

Herewith we are sending you a document concerning an experience the women of SOLARI recently had, which has pointed out the subjects and the directions useful to promote a struggle against the Health Service that, as it now runs, exploits the user (that is the sick person), especially if he is a worker.

The official "Science" keeps us in a constant ignorance and therefore it makes us consider the doctor just as a wizard, a god that knows everything and re-solves our illness; we do not even dare to ask him why and how we are sick.

The doctor is like a technician that repairs damages (if he repairs them) and never explains the motive of "that illness", of "that pain", of "that operation".

To ask him something means to destroy the myth of the "Scientist"; it means to reveal his ignorance, his inhumanity and his disrespect of the sick person.

It could reveal things how they really are, i.e. that Medicine is subjected to the Power, the System, the Capitalistic Structure of the actual society.

All our troubles are the logical consequence of how work is organized in the middle class/capitalistic society: the daily strain, the production rates, the noxious working environment, the necessity of "selling off" our own labour in order to survive.

All this affects the workers and forces them to risk their life every day. Every day we die a bit to give more profit to the Boss.

The Capital - the Boss - make us fall ill for his own profits and forces us to loose part of our wages to follow a treatment with the medicines he produces, thus increasing his already substantial profits.

In fact illness is not prevented; the "gap is stopped" when it already exists and then it is often too late.

Therefore we think that from the political point of view it is very important for this document to be transmitted to as many persons as possible in order to extend this struggle which concerns us all.

Therefore we are requesting a concrete contribution to all the political and cultural forces and to the Left-wing press, who are willing to change such a situation; and we beg them to publish the enclosed document or, at least, to inform people about its real and exact political content, that is:

- women's function in the present society,
- mobilization concept for the defence of everybody's health and particularly of the health of the workers, who are responsible for stimulating the competent bodies.

For your information only, we are enclosing the letter attached to the above-mentioned document for its political utilization.

THE WOMEN OF SOLARI

To

The enclosed letter is being forwarded to every local responsible for health services, to the Unions, and to the differently interested bodies as listed above, in order that they may be aware of an experience we recently made in the field of health defence and may give their help in facing and resolving the consequential problems.

We specifically request a commitment from the various competent bodies for the achievement of the following aims:

1. quality improvement of preventive oncological examination (organisation of the service to guarantee treatment co-ordinated with oncological and gynaecological examinations; qualification of the relation between doctor and patient, by means of health education, too).
2. Overcoming of administrative-bureaucratic complications connected with INAM (National Health Insurance Board), Oncologic Centre and Hospital, to obtain a simplified and effective service.
3. Starting of a systematic dialogue between the health services and the workers' basic bodies for a mutual co-operation between sanitary operators and users in view of the forthcoming institution of national health service.

The Workers' Council of Solari/Udine, where the Health Committee also operates with its women delegates, is available for developments and connections.

THE WOMEN OF SOLARI/UDINE

LETTER ON WOMEN'S HEALTH

We are a group of women who work in a clock factory, Solari, which is situated at 100 metres from Udine's Civil Hospital. In our factory we represent almost half of the workers; in all we are 400 women.

we are the
women of
Solari/udine

We have felt the need to write this report on the long vicissitude of which we have been protagonists in the attempt to exercise our, as all workers', right to defend our health.

Our vicissitude commenced in the Spring of 1974 when we tackled the problem of the Pap Test (i.e. an examination to know whether or not we have cancer of the cervix or womb, plus an examination to ascertain whether or not we have carcinoma of the breasts).

It was a serious problem for us because the 'Varisco' Tumour Centre which is situated in the Civil Hospital and is run by the Province of Udine, is only open from 8 a.m. to 12 a.m. week-days, Saturday excluded. For us these opening hours meant losing two half days work (obviously not paid). We spent a morning in order to go and book the appointment, leaving the necessary personal and sanitary data with the nurse in charge; it is to be noted that the waiting list is months long. We spent a second morning in order to effect the visit itself.

first
experience in
health defence

When we put forward this problem we immediately received a certain degree of 'comprehension'.

On one hand the Tumour Centre demonstrated to be ready to establish for us a special visiting hour, and on the other the factory Management allowed us to hold an assembly of one half hour at the end of the working day in order to acquire some relative information on the above examinations, the assembly being suggested to us by the Tumour Centre itself. It was an assembly that we will certainly remember in so far that we were given the possibility of asking questions and generally discussing the problem. However, the Management went beyond our expectations, perhaps prompted by the 'nobility of the gesture' and allowed us an hour fully paid in order to undergo the examination (however only for those of us at the Head Office).

