

FOR THE DEMANDS CONFERENCE OF THE WORKING WOMEN'S CHARTER.

We disagree with the spirit behind the Charter because it is basically conservative- it does nothing to change the root causes of women's double exploitation, and it helps the government organize more work for us. The Charter is not the voice of women who are angry at being all things at once. It seems significant that hours of work are not even mentioned yet the women's liberation movement is about women wanting more time to be themselves by themselves. If every demand in the Charter was fulfilled tomorrow women would still be unequal, that is doubly exploited and working twice as hard as men, because it accepts the status quo. In fact the Charter indicates the direction Capital is moving towards. To see this we only have to look at some of the stateplanning being engineered by the Department of Employment and the Labour party. Eventually both men and women could be on a 24hr day, looking after the children in turn while the other was at waged work, and saving the state the expense of nurseries. It is also widely admitted that all women can be used as anti-inflationary instruments.

We feel the liberation of women is not something we can trust the unions ever to speak for, even if they do encourage more women onto the executive. They have no tradition of fighting for the sort of changes we want to see and certainly should not attempt to express those changes on our behalf. Unions themselves claim only to be interested in the conditions of waged work (and even waged workers might deny that) and that is far too narrow a field for us to confine ourselves to. There is so much more potential in the anger of women than just a desire to have equal employment terms with men. We feel that women should be totally independent of unions when they are working out their policies and practice.

Much of the discontent of women springs from wider social injustices than the Charter indicates. If unions thought in terms of striking for decent accommodation at a reasonable price for everyone then many women would not have to take another job, and both men and women would not be breaking their backs to get a down payment on a ~~xxxxxx~~ mortgage.

The Charter ignores the housewife as if she doesn't exist and should not exist, when she is in fact something like half of all the women in the country. It is a familiar insult. Why should we join the government in advocating carrots to push her into a second job when she was able to choose not to work outside the home. These women are wageless. Because of this all women are in an inferior position on the labour market, when it comes to bargaining. Employers always think of women as housewives and mothers primarily. The nature of housework is reflected in the kind of waged work available to women- always underpaid and monotonous, often organizing petty details to serve men. And these women are housewives when they get home too.

We understand why so many women have supported the Charter. Demands like free nurseries, maternity leave, more family allowances; these are all things we need. But if the Charter is intended as a focus for organization then the perspective it embodies is important. And the perspective of the Charter is to ask for the minimum in all cases, to accept that we have two jobs and simply rationalize the double day's work. How about the 7th demand as an expression- the rationalized child bearing machine Capital wants- 18 weeks maternity leave but if the child is born dead back to work in 7 weeks.

To say more clearly what we mean we decided to look at each individual point in turn. The title "The Working Women's Charter" itself seems to exclude women without a waged job. This term traditionally means women working outside the home but housewives. Housewives, especially mothers are working women too.

I. "The rate for the job, ~~xxxx~~ regardless of sex, at rates negotiated by the trades unions, with a national minimum wage below which no wage should fall."

We all know that the rate for the job means in practice next to nothing for jobs which are traditionally women's jobs. The unions may oppose job revaluation but they have done nothing to change the sexist division

we want rates fought for by women not negotiated downwards by unions.

Who wants a minimum wage anyway?

2. "Equal opportunity of entry into occupations and in promotion, regardless of sex and marital state."

This doesn't say much at all. Even the last Conservative government wanted equal opportunity in employment regardless of sex. There is no attempt to discuss how this demand can be effected. Like the Labour Party's bill it is a declaration of intent only. Anyway when it boils down to it it is only asking the government to use us more efficiently. Is this what we really want?

3. "Equal education and training for all occupations and compulsory day release for all 16-19 year olds in employment."

The same goes for this. It shows no understanding of why women don't go in for further education and training. Many girls leave school to earn money they need, and continue in secretarial work when they marry for money. There is nothing in this demand about payment for studying. In any case not everyone is interested in study. Demands like compulsory day release ignore the fact that many school children are not interested in school work. Who are we to force certain kinds of equality on women who reject it.

4. "Working conditions to be, without deterioration of previous conditions the same for ~~xxx~~ women as for men"

Why doesn't this demand ask for ~~ix~~ improved working conditions for men and for women?

