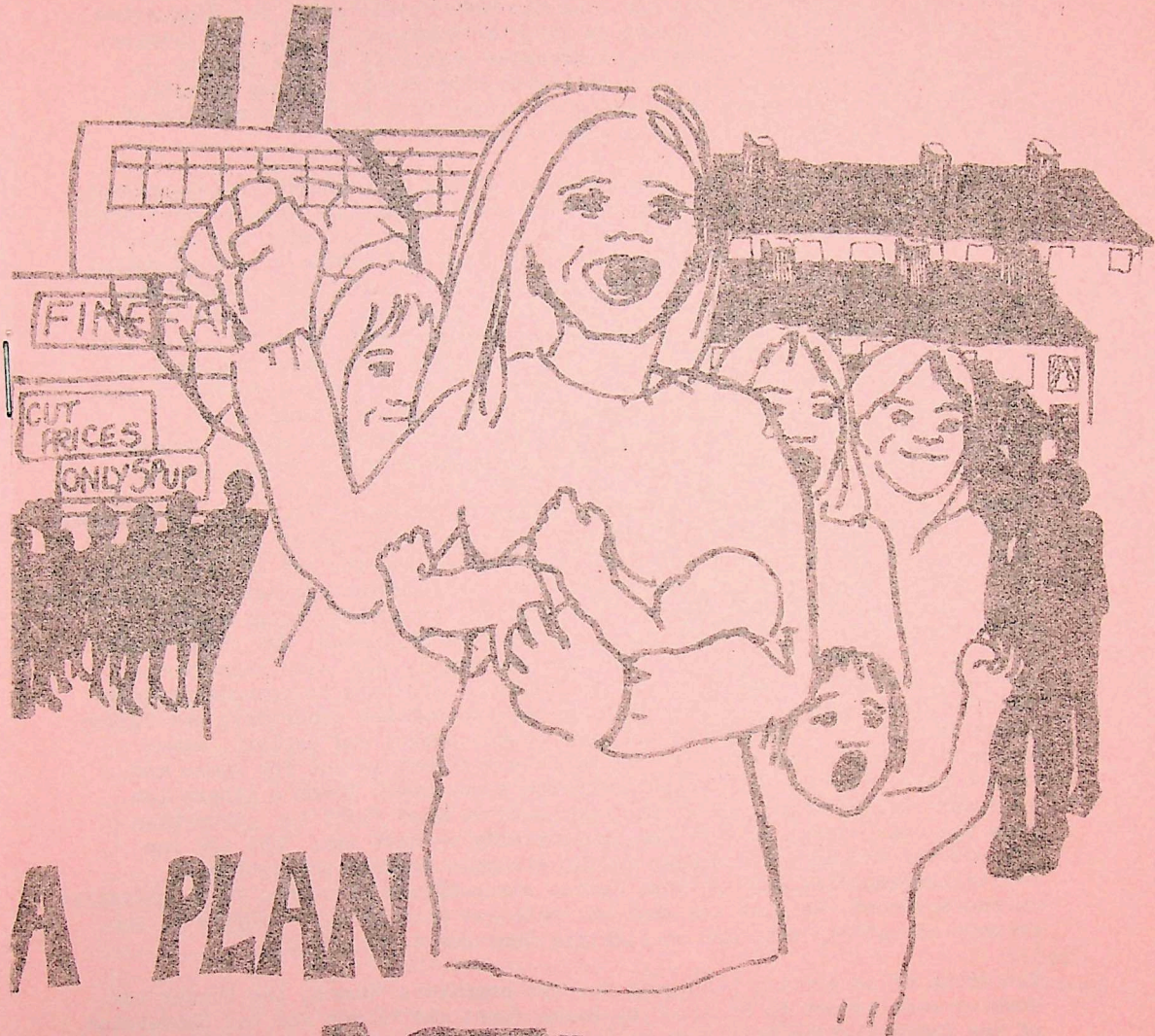


WE MUST GROW TOUGH
WITHOUT EVER LOSING OUR TENDERNESS



A PLAN FOR ACTION

Sisters,

The Manchester Conference has tapped a flow of thoughts and ideas in many of us. It was a real step forward and a real eye-opener for us, realising our potential and our commitment to and participation in a growing active, vibrant movement for real political change in our time. If there is one thing there can be no doubt about, it is that we are not living in a static situation. Daily we can watch things changing and developing. We can no longer sit back and take it easy because "people seem to be satisfied", or

because "people don't want to get involved", Dissatisfaction is growing and spreading: the miner's strike, the Fakenham women's occupation, the dockers and the night cleaners on the work front; the growing tenants' actions, squatting, claimants' actions etc., on the home front; while the Repression Industry - the Industrial relations Act, the Immigration Act, the Criminal Law Revision recommendations and increasing political trials (making heavy use of conspiracy charges) is trying desperately to keep up with the growing agitation and is finding it harder to make the accusation of "outside troublemakers and agitators" stick.

The Women's Movement is sometimes accused of too much consciousness-raising, too much problem sharing, too much introverted gossiping. Yes, we have spent a lot of time talking together, getting to love and live with one another. It was necessary. We're learning how to destroy the system's idea of women, which told us since birth that we would only find fulfilment through Mr. Right, Mr. Abbey "national hero, The Man in my life, and that all other women were competitors and had to take a secondary role in relation to HIM. Women were always more boring, more silly, somehow less whole compared to Him, His work, His ambitions, His desires. If you've had a lifetime of that it takes a lot of rapping and screaming and moving and freaking and understanding to flush it all away. But now we're emerging with a really gut feeling of Sisterhood as Powerful, but where do we go from here?