180 of us undertook the tests. When the Tumour Centre sent the results many of us (25%) discovered to be invited to undergo a gynaecology visit, in that the Pap Test had revealed cervicitis, vaginitis, erosion of the neck of the womb, parasites, inflammation etc.

Not that before we had believed ourselves to be 'healthy', perfectly healthy; but for actual lack of time in that once finished our work in the factory our housework began, each one of us was resigned to not paying attention to the renal pains, to the various discomforts,

right to be
healthy and
duty to be ill

to the exhaustion, to the white discharges and those of blood, to the irritation, to the severe period pains, and to a rise in temperature.

One was resigned to not finding time even to cure herself; in comparison with our perpetual physical and mental exhaustion owed to the fact that our life is governed by our work, one slight pain more or less did not have any importance. What does it mean for a woman to fall ill? When can we permit ourselves to be ill? NEVER; only if we have cancer, tuberculosis etc. or if we have to undergo an operation. It is necessary for us that our life itself be in danger and at the same time the work we guarantee before everything else in the home and then also in the factory - only then 'can' we cure ourselves; but our state of health in this case must be really serious.

Face to face with those 'invitations' to undergo the gynaecological visit, we, however, decided to accept them. We decided to start to cure ourselves of the slight ailments, too, and of those illnesses which everybody takes for granted that we women have to stand as chronic. Soon we were to discover that we were perhaps asking too much!

In fact our 'via crucis' began at that moment. Going for the gynaecological visit meant losing four working days: half a day for the visit to our G.P., another half a day in order to go to I.N.A.M. (i.e. National Health Insurance Board) to book an appointment with the specialist, another half a day for the actual visit and yet another for a second visit to our G.P. in order to obtain the National Health prescriptions.

4 day's work
not paid for
a check up

Then the same rigmarole follows at the end of the cure in order to obtain the results. In total four day's work unpaid. Why do we say four days?

Because we have to wait hours in a doctor's waiting room until our turn arrives, we have to queue at I.N.A.M., always hoping that the doctor will be punctual, we have to undergo the visits; to cure ourselves is not a pleasure, it is a work: it is housework in so far that we have to spend these hours in order to try to put our body back into a fairly good condition that others abuse of each day in the factory and at home. No one has any doubts that doctors and nurses carry out work when they cure the sick. Some one even succeeds in seeing that we at home cure our loved ones before they enter into hospital, or when they leave, so carrying out a job of work and this is a part of housework.

Housework, what does housework mean?

production in
the factory
and domestic
production

First of all it is not defined as a work, or in the same way as any outside work. It is part of the obscure, vague, taken for granted female mission of dedication to the family and to the home made of patience, sweetness and sacrifice, female instinct, inborn, natural and therefore inevitable. But however, let us face up to the reality of these things which are taken for granted, verifying them with the events of our daily life of women. Housework is not held to be a work by the Capital so much so that it is not paid and therefore in political and economic terms it has no rate of exchange, no contractual power, and no limits and protections.

But why all this?

The Capital gains money from women's skin, that is profits in excess. With our 'work' on the one hand it saves money (collective social services, structures functioning to the actual service of all the communities), and on the other keeps the majority of the female population isolated forcing it to work in the home. NO, it is not a female mission, and even if it were, the Capital gains too much on this 'mission' in order to be able to smuggle it as such! Women are the mass most blackmailed by the Capital everywhere, at home and at work.

The capital, the society, exploit women from when they are born until when they die and this process of exploitation reflects on the physical and psychological health of women.

To double exploitation, and therefore double work and physical fatigue, corresponds the greater physical vulnerability of the woman and her minor protection because she has not the material time to cure herself, to permit herself this luxury; in fact to protect her own health is not a woman's right and therefore a duty of the State towards its citizens, as sanctioned by the Constitution itself, but it is a "luxury".

Therefore, even when we cure ourselves we carry out a job of work, housework, even if no one is disposed in seeing this and even less in compensating it.

It is with this point in mind that the women's health commission has arisen inside the factory. The aim is not only to resolve this concrete problem, i.e. to be able to undergo a visit in a decent way on leave paid, but also to collect and voice all those things which have always been thought but never said by us publicly. And these things are many!

women's health
commission

However, let us take up briefly again the story of the facts.

