

FC, Cartella 4, 39

Wages Due Lesbians  
74, Princess Road  
London NW 6 01 624 6364

To the Labour Party National Executive Committee:

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Lesbians

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To the Labour Party National Executive Committee:

We are writing to protest the decision taken by Northampton North Labour Party that Maureen Colquhoun should retire at the next election. Whatever reasons have been offered to defend this action, it is quite clear to everyone that it is because she is a lesbian woman and what's more, has refused to hide or act ashamed of it.

Maureen Colquhoun is not the first woman to be sacked for being lesbian. There have been many. For millions of women in this country the reality of our daily lives is that we have to "choose" between hiding who we are from all but a few close friends and "coming out" publicly and risking the loss of our jobs, our children, our homes, our friends. It is this that makes M.S. Colquhoun vulnerable. Her situation highlights the fact that because most women have little or no money, even women who appear to be immune to the pressures of a day-to-day life of poverty and dependence on men, are also under attack. She was able to leave her husband but she has been denied her right to money and her right to live independently how she chooses and with whom she chooses. On the one hand, the lack of power of most women and of lesbian women in particular makes M.S. Colquhoun vulnerable to this attack. On the other hand, if M.S. Colquhoun is sacked as an MP that is a precedent for even more lesbian women to be sacked from jobs and for courts to take our children away in custody cases with even less hesitation than at present.

It is not uncommon for members of both Houses of Parliament to sleep with women and with men. When the MP's are men no one is very bothered, not even when it's a PM involved. Yet when women are involved with each other it is immediately a subject for public scrutiny and alarm. Whereas men's "morality" is on the whole a private affair, women's "morality" is always being attacked and examined under a microscope. Although lesbianism is not illegal in this country, we are punished as though it were a crime. So much is it expected that all women should be poor, and dependent on men, that when any one of us steps out of line and takes our independence, we're treated as criminals.

If the Labour Party is so concerned about retaining a "marginal working-class constituency" as Mr. Ashby (the Chairman of Northampton North) suggests, we would expect that the personal life of a prospective candidate would be con-

siderably less relevant than what proposals she had to meet the needs of her constituents. For instance in an area of high unemployment, women are always the first to lose even the low-paying jobs we have, and are forced back into financial dependence on men, in a time when men's money amounts to less all the time. Rather than concern for who she is sleeping with, we demand concern for all the women in the constituency--from married women to single women, from lesbian women to non-lesbian women, young and old, with children and without. These women's needs never hit the headlines.

If the Labour Party is concerned to find favour with the working class of this country they had better find out who is the working class. Far from our concern being "conventional morality," our main concern is money. The working class is single mothers, is lesbian women, is women who are divorced, prostitutes, pensioners, full-time housewives, women who have two jobs, Black women and immigrant women--all fighting the crisis despite a wage freeze and the Chancellor's Budgets.

It is not the "working class" but the Labour Party which is upset about our "morality," because breaking away from traditional morality <sup>in this case</sup> is about breaking away from a woman's place, from a woman's work and a woman's dependence. Every government has always profited when we stayed in our "place" and worked for little or nothing there.

Women in particular are fed up to the teeth with all political parties since none has ever spoken to our needs and all have conspired to keep us poor. No political party has defended the right of all women to money for all the unpaid housework we're expected to do or the single mother's right to adequate social security or the married woman's right to independent money of her own, or our right to jobs with decent wages. We don't know where Ms. Colquhoun stands on these questions, but we do know that even if she wanted to help women her hands would be tied. We are supposed to believe that women in the Houses of Parliament will give us power, but it is clear that Ms. Colquhoun does not have any political power unless she dissociates herself from the rest of us.

All the political parties have had to reckon with the widespread rebellion of women against what's expected of us as mothers, as wives, lovers, daughters, etc. Even the Houses of Parliament have not been immune, e.g. Bernadette Devlin as the first single mother in the House as far as we know, <sup>and</sup> the MP who brought her child to "work." And now a publicly lesbian woman. The fact that lesbianism has

surfaced in the Palace of Westminster is some indication of how very widespread it is, and that any politician who chooses to ignore us as a force will do so at their own political peril!