Some of us are accused of having separatist tendencies - "You male pigs fucked over us long enough, now we'll cut you off completely, we'll start fucking over you". For these women Man has become the enemy, instead of the system. To these women we say that the traits they are fighting against, aggressiveness, ego-tripping, individuality, are traits which our society consistently cultivates in men and discourages in women from childhood. But these traits are neither inherently male nor universally human; they also stem from a brutally competitive society which cultivates interests in commodities more than in human beings. And as a brother pointed out the other day, the ruling class is made up of women as well, women who control and exploit, women who must be our class enemies. The Women's Movement is not for women and no one else. Ours is not a populist women's movement, Women's liberation is people's liberation. If we are oppressed we must fight for liberation from all oppressors. To that end, politically we must ask, "Who are our friends and who are our enemies in the struggle against the system of capitalism/imperialism?" We must define our politics if we are to be effective in the Movement. We must ask what our role is; what is our analysis of the present situation; what are we fighting for? How do we get it?

The group of us writing have read the two pamphlets "Women, the Unions and Work or what is not to be done" by Selma James and "Women and the Subversion of the Community" by Mariarosa Dalla Costa. For us the pamphlets started huge discussions and meetings and sorted out a lot of our ideas. It was a good opportunity for us to get together more. But still our ideas are too theoretical, too vague and woolly. The idea of this pamphlet is that we are trying to get an overall picture of the situation. Not only the condition of women in our society, but how this system controls all of us and what this means, and how we as women can fight it. There is already too much discussion about this demand or that demand. More are no total demands. But we do have aims - we put people's needs before company profits. We have a right to live and we're going to fight for it. We believe we should control our own situations, at work, at home, at school, in the areas we live in. Our emphasis is on Action and Organisation. Having understood and agreed with Mariarosa's description of the housewife's fundamental role in capitalist society and taken Selma's point that we don't have to "go to work" to be part of the working class and that Trade Unions are not and never can be the pivotal point of "revolutionary consciousness", we now know what perhaps we have been leaning towards in the last two years; that we can and

should be organised in the communities we live in, around the things which oppress us most, financially, emotionally, psychologically. We do not deny that the struggle at work, around the wage and redundancies is important, what we do say is that that struggle is not enough. It omits the areas where people feel their lives are really lived, with their families and friends, where it affects the food they eat or the roof over their heads. It also omits the fight around the quality of work - speed-ups, mechanisation, decline in skilled labour. It omits the fight against the repressiveness of work itself. We want to know why is the community so important? What part it plays in the system? How we can organise women? How we can link struggles and get stronger?

To clarify our ideas a bit, we have divided up this pamphlet into a number of sections, none of which stand as complete but which are notes about some of the things we have been thinking and rapping about. They are:

1. What is the system? What is Imperialism?
2. Whats been happening in Britain?
3. Tactics,
4. Who are our friends, who are our enemies?
5. What we want,

Our ideas are based on some of our own experiences and the experiences of other working class struggles which are part of our history. We've learnt a lot from Italy, Ireland and elsewhere. This pamphlet was written with the idea not that we should get into books and pamphlets and reading as an alternative to action, but with the idea that understanding gives us strength and that ideas should not be confined to the intellectual few. We are a young movement, we want to know more, we want to understand more, we want to share our ideas and grow strong enough to change things.

What is the System? How does it control all of our lives?

The system, the way in which the economy works, is still called capitalism by many people on the "left". The "working class" often means, (as Selma put it) "white males between the ages of 25 and 50 working in factories or coal mines". They sell their labour to the boss in return for half of what they are really worth (thats how the real profits are made) and so the men formed themselves into unions to fight for better wages, better living conditions. The left in the past has wholeheartedly supported these struggles and given them primary importance, saying that not only do concerted demands for more money weaken the system, but also that political consciousness grows through any struggle. This maybe true but one of the reasons why many on the left and the trade union movement have failed to make any real political/revolutionary progress towards actual change is that the basic analysis is about 40 years out of date.

We are no longer living in a simple capitalist society. To understand the global effects of western economic power, especially in relation to the USA, and since the end of world war II we must discuss and use the more accurate term Imperialism. We live in a first world imperialist country, which not only means that we are to some extent dependent on many third world countries for our raw materials (this is in fact becoming less true for Europe and the USA than it was say 20 years ago), it means the growth of huge multinational corporations, of monopolies which know no national boundaries. It means domination by neo-colonialism, i.e. not direct rule, but rule by native administrators carrying out the economic policies of the western powers. (There is a line in the "The Hour of the Furnaces" - about imperialist domination in Argentina - which says: "The Vietnamese have only to look up in the sky to see the enemy; in Argentina it is much more complex. The ruling class are the same colour, speak the same language and look the same as the (Spanish) population, yet their culture, their aspirations, their

affiliations are in complete contradiction to the people. In the name of "economic freedom/independence" they carry out the oppressive policies of US Imperialism", Neo-colonialism is carried out through multinational corporations, euro-currencies, international merchant banks. In countries which have won their independence it enforces domination and exploitation through international agencies like the international monetary fund (IMF) and the World Bank. It also uses military force to impose domination. African administrators are not only educated at Oxford, the army officers are Sandhurst trained and anyway, the 1st World forces are always ready to move in when "local" law and order breaks down (Ireland, Vietnam, Aden, Cyprus). But this is a last resort, 1st world countries would much prefer to support repressive regimes (Brazil, Argentina, Spain, South Africa, Greece, Turkey etc) than have to be seen "sending the troops in". The UK and the USA cannot afford the public embarrassment of many more Irelands and Vietnams.

The western powers support repressive regimes to make money from investments. Imperialist investment policies are a direct means of exploitation of 3rd world countries and a means of keeping a high standard of living in our own country. Investment policies are always meant to sound as if they are helping the country in which they are made, to "develop", to help them get richer and to solve some of their economic problems. A lot of newspaper coverage is given to "aid programmes", "USA Peace Programmes" and "Overseas Development projects" etc etc. But investment policies do not help the people of Latin America, Africa and Asia to get richer. The distribution of wealth is not the aim. The aim is to keep the government and the bosses in control by any means they think fit and make them and the investors richer.

Everything is geared towards - more expansion, more growth, more markets, more commodities, cheapest labour, most efficient production, least trouble from the workers, more profits, more money, more power for the imperialists. These policies keep the rich ruling and the poor starving.

