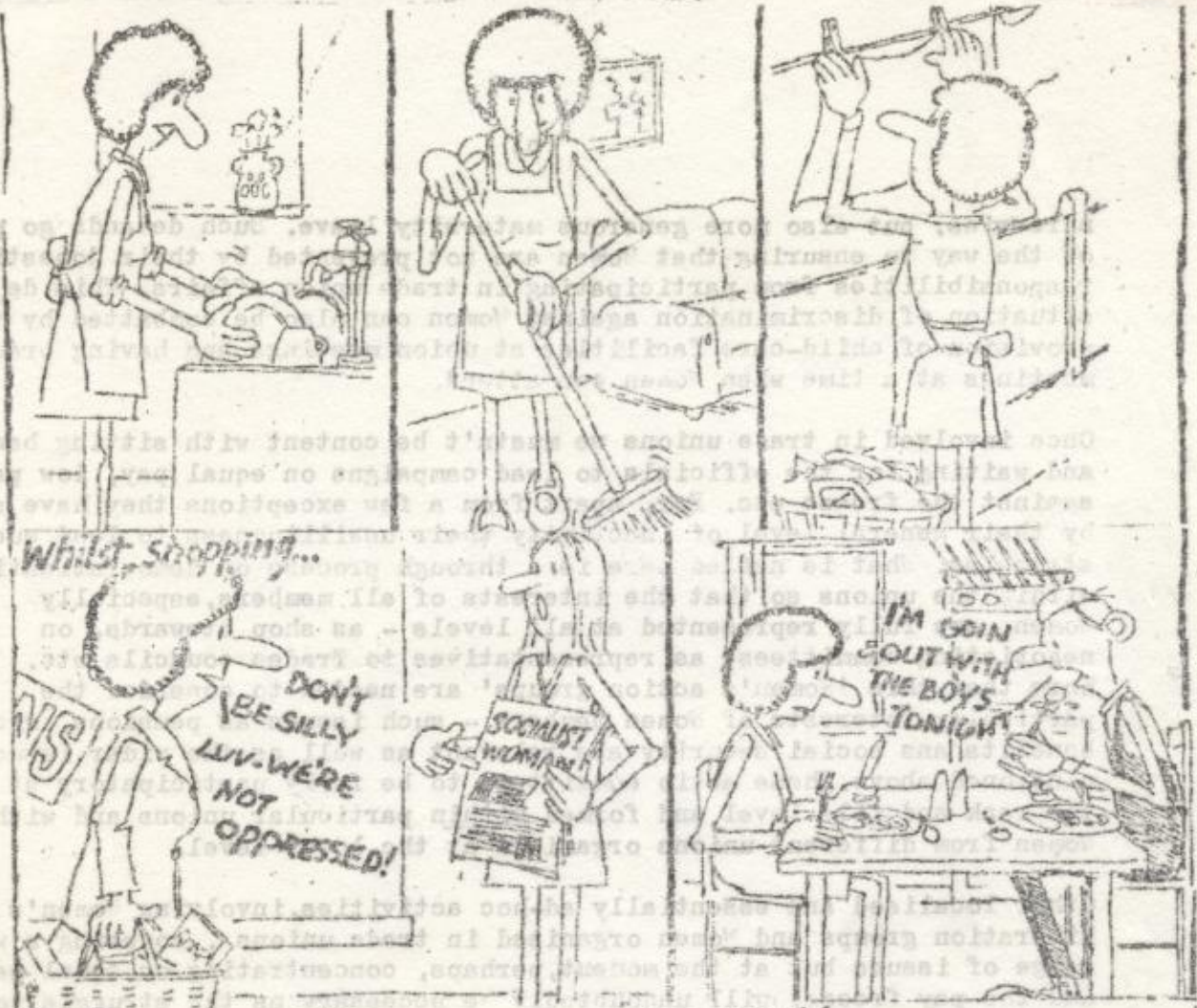
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