We demand that the Labour Party take a position on this issue. Millions of women, lesbian and non-lesbian, all over the country, are waiting to see whether the Labour Party supports this attack on women's right to keep our paid jobs and to have an independent personal life or whether it will defend that right. In doing so the Labour Party will be taking a position against women or for us--- and we will deal accordingly. The Labour Party once opposed suffrage. We hope times have changed.

Power to all women and therefore to the  
rest of the working class,

*Anne Neale*

Anne Neale, Wages Due Lesbians

P.S. Letters will shortly be sent to the Conservative and Liberal Parties demanding that they too take a position on this matter.

# THE LABOUR PARTY

INFORMATION UNIT

GENERAL SECRETARY: R. G. HAYWARD CBE  
HON TREASURER: Rt Hon L. J. CALLAGHAN MP  
NATIONAL AGENT: H. R. UNDERHILL

FM/TB

25 October 1977

Ms. A. Neale,  
Wages Due Lesbians,  
74 Princess Road,  
LONDON.  
NW6

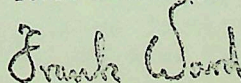
Dear Ms. Neale,

Thank you for your letter and it may very well be, that the issue of Maureen Colquhoun being a lesbian did play some part in the decision by her local Labour Party to seek a new candidate at the next General Election. However, it would be totally unfair of you not to obtain information from the local members as to any other factors that might have influenced them in coming to their decision. It does not appear from your letter that you have tried to obtain their point of view. It is certainly not something one can obtain from the media.

You may be quite certain that there is no Party restriction of any sort on those who are regarded very unfairly as being different to the generally accepted sexual mores. However, it would be foolish for anybody to deny that there is considerable prejudice on the issue of lesbianism, but what we can claim is that the majority of members of the Labour Party have, in the main, been more advanced and open on personal sexual issues than the general public. The vote at our Annual Conference for example on Abortion on demand was an overwhelming 4,666,000 to 75,000. It was my wife as a delegate to the 1975 Conference who made the point at the rostrum that it was a male dominated House that reformed the laws on male homosexuality long before dealing with the abortion laws.

What we are discussing, however, in respect to the Northampton North Labour Party's decision is the right of the local members to decide who is to be their candidate. Providing the rules are conformed to, which include giving Ms. Colquhoun every right to attend all meetings that deal with the issue then we have no power to reverse their decisions. Nor in fact from the standpoint from democracy should we have such powers. Our membership has long since thrown off the idea that we bureaucrats at Transport House should decide these issues for them. We doubt if you yourselves would wish to reverse this process.

Yours sincerely,



Frank Ward

Information Officer

Wages Due Lesbians  
74 Princess Road,  
London NW6

3 November 1977

Dear Mr. Ward,

We want to take up some of the points raised in your letter.

We are well aware that there may be a number of reasons why certain elements in the local and national Labour Party wanted Maureen Colquhoun sacked. We are sure, however, that the fact that she is a lesbian woman who has refused to hide her sexual choice was the occasion for her actually being dismissed. What this means in effect is that a publicly lesbian woman cannot take a position on controversial issues. In this case the controversial issues that some of the local party are objecting to were her position against racism, and her position for free abortion on demand. This are issues on which many women - lesbian and non-lesbian, white and black, - and men supported her. It is quite clear to us all that in shutting Maureen Colquhoun up, all women are being told to shut up.

Unlike your letter suggests, we are aware of the views of Maureen Colquhoun's constituents. It is clear that she has received a lot of support from her constituency at a grass-roots level. The Labour Party would do well to examine the motives of the people who oppose her and to see which sections of the constituency they represent.

We certainly have not seen the Labour Party be "more open and advanced on personal sexual issues than the general public." There are many members of the general public who are lesbian women... We have never heard the Labour Party (or any other political party) defend our interests; and there are even more women and men in the general public who feel that we are all entitled to sexual lives of our choosing. After your party's treatment of Maureen Colquhoun, the Labour Party cannot claim to have that position.

As we raised in our letter, the Labour