To give 2 examples of how this works:-

A report in the Financial Times (24, Oct, 72) reads, "The Ford Motor Company will start exporting 200,000 Brazilian built four cylinder motors per annum in 1974. A communique from the ministry of Industry and Trade said that Ford had presented 3 proposals, all approved by the Ministry's Industrial Development Council for development grants and tax concessions. Production of the motors will begin in 1974 with 255,000 units - 80% of them for export." Ford are building cars in Brazil (called the "Japan" of Latin America) because labour is cheap, there are no strikes, the Government is stable. Why? Because Brazil is ruled by a ruthless dictatorship who have dissolved the Opposition party, who wiped out the unions in 1964 and have eliminated the urban guerrillas and continue to use torture as a fully institutionalised part of "normal" police methods. Despite Sr. Neto's famous "Brazilian Miracle" - televisions and skyscrapers and American cars in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, the wages of unskilled urban labourers have gone down since 1964, and the infant mortality rate is 150 per 1000 in the towns in the poorer north east and 50 per 1000 in Rio de Janeiro. And there is no million of unemployed. Brazil, like Bolivia, Uruguay, Argentina is a safe investment bet.

Another example of the way in which imperialism "underdevelops" 3rd world countries is in coffee production. All the 42 countries represented at the International Coffee Organisation that produce coffee are classified (by the West) as being "underdeveloped" or "developing nations". This means they are dependent on the export of primary commodities, such as coffee, for the main source of their income, rather than on the export of manufactured items. Coffee exports are the main source of from 25% to 81% of all foreign exchange for 14 of the

producing countries. This dependence has led the producing countries into great economic instability as the price paid for primary products, determined in New York or London, has been falling steadily for many years. Whereas the price of manufactured items they need in order to begin to industrialise, also determined in the developed countries (USA, UK) has been increasing annually at a dramatic rate.

The biggest coffee producer is Brazil - 40% of total world supplies, 94% of Brazil's coffee plantations are owned by 6% of the landowners. Portugal is also classified as a coffee producer. In "true colonial spirit" Portugal controls all the coffee production in Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Angola and maintains fascist control by forced labour and labour camps. Plantations maintain their own private armies of security guards, guard dogs search lights, and barbed wire. In fact every thing that the Portuguese consider they need to ensure "maximum productivity". Most coffee is shipped to Europe and America and is bought by individual roasters and huge coffee manufacturers such as Nestle (Nescafo) and Maxwell House who in their turn are part of huge multi-national corporations (General Foods etc). Then the coffee, like cigarettes, is made into different brands to titillate our senses. To make us feel as if we can choose, to make us feel important. Even in these coffee producing countries (except for Brazil) the only coffee that can be bought is Nescafe!

For our own country, imperialism means that the economy is more concerned with the problems of how to keep the increased wealth flowing through the banks. Also to keep such a world wide system going the western powers need more bureaucracy, more people to work in businesses, in banks, more secretaries, more cleaners. As industry gets moved out to areas of cheap labour, so the "home of imperialism" becomes more of a "shining white consumer trap". Work at the "point of production" becomes less and less important. Finding out ways to make us spend more is a big problem for the bosses. They employ whole armies of researchers to invent the latest, the most exciting commodity; from colour T.Vs to fitted carpets to J cloths to bin liners to packet soups to packet mashed potato to synthetic meat to health foods. From Sainsburys to "mini-cars for the busy mum", from platform shoes to cheesecloth smocks.

In concrete terms all this means that for the year ending 1970, 51% of the labour force worked in service industries (civil service, transport, cleaning, catering, tourists etc) while only 49% worked at the point of production, i.e. on the factory floor, in the pits, on the docks etc. Now these figures relate to the "paid" labour force (mostly male) but if one were to include the 24 hour service work performed by women (who after all, give birth to, feed, clothe and generally service all the "paid" workers) one can see that over 75% of the population is engaged in service work although for most women it is unpaid, but absolutely necessary service labour. Now what "imperialism on the Home Front" also means is that a surplus of goods is continually produced which have to be absorbed by us in order to keep the economy ticking over - the more we are paid, the more we buy, the more we buy the more we feel that buying should be satisfying. As housewives and consumers we have played a fundamental role here and the system has always pandered to our feelings (which it gave us) of isolation and frustration. Adverts, songs, T.V. shows - if we're not busy being born we're busy buying, . . . Persil mum / California Blue Band mum / Don't forget the fruit gums mum / the everyday housewife who gave up the good life for me / the Tom Jones wank / the family sized Cliff Richard / Alf Garnett's silly old moo / supermarkets designed for us / Mothercare gets richer / Mary Quant mixes more shit for our faces - the natural look???

We play our role well and define our lives by the amount of goods we have at our command. Spending power equals the highest form of satisfaction,

This is at the root of many of the demands made by the "most advanced" sections of the male working class in recent years. The most militant struggles have demanded more pay, as with the electricians and the miners, or the right to work, as with the recent docker's strike. These are class struggles, but they are also easily co-opted by the system. These demands by the white male working class mean that in fact we share in the fruits of imperialist domination and plunder. We will continue to live off the backs of the workers and peasants in South America Africa and Asia if our demands are made always in isolation and out of self interest only. At the moment the highest paid workers are in the best bargaining position. This is OK for them, they stand a good chance of getting the rise if they strike. But only about 15% of workers are in this position. And alone they cannot make steps towards revolutionary change.

Forced to live in a consumer society, it is difficult to see how we can effectively show our solidarity with people fighting for liberation in the 3rd world, when we can eat good food and watch TV. Actions which do link our struggles are actions like the Angola Committee in Holland used, which got a huge campaign going against the use of Angolan coffee bean in Dutch coffee. The campaign got tremendous publicity and support for the guerrilla groups fighting against Portuguese domination. Eventually, after a successful boycott, 90% of the Dutch market became free of Angolan coffee.