First of all we turned to the Civil Hospital because it is practically next door to our factory and it would have been convenient for us to have made the visit there. Moreover we

thought it was the most logical solution of the public health co-ordination with respect to our needs: information, diagnosis and cure; eventually because we would have saved, besides the time, also the money for transportation, which would not have been so very little all things considered with the number of runs involved.

We promoted a meeting with the hospital in the presence of our 'Unitarian Factory Counsel' and the trade unions too.

hospital

The hospital gave us their complete availability in executing not only the more urgent visits but also of initiating cycles of sanitary information pertinent to anti-tumour and gynaecological visits, which had naturally to be authorized by I.N.A.M. The latter however, was not represented at the meeting because of a misunderstanding.

However, to make up for this, members of the public health service of the Province and the Commune were present. By means of one of them we learnt that trichomonas is very common above all for the excessive frequency of coitus (we have sexual relations too often) and for poor intimate cleanliness (we do not wash ourselves often enough)!

Commune

Ours is a bitter reflection in noting that these people are also responsible for the health education of all citizens.

After the above we requested a meeting, by means of the 'Unitarian Factory Counsel' with Udine's 'Varisco' Tumour Centre, which is run by the Province and located within the Civil Hospital.

Province

With this meeting we were proposing to obtain two things.

On the one hand we wanted to explicitly ask for a mobile unit which could undertake the Pap Test directly at the factory, so that even the women who work at our factory at Artegna could undergo this test (something which Solari's Management had not allowed them as they had allowed us of the Head Office).

On the other hand we wanted to know if there was the possibility of undergoing a gynaecological visit during the Pap Test.

The first request is self-explanatory: we did not wish that the possibility of undergoing the Pap Test remain a 'privilege' only for us, but that it were a right to defend for all.

The second request arose out of the practical difficulties that we had met: the specimen is taken by a specialised nurse therefore every information she gives us verbally (there is cervicitis etc.) is not concretely translated into an immediate explanation of what one has, and in a likewise immediate prescription, for the cure.

We only receive the suggestion to make a gynaecological visit. The result of this had been that many women were frightened (how many of us know what a cervicitis is?) in not succeeding in under-

standing what was the matter with them and they were still more frightened on hearing the suggestion to undergo an immediate gynaecological visit.

The reply to these two requests was NO!

Another no was given to our requirement for a different relationship between doctor and patient.

"You cannot have a drawing-room tête-à-tête" are the textual words of Dr. Cozzi, who evidently has never lived the experience common to many of us, to be visited without materially seeing the doctor, of being half undressed and of remaining thus with half our panties and tights in our hand, and of waiting in over-crowded rooms without windows and sufficient chairs (80 persons); all this in order to permit a more rapid visit.

The tone of the meeting was very strong (read offensive), especially owing to the behaviour of Dr. Cozzi, more than once rebuked by the President of the Province himself. Not one of the women present was allowed to speak. Who had in some way succeeded in speaking was immediately quietened by Dr. Cozzi, who closed the argument with one of the usual insults against women. If it had not been for the fact that the trades union and unitarian factory counsel were present, probably we would have left the hall. And it would have been better! From that moment we have had no other contact with the Tumour Centre.

On 28th January, we, the same group of women and the factory groups, promoted a meeting with I.N.A.M. in order to obtain that famous authorisation to effect the gynaecological visits at the hospital.

I.N.A.M.

We explained the great number of difficulties that a woman meets with when she must frequently undergo gynaecological visits and check ups.

We related what a woman's life consists of. Factory and housework, where one finishes the other begins; the fact that before thinking of ourselves we must first assist the sick at home, that the time then to cure ourselves never arrives, that in the factory this time off is not paid, that to defend our health costs money without which it is indeed difficult to cure ourselves.

We denounced the absurdity of the long hours spent (hours of housework not a general loss of time) in waiting rooms for a few minutes' visit hastily carried out without the minimum consideration of the patient as a person, of the long hours passed at I.N.A.M. for continual stamping of documents and super-checking at the desks. All of these long hours are unnerving and demoralising.

We spoke of the transcription of the services and of the prescriptions, made by too many doctors (tumour medical centre, family doctor, I.N.A.M. doctor, Civil Hospital doctor). Therefore we remain confused

and perplexed faced with prescriptions or therapy so manipulated and multiple.

I.N.A.M.'s reply was moving and full of tact. Do not worry, we will do everything, the hospital does not come into it, neither does even the Tumour Centre.