5. "The removal of all legal and bureaucratic impediments to equality, eg with regard to tenancies, mortgages, pension schemes, taxation, passports, control over children, social security payments, hire purchase agreements" what use is this kind of legal equality for the housewife.

What use is it when women don't earn enough to be able to get a mortgage, or more than miserable pensions. You can't blame a mortgage company for refusing a mortgage to a woman ~~xxx~~ when they know when she has a child she has no income of her own.

6. "Improved provisions of local authority day nurseries, free of charge, with extended hours to suit working mothers. Provision of nursery classes in day nurseries. More nursery schools."

We would like to see more ~~xxxxxxx~~ nurseries too, but not as part of government planning to push more women into second jobs, outside the home to fill all the jobs men are refusing to do, like ticket collectors in London underground. Why are only "working" mothers mentioned? What about full time housewives who need a break from their kids in the day? Also this demand doesn't touch on the problem of mothers who are reluctant to dump their children in a state nursery. It doesn't discuss the possibility of local control of these nurseries by mothers and fathers.

7. "18 weeks maternity leave with full pay before and after the birth of a live child; 7 weeks after birth if the child is still born. No dismissal during pregnancy or maternity leave. No loss of security pension or promotion prospects."

The obscurity of the wording of 7 is horrid. We felt that if we'd had a dead child we would want more time off work to recover. The tone of this makes child bearing sound like a production process. By all means let us demand maternity leave but how about a realistic amount of time for this? What woman would want to leave her child after only 18 weeks?

8. "Family planning clinics supplying free contraception to be extended to cover every locality. Free abortion to be readily available."

How about the freedom to have children as well as the "freedom" to work? Many women can't afford to stop waged work to have a child.

9. "Family allowances to be increased to £2 50 per child, including the first child."

What a miserable sum. How about £45 per week for child care?

10. "to campaign amongst women to take an active part in the trades-union ~~xxxxxxx~~ and in political life so they may exercise influence commensurate with their numbers and to campaign ~~xxxxxx~~ amongst men trade unionists that they may work to achieve this aim."

Who wants this favour anyway? Men can never represent women's interests fully, they never have done up to now so why should they change. What have unions ever done for women in a strike? would they come out for ~~wage~~ wages for housework?

We don't want the right to be equally exploited with men. We don't want to do two jobs all our lives, a waged one for employers and an unwaged one for our families. Wouldn't it be better to be paid wages for housework and then we would have a real choice when it came to working outside the home, or refusing to work outside the home. This is not the sort of equality the Charter is pushing us towards. Any struggle for equality must begin with the interests of the housewife.

More relevant demands would be: paid time off for shopping, paid days off for domestic crises, no taxes for women, clothing allowances for secretaries, free housing, paid travelling time and wages for mothers and housewives.

Already women have shown that they are demanding more than this Charter is demanding. In August 1975 a factory of 2,000 workers, the majority of which were women in Rierburg in Germany which makes carburetors came out on strike for one paid day off a month for housework, for paid transport to and from work, for the abolition of the lowest category (in which most women are stuck) for one half day off paid for visits to the doctor. They won only the abolition of the lowest category (a year before they had abolished an even lower category by strike action) and a rise in wages. It is easier for women who do waged work than for full time housewives to demand more time off from the second job and a wage for both jobs. Those of us who are looking to see the actual struggles women are involved in, their actual demands, can see that we are not limiting ourselves as women to a fight in the work place - but also in the other work place, the home. We have seen the massive struggle of full time housewives, supported and unsupported in this country and even more massively in North America. Welfare mothers there have demanded a wage from the state in order to resist taking a second job. Women everywhere are with holding rents, either by falling in arrears individually or by organized rent strikes. Shop lifting is becoming more common and the inflation has caused to act more and more in groups. If the ~~xxxxxxx~~ state and the employer will not pay the wage we need we have increasingly begun to take it, in order to resist the double work they are trying to force us to do.

If our demands don't reflect the struggle then we are intentionally or unintentionally holding them back. What we have to do is spread and strengthen them.

POWER OF WOMEN

Power of Women Collective.