Writings from America have pointed out the contradictions of imperialism as racism, national chauvinism and male chauvinism. Those characteristics are imposed on our basic class consciousness to divide and isolate us, (In our situation we could also add the distinction between the higher and the lower paid worker). Superficially at least, it is in the interests of the white male workers . . . to keep the blacks and other immigrants down and to dominate women. (Smithfield meat workers simply think of blacks taking over their jobs and taking their place on housing waiting lists). It is easy to see why racism and chauvinism are encouraged by the system. They keep us divided. An attack at the level of wages only no longer constitutes a real threat to the system. All the system has to do is threaten to bring in cheaper labour to the work force (women or Ugandan Asians) or threaten unemployment and the male workers will beg for their jobs back. If we are fighting for political change against imperialism we must reshape our demands in the interests of the whole working class against the boss class. Of course it would be foolish to imagine that we will or can start striking for "international revolution"! However demands with an international perspective can and have been made. In September of this year in Bristol, the owners of a Cypriot cargo ship were forced to pay out £8,000 in cash in back wages to officers and crew after seamen and dockers had refused to handle the ship unless internationally agreed wage rates were paid. Avonmouth dockers had refused to open the lock gates to allow the ship into the Bristol channel. Likewise, with the recent Chilean copper dispute - because Allende (the marxist president of Chile) had nationalised the Chilean copper mines, the former american owners demanded compensation for their loss. When this was refused, the nkees tried to grab a cargo of Chilean copper bound for France, however the dockers at the port of Le Havre, in solidarity with socialist Chile, refused to land the copper, as did Dutch dockers at Rotterdam when the ship tried to land there. Acts of real international solidarity!

Just because we don't have a paid job, because we work so hard at home or even at a job we 'enjoy', we are never 'outside' Imperialism. We have tried to explain how living in a 1st world imperialist country affects our whole lives. We are exploited all the time, even in the way we exploit in our day to day lives our brothers and sisters in 3rd world countries. We have benefitted from imperialism in our upbringing, were nurtured on it at school and even in our political work betray its roots in our ideas and attitudes. Without a global perspective, a political movement however well it understands its own country in isolation is doomed to failure.

We must seize the time. We are living in a period of a great upsurge of revolutionary feeling throughout the world. This will not necessarily last; the world revolution will not come about automatically. As women conscious of the divisions of sexism and economic exploitation laid on us by the system, we must use this time to strengthen our demands and actions and organisation against co-optation by the system.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING IN BRITAIN?

HOW HAVE PEOPLE ORGANISED?

WHAT HAVE WOMEN BEEN DOING?

In the last few years, the numbers of unemployed, the number of days lost through mental illness, absenteeism, through strikes and disputes; all these figures have gone up. Post Office workers, power-workers, car workers, miners, dockers, building workers have all been on strike. Workers at UCS Fisher-Bendix in Manchester, Briants printing-works; Stanmore engineering; British Leyland, Basingstoke; CAV Lucas in Liverpool have all occupied their factories- these are only a few. These are all struggles centered on the paid work force. Many of these struggles have been very important for us. There is no doubt that they have shaken up the bosses and the government, and also to some extent the leadership of the TUC. We must support these struggles, especially the rank and file actions which have stopped Vic Feather and the TUC bureaucracy controlling the struggles. We know that many rank and file demands made at mass-meetings for things like a shorter working-week, an across-the-board pay rise (which breaks down differentials), equal pay for women are often co-opted and 'disfigured' by the Union leadership into demands for only more money.

How many times does the union sell the workers out by ignoring the political side of their demands and agreeing instead on;

- 1, percentage wage increases (increasing the division between skilled and semi-skilled, men and women, black and white),
- 2, a speed-up of the production line
- 3, agreed redundancies, or a phase out of 'surplus' work force i.e. not sacking, but not employing any more when people leave.

We think occupations can lead to working more collectively IF the community gets involved and everyone is allowed to vote at the meetings. But we think for example that the UCS sit-in made a lot of mistakes-by continuing to produce ships for the capitalists, (the management were still around and ships were still sold to capitalists just the same).-Also that the kind of contracts that have been signed by the John Brown workers in Clydebank with the new Yankee owners are no improvement at all in the working conditions. We support people's use of violence, when they are prepared to take risks to get what they know they have a right to i.e. the miners pickets and the dockers pickets. We regard these actions as victories for all of us.

But also with these struggles we feel that many of these men are still only asking for economic change. They are asking for the system to work more efficiently to give them more money and work, but they are not making demands that will change the system. Wage-earners on strike alone do not constitute a real threat to the system. The people who are more of a

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political threat to the system are school-kids, prisoners, squatters, tenants, gay brothers and sisters and blacks, Also those not working at the point of production- night cleaners, nurses, hospital-workers, teachers, we are also making a political point when we strike because we are drawing attention to the fact that our functions in society are just as important as those in the industrial work-force on the shop-floor. We are people and we have the same needs,

Women in the last few years have organized themselves in many ways. Women occupied the factory in Fakenham, Instead of producing the same rotten parts of shoes they were producing before, they produced things which were more satisfying for them to make e.g. bags, belts and skirts, and they controlled the marketing of what they made so that they weren't feeding the profits into the bosses' pockets. The night cleaners came out on strike for a 14 rise and more cleaners to work on the 20 storey buildings. They ignored the union (the Civil Service Union) who were later embarrassed into supporting the strike, and with the support they got from local women's groups taking turns at the picket, they won all their demands. (One of them left the job at this point - she'd made too many friends on the picket line - and decided to claim a "guaranteed income" on the SS instead), Miner's wives took equal share of picket duty at the pits while the men were away on roving pickets round the ports. (Any woman on the docker's picket will remember many of their chauvinistic and racist attitudes. If their wives and girlfriends had taken an equal part in the strike, the strike would have been twice as strong).