We will do everything (for you of Solari), visits, check ups, sanitary information, therapy.

Therefore the authorisation to go to the hospital will not be given because it is not of any use to you. In compensation however, we obtain:-

for urgent patients to immediately undergo a visit, without the letter from our G.P.,

without need to queue (for you we will establish special bookings), to receive from the specialist an I.N.A.M. prescription (consenting the immediate purchase at the chemist's of the medicines prescribed, without having to return to the G.P. for this purpose only).

Moreover we receive (from I.N.A.M.) the advice for a plausible concrete program to effect the slide specimen for the Pap Test at the factory and to adopt it for public health information, always in the future.

In any case, the agreement was that before long there would be a meeting between I.N.A.M., the hospital, us and the unitarian factory counsel and trades union in order to widen the discussion on health and examine all the problems concerning the gynaecological and anti-tumour visit.

But let us see what was obtained from these visits.

On 14th February the first objections on the part of the other women in the queue at INAM. Our small conquest was risking to divide us from other women.

On 17th February the objections of the other women became so open that the specialist refused to visit us during the opening hours, blowing his top and protesting with INAM's social worker. At the end a new time-table for visits was proposed from 11.45 to 12.30 a.m. All this happened whilst one of us, who was being visited, was on the couch.

On 21st February the women of Solari refuse to effect the visits to INAM because first of all in the above conditions our small victory was risking to transform itself into a political defeat, in so far that it was creating an open division between us, women of Solari, and the other women (housewives etc.), they too like us with work to do and thus with little time to 'dedicate' to queues. Secondly, because the new visiting hours proposed by Dr. Debiasi altered the nature of our struggle, as by accepting to undergo visits outside

the first consultations: favours and not services

the normal working hours meant returning to resigning oneself to not undergoing cures, or else to curing oneself paying the usual cost in terms of work, time and money.

Besides these facts, still in relation to the visits made at INAM, we have noted that: the pill was prescribed to two patients without first having made the relevant tolerance analysis, the necessity of which is now known by everybody; medicines were prescribed which have been out of use for years (we would like to know why); a cure based on the use of vaginal pessaries was prescribed for 20 days to a woman who had an ovarian cyst, when what was needed was her urgent admission into hospital (as in effect was then carried out by means of her G.P.).

This fact provoked small meetings between us in the various departments of the factory, both for prompting a meeting, which was no longer to be postponed, between INAM and the hospital with the aim of obtaining the authorisation to effect the visits in hospital, and in order to discuss once again the public health assistance which the State supplies.

Out of these meetings came a reality which we want to be noted: all the women visited privately by specialists (often the same who hold surgery at INAM) never obtained a receipt for the fee paid (from Lit. 20,000 to Lit. 25,000), which enables the doctors to avoid declaring their actual incomes to the tax offices.

the 'fees'

Often, INAM denies us the right to make the analysis that our G.P. requests. INAM is one of those many institutions maintained with money which comes out of our pockets.

Doctors who prescribe contraceptives out of date and inefficient, which demonstrates their wide ignorance; squalid and hasty visits: faced with the patient that complains and wants to go into hospital, only if she has her husband with her does she succeed in obtaining that of which she has need.

From the discussions another question arose, that immediately began to go round the factory: when we are ill we are paid, when we go for a medical visit we are not, why? And so several male factory workers began to ask themselves the same thing; why, for example, when they go for an ulcer X-ray they are not paid.

the contra-
dictions in
defence of
health

Our struggle this time succeeded in giving political indications to them too.

At the last meeting with the hospital and INAM we obtained that INAM avails the convention in order that we are able to effect such visits at the hospital, too.

In order to make this small step ahead we had to knock at a great many doors and not lose heart when these were closed in our face. We held hard.

health is
mobilization

We have written this report so that the largest possible number of women come to know of our struggle.

We have written it for women workers like ourselves, who always more numerous, are struggling in order to obtain factory assemblies completely for themselves, where they can discuss their problems as women, in order to obtain a monthly paid day for housework.

We have also written this report for all the women who up to this time, during the medical visits and analysis, in the waiting rooms, and in the hospitals have not succeeded in expressing openly their rebellion against the public health system that abuses us, that insults and oppresses us, and above all us women, in a much stronger way than it does with the men.

Our struggle has began here, but it does not stop here.

Willing or not, the National Health institutions, the hospitals, the doctors, the Province, the Commune, and the State, from today onwards will have to face up to us and our struggles.

The women of Solari

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