Women in communities have been organising, in the G.L.C. rent strike 68/69, and in the present rent strikes and housing struggles. We have squatted, organised a squatters union, and attempted to organise street committees. Women have campaigned against fast roads and have been effective in getting play streets and crossings. We have campaigned for nurseries, play groups, play space for kids; have worked in Adventure playgrounds, free schools and creches. We have been effective in Claimants Unions and in the Cohabitation Campaign. We have demonstrated, broken up council meetings and occupied offices. Sisters have been arrested and have defended themselves in court (Mangrove trial, Stoke Newington 8 trial and many trials around the country for busts on demonstrations, and occupations especially around SS offices and the Cohabitation campaign. Also the recent squatters hearings.) Sisters have acted as McKenzie advisors in court (a friend to sit in the court who is allowed to talk to the defendant and take messages etc), have campaigned in and around Holloway and organised a prisoners' Union. We also learnt a lot about political violence from the armed population in Northern Ireland. From the brothers forced to train themselves and act to defend their communities and their lives, to the sisters who organised street committees against the imperialist British army. We support peoples right to defend themselves and attack when necessary. From the Stoke Newington 8 trial we saw the extent of the political and repressive nature of the state, the ends it would go to to smash us, the extent of the knowledge the political police can find out about us without us knowing. We learnt that we have to be careful at all times.

We have campaigned for free abortion and contraception, better womens health. Sisters have got womens houses together, womens workshops, have learnt to print, make posters, take and develop photographs and slides, make slide shows and have taken them round the place. While men have organised around higher wages and the right to work, women are organising around basic needs, peoples right to live, peoples right to control their own lives. All these things are the beginning of women taking their lives into their own hands, doing things for themselves instead of relying on men. But we don't see a strong movement growing out of just this. Women don't decide out of the blue to start doing things for themselves

after years of passivity, Nearly all these things have been started by middle class women who, because of their upbringings have a lot more confidence to do these things than working class women.

Its important to see this difference if we want to be part of a growing political struggle in Britain to overthrow the system, Most working class women gain confidence to start changing things for themselves in the struggle like these examples from the 1919 and 1939 rent strikes and the beginning of the 68/69 rent strike:

Glasgow Rent strike 1919,

(From "Revolt on the Clyde" by Willie Gallacher),... "In Govan, Mrs. Barbour a typical working class house wife, became leader of a movement such as had never been seen before. Street meetings, back court meetings, drums, bells, trumpets- every method was used to bring the women out and organise them for the struggle,... Mrs. Barbour had a team of women who were wonderful. They could smell a sheriff's officer (bailiff) a mile away. At their summons women left their cooking, their washing, or whatever they were doing. Before they got anywhere near their destination, the officer and his men would be met by a party of furious women who drove them back in a hurried scramble for safety". The landlords then attempted to take them to court to get the rent taken out of the wages, (As they tried to do in Northern Ireland by attempting to take the rent out of a family's social security before it was paid, in the recent rent strikes). "Will we let them get away with this? Was the war resounding cry in every street. Never! thundered the reply from the women. All day long in the streets, in the halls, in the homes, meetings were held, Kitchen meetings, street meetings, mass meetings - meetings of every kind,... On the day of the trial, Glasgow witnessed a demonstration, the like of which had never been seen before. From early morning the women were marching to the centre of the city where the sheriff's court was. Mrs. Barbour's army was on the march. But even as they marched, mighty reinforcements were coming from the workshops and the yards. From far away Dalmuir in the west, from Parkhead in the east, from Cathcart in the south, and Hydepark in the north, the dungareed proletariat invaded the city,... It was obvious to the sheriff that the situation was too desperate to play with. He telephoned to London and put through to the minister of Munitions; "The workers have left the factories, they are threatening to pull down Glasgow. What am I to do?" "Stop the case!" he was told, "a Rent Restriction Act will be introduced immediately."

The women of Glasgow refused to be brow beaten by the threat of court action and brought about a situation of national crisis and forced the Government to back down. (This was the beginning of controlled rents).

London and Birmingham 1939

(from "Our Flag stays Red" by Phil Piratin),... "the spirit of the 50,000 in Birmingham (who stopped rent increases by rent strike) gave greater power and morale to the working class women of Stepney, who in the main conducted these battles, for battles they were and all honour to the women. It was they who had to be in the home when the bailiffs called. It was they who had to take responsibility for picketing every hour of the day",... "Outstanding were the women. Every feminist claim was proved. There was nothing that the men could do that could not be equalled by the women, and in fact they were mostly more enthusiastic and hence more reliable. For example, during the rent strike of Brunswick buildings, it was the women who did most of the picketing. The strike lasted for 11 weeks during a severely cold winter, and braziers were lit in the street to keep the women warm."

Here the women organised and fought the rent strike - at one point fighting

it out with hundreds of police and bailiffs who attempted to evict them in Langley street EC3.

GLC Rent Strike 68/69

The strike began with a group of women on a GLC estate deciding they'd had enough: (from "How to beat the GLC, The Coventry Cross Tenants Victory") From a leaflet called "A Call to Action": - "I am a tenant of Coventry Cross, a slum housing estate in Bromloy-by-Bow E3, and I am writing this message to all wives and mothers of GLC tenants, Don't wait for your menfolk to fight the GLC rent increases and then support them. Come out and fight with your friends and neighbours, fighting with women's weapons; determination and sureness, with your menfolk backing you. We did this at Coventry Cross and we fought the GLC and won. Now the council don't only do what we want, but the way we want it done. If a few women can get results like this in only six weeks, think what a few hundred women could do. No power on earth could stop us, the GLC would have no answer except to give in to our demands. So all you women I am calling on you for the sake of decent living conditions, for your children and families to get together, Call meetings, choose your committees, and then we will all unite. Standing together nothing can stop us, we at Coventry Cross have proved it. Now we want to help you to help yourselves. When you have a meeting let us know, we will come and tell you how we did it and help you. I am a housewife and mother myself, and i would like to end this appeal with a sobering thought; every penny the GLC puts on the rents is a penny taken from your children for life's necessities. Are you going to let them get away with this? We at Coventry Cross are NOT. JOIN US NOW AND WE WILL WIN. Mrs. Jayne R. Mole, Coventry Cross, . . .

Its out of these struggles that women really got going til nothing can stop them. Phil Piratin says in his book about the '39 rent strike . . . "The story of Mrs. Ella Donovan could be written separately, as an example to so many working class women in or near the movement who never play their full part. They are shy, they lack confidence. Oh no! they cannot be secretary, they cannot write too well! Speak on a platform? Never! Ella was like this. But so rapidly did the campaign develop, so many things needed to be done, so many people were required, that Ella soon found herself doing many of the things she had hitherto thought beyond her powers. Then in a short while she was elected a full-time organiser." "Mrs. Elsie Borders, a working class housewife, fought the case in Chancery Court against the most learned Counsel. The legal arguments went on for weeks and months. She conducted the case as capably as any top-line highly paid lawyer. She argued, she examined, she cross-examined; on one occasion she spoke for 8 hours submitting her arguments. Elsie Borders became known as the modern Portia." (She fought a case around eviction by a Building Society, exposing the tie-up between Building Societies and builders and landlords.)

Sisters, its out of this sort of solidarity that the isolation and passivity that we hate breaks down.

TACTICS

Already we are organised in small autonomous groups. We are strong because we don't have to adhere to a party line, a centralised bureaucracy. As autonomous groups we make our own energy and we work within the context of the local situation. But these autonomous groups can also be our weakness unless we develop the means to regularly discuss what we're doing and

hammer out our long term aims and strategies, Like with the Cohabitation Campaign, we need to meet around particular activities, (organising a national rent strike or squatting campaign) and areas of organisation - housing, children (play groups, adventure play grounds, creches), work (say, having a campaign around the shit jobs available for girls out of school, women in shops etc.), health (plans for health collectives). Its only by organising nationally that we overcome some of the reformist things we get into in our small areas, when we only make life a little more bearable within the system as it is. When we get together with other groups for discussions or joint actions or at conferences, we build up more energy and ideas from sisters in other areas,

The problem with many of our groups is that weekly meetings of 7, 10, or 15 women can become only a talk session, a security ritual, a closed shop. We have learnt from experience that weekly discussion groups do not by any means lead to mass participation and action for other women who live with us or near us. Discussion is necessary, but we need action at the same time. Only in this way can we continue to learn and begin to organise more effectively,

People get involved around issues which concern them, the rent they pay, their kids schooling, the conditions they live in, the rising price of food, making ends meet, the house-keeping stretch, their health... Most women don't have the time or even the interest to come to regular discussion groups. But if it is a meeting to plan a rent strike, or organise a creche or playspace, then through this kind of struggle women come together and are forced to rap out their other problems. As in the squatting campaign in Via Tibaldi, Milan, Italy in June 1971, when 70 families took over a new apartment block. The initial struggle was for housing better living conditions, but as the squat continued, rooms were organised for communal meals, meetings and creches; the whole problem of tiny separate apartments for each family was discussed and people began to rethink and reorganise their lives. The squat itself which was organised by women, children, workers from Pirelli, building workers, students and unemployed workers was a tremendous victory and 200 new flats were allocated as a direct result. The women said, "Besides the creche we organised a canteen and a dispensary. Priority is given to those in most need, and things are shared according to collective decisions. The houses were built to enclose each family in "its" flat and to cut them off from contact with their neighbours. But in the struggle we don't simply appropriate houses in the form that the system designed them, in order to remain isolated. We transform them. The house becomes the centre of organisation; collective existence becomes more important than individual existence,

We think that the function of a small groups is to plan for bigger actions. Some of us have even stopped having regular "discussion" meetings which became a drag and instead we're working on specific projects in different areas; in Claimants Unions, on local people's paper, in community run press, in poster workshop, in local housing group, writing pamphlets. We cannot organise women individually. We can only organise ourselves around issues which affect us collectively - when a group of us are unsupported mothers, when we have the same landlord, when our kids go to the same school, or even when we live in the same street. To those sisters who don't feel the same need to organise around their material oppression we say this: If you have money, make sure its used by as many people as possible to fight i.e. for paper, printing presses, communal cars, vans, petrol; if you have a big house open it up for meetings, for a press, for a creche, for a play group, for a womens' health collective, for a free school, for a womens crash pad. We must use all the skills and resources that we have

for all oppressed sisters. We attack women who still think they can remain on the fence, who are always only half way to dealing with the real problems of the system, who "don't have the time to organise" because of the full time false security of a "good job / career / a nice house / money / a man / a role in life." Many of these sisters think they are revolutionary because they have divided labour in the house equally between men and women or because they sleep with different people. But this is only the first step. Revolution will not be made because men change nappies or cook the evening meal $3\frac{1}{2}$ days a week, or because women have their own job and their own independant wage. We are only going to threaten the hold the system has on and in us when we are active, when we are organising. When we can use our time and energy for specific struggles in the community, around issues which are really oppressing women. For us the only real security is real class solidarity, when we become truly interdependant; realising that the problems around our own lives are the same as the problems of sisters 'out there on the street'; that we have to see our own problems as part of the political struggle and organise around them to be able to overcome them. Of course we still need personal relationships. And this is not a plea for everyone to live in communes. But for all women there is now the possibility of not being totally preoccupied with "the home", "the kids", or even "the commune". If we share responsibility for looking after kids, for having a creche when we organise a meeting, for fighting housing policies, we are learning our collective responsibilities and we are giving each other time and space to think and to create and to organise.

Actions that we've been involved in.

Some of us have been active in squatting, squatting ourselves in an area which is slowly being redeveloped by speculators or Compulsarily purchased by the council to make way for more offices, hotels, luxury flats for business people. We formed a squatters union - we refused to squat people when social workers brought them along (we're not a welfare agency); Instead we told people how to get into houses themselves, how to get gas, water, electricity; how to barricade property. We learnt a lot of skills, how to do wiring, plastering, plumbing and how to use the law. In the union we worked out defence tactics for the squats and successfully defended some. People who are squatting are people taking action who know the system won't get them what they want - somewhere good to live, a HOME;

- Women who want to leave their husbands but haven't anywhere to go.
- Girls who have become pregnant and have been kicked out of home.
- Young people who can't stand family life any more, and don't want to live alone in a bed-sit.
- People who can't afford the rent any more and have been evicted.
- People who can't stand their lousy living conditions any more.
- People who want to live together in a group and can't find anywhere big enough.
- Women and families with kids who landlords won't rent out to.

Its no accident that a lot of us are women. Its women who have to stay home all day long (if they don't go out to work). Its women who have to move out from their husbands (because it usually becomes a matter of physical strength as to who stays). Men have their names on the rent book and the mortgage. Its women who are at the bottom of the housing list. (A good practical guide to squatting "The Squatters Handbook" from 11, Hemingford Road N.1.

Some of us have started to live communally, breaking down our possessive habits about money, food, sex, men, other women. We want to learn to share

life and love with a lot of people - our kids deserve this too,

Some of us have started a creche for 5 or 6 small babies. Each mother/household takes it in turn to look after all the babies one day a week. The kids get loved by different people every day, instead of nagged or neglected. We have enough time to do the things we want to (in the C.U. in the press, living) and the babies play and do things with people of their own age, as they must. (The youngest were four months when they started, the oldest is two and a half years),

Some of us organised a play house for kids of all ages. We marched on the council - women and kids from our street - and demanded and got a home and a grant for a play group. Older kids took it over and we were forced to move into a privately owned house. Three different people work there each day with 8 to 16 kids. We hold weekly meetings to talk about how its going and decide who does what. We've demanded money for wages off the council, £2 per person per day - the beginning of demanding collectively pay for work we have to do every day. The best thing about the play house is that if there are enough people it can be open all day instead of just 2 hours like many play groups.

(For both these schemes the idea is not that women can then go to work and dump their kids on a substitute baby sitter - although some of the sisters are forced to work part time - but that kids get a rough deal if parents are working or not, often on their own or being dragged around the shops. We often repress kids for our own personal "sanity". If we give kids space and time and opportunity to play/ shout/ paint/ run/ cry with their friends, we also have more time to do the same with ours),

Some of us have worked in community play organisations such as Playspace, which is a group of mothers who came together a few years ago in order to take over the few open spaces left in our area to use for kids to play. By demonstrating, and by actually occupying areas of streets and barricading them to traffic, the Playspace group liberated 3 play areas and pressurized the Council into spending money on play facilities and play workers during the school holidays. Playspace is an ongoing group and has control over who is employed as play workers. One of its most recent actions was by force of numbers and later by negotiation, stopping the Council covering a play square with heavy road tarmac. We tore it up and wrote Piss Off in the tarmac already made, and we submitted plans to the Council for paving and grass on the square, the first part of which has now been laid.

Some of us are working on local community papers (people's papers/ gutter presses). We think that a paper is a good way of co-ordinating our activities, of calling meetings and trying to find out whats really happening in the community - where men work, where women work, what the housing conditions are, and what we can do about them. What the police are up to, what the prices are, what the council policies are. A paper is a way of going round talking to people, finding out what they think, getting them to write things, finding out what needs to be done.

Some of us are learning printing and silk screening skills, helping people to print their own posters/ leaflets/ and pamphlets. Taking and developing photos, plate making etc. Printing posters to finance pamphlets,

Some of us are in the Claimants Union and working on the cohabitation campaign, seeing the campaign as challenging the fact that women usually have to depend on men for their living. Seeing it growing into a campaign for a guaranteed income for women, regardless of whether they live with men or not. And in the CU as a whole trying to work out new ideas of collective

action.

Some of us tried to set up a woman's shop. We were given a shop front free and wanted to use it as a Free Shop for womens' and kids' clothes and baby clothes and toys. And also to use it as a place to sit down, have some tea, have a rap, and give out pamphlets etc. It didn't work as well as we thought it would. Some lonely old women came in just to talk about the bloke they'd had 40 years ago; we felt that we couldn't cope with a lot of heavy personal problems - we weren't a Citizen Advice Bureau, but that's the image that people related to. Other women came in, took clothes and went out again without speaking. Although perhaps still a good idea for some, we decided that it wasn't really a way of organising women round a common struggle and that we were wasting a lot of energy just sitting, so we packed it in. There is still a stall in the market on Saturdays which sells women's pamphlets and leaflets.

Some of us have been attacked in the streets at night, so instead of not going out late at night on our own, we are starting self-defence classes. The system uses the idea of "women's weakness" to intimidate us and boost mens' egos. We attack such sexist attitudes.

Other struggles have given us more idea for tactics. For instance, the tenants in the 68/69 rent strike wrote this:-

"The way to win this struggle then is to PREVENT EVICTIONS HAPPENING IN THE FIRST PLACE. This we think can be done in two ways.

1. By the threat of large scale industrial action in the case of any evictions.

2. By "guerrilla tactics"

Here are some of the guerrilla tactics we will be using.

The people responsible for the rent increases are the members of the GLC Housing Committee. These are the people who must be defeated, and these are the people who will be given the go ahead for selective evictions. They have got to be hounded so much that they WILL NOT DARE EVICT ONE SINGLE TENANT.

From October 1st their lives will have to be made unpleasant. The kind of treatment given to Mr. George Vale is the way to do this. Every member of the Housing Committee will have to be subjected to a ceaseless barrage of phone calls, all day and ALL NIGHT. Tenants and sympathisers will have to call on them at odd hours, picket their houses, leaflet their neighbours - not once or twice, but dozens of times. Undertakers and other traders must be got to call on them all the time. A few tons of coal, or manure left on their front path could perhaps also be arranged. The possibilities with mail order firms are unlimited! All councillors have jobs - they must be followed to work and their workmates leafleted. Sit-ins in their houses, or on their front gardens, or at their work places are other methods of hounding. Sleep-ins, tenants camping on their lawns will also help. All the councillors on the Housing Committee have social lives - these can be ruined, if the councillors are followed and their friends leafleted. All kinds of other variations are possible, but we think we've made it clear the sort of tactics we're advocating. In short - WRECK THEIR LIVES, and every act must carry the following message NOT ONE PENNY ON THE RENTS AND IF ONE TENANT IS VICTIMISED, THEN THESE TACTICS WILL BE TREBLED. The alternatives are this - do we want to win or don't we? We're going to defeat the GLC in the rent struggle!!!"

This kind of struggle can be extended. For instance, in a recent squatters court case, 15 women and 16 kids turned up in court for one squat! The kids thought it was tremendous fun and proceeded to run around and freak out eventually forcing the judge to get some nurses to keep them under control. The squatters won the day on a point of law and by openly demonstrating the

need for houses and space for people and their kids,

Its no good simply stating our "Aims" if we are not prepared to fight for them. We know we are exploited and repressed sexually and economically, but if we want more control of our bodies we must invade Birth control and VD clinics collectively and demand to see inside each others bodies and to know exactly what the doctor is doing and what he is proscribing and why - so that we do begin to control our own bodies. If we demand research into better and safer methods of birth control we must attack the big firms who only want to make money out of us. (Distillers, parent company of Distillers (Biochemical) Ltd., the firm which manufactured and distributed thalidomide, last year made profits of £64 million. It has yet to pay compensation to the thalidomide victims).

We must organise boycotts of the many doctors who abuse women. Some of us are trained doctors and nurses. We want to be able to get a women's health collective together. We want to demystify medicine, to test ourselves and each other for pregnancy, to abort ourselves safely by modern methods. If the Carmon canulla (menstrual extraction) method is illegal we must learn how to use it from our american sisters and "extract" ourselves en masse and publicise it. We are not intimidated by sexist laws.

If we want changes in education we must fight for them; in schools by attacking the "board of governors" system, and the elitism and sexism of unions like the National Association of Schoolmasters and the Nat. Assoc. of Schoolmistresses, invading and disrupting their meetings, picketing the schools and the Education Office and officers and putting forward our demands. Skoolkids organising themselves is crucial to the struggle in education. We should support them in any way we can. We can also set up our own Free schools.

We cannot win by putting forward "demands" and then sitting back. Our tactics must be militant. We must make our demands really felt, we can't stop half way. The basis of all our struggles is that we want to work and live and organise in the community and feel the strength and energy and protection of people like us, fighting the same battles as us. If we remain isolated we have no strength. Our "women's groups" are merely base groups from which we should be able to branch out in to any number of things, around the needs of the people around us. If we are well enough together, we can really do things.

WHO ARE OUR FRIENDS? WHO ARE OUR ENEMIES?

The people we feel closest to are the people organising around the same issues as us. The work force is becoming more and more polarised - into a highly skilled white collar mainly male sector, doing control and design jobs on the one hand, and on the other a semi-skilled sector doing boring badly paid jobs which is made up of women and migrant labour. Our friends here are those whose interest and whose struggle are the same as ours. Women and black/migrant workers are being used more and more as cheap labour. We are doubly exploited, exploited economically and by the system's sexist and racist attitudes towards us.

We are close to the people who have taken a strong political stand against the system - black liberation groups, claimants, unsupported mothers, people in GLF, prisoners, skoolkids.

Together we must break through the sexism and racism of the whole class. That is one of our aims - to unite our struggles.

Our enemies are those whose class interests are different from ours; people who have a vested interest in keeping the system as it is, whether they are men or women, black or white. People who, if the crunch comes would sell us out, betray us, would look after their own interests first before anything else.

WHAT WE WANT.

Politics is not separated from everyday life. In England it's very easy for us to feel totally isolated and "civilised". We are allowed to feel "far away" and "untouched" by the middle east crisis, the war in Vietnam, the declaration of martial law in the Philippines, the "mad" policies of Amin, and even the war in Northern Ireland, which is a direct result of British Imperialism.

The papers and the media mystify the real causes of wars, acts of terrorism, violations of treaties etc. Palestinian guerrillas are regarded only as "lunatics". Every guerrilla movement is represented as part of "a Great Evil" whose tentacles are stretching across the earth, whose aim is no less than complete chaos and destruction. We are never given the people's history of Palestine, Mozambique or Guinea-Bissau or Quebec or Vietnam or Yemen or Greece or Spain or Italy or Cyprus or China or Ireland or Argentina or Chile or Cuba.

Everything is presented as "the fight against communism", "the war for Peace", the arms to "protect" South Africa, "aid" for underdeveloped countries; and never as "Protection for capitalist investments", "war for more profits", "pacification programmes to give imperialism more power". This is what we have to change. We want a different society where people's come first, where we control the policies which affect us.

We want to organise in the way we want revolution to grow.

But women are not starting the struggle. Class war already exists. We are adding our strength and our experience to the fight. At the moment we feel young. Our movement itself is very young. Every year we're getting bigger, more organised. But change is not made automatically just because the women's movement grows in numbers. It doesn't necessarily mean we are achieving anything. The Trade Union movement has got bigger and bigger but has become more and more like a tame dog on a lead than the tiger it could be. The same thing could happen to us. How do we work politically and become more revolutionary? How do we make sure that our movement is not co-opted here and there, is not picked off bit by bit by the system without us noticing?

Already Sir Keith Joseph is suggesting giving us all free contraception. A victory perhaps, but one more demand defused. And what happens when the Council offers us grants for the playhouse, or for the women's house? Do certain conditions go with it? Do we restrict our activities under the threat of getting the money stopped? This is the greatest danger. Community work, a trendy past-time for some, has often fallen into exactly the same trap; and good work started, gets slowly reabsorbed into the welfare agencies of the system - the very things that act as a sop to any "liberal" or "democratic" tendencies in any party.

Sisters, we have had enough of social workers, probation officers and welfare agencies who claim to "solve" people's problems for them, while only papering over the cracks. These "help" services prop up the system.

We want to give each other the confidence to fight the system now,

Sisters, we are strong but we are keeping it for ourselves,
We must push that strength outwards,

love,
the Tough and Tender collective

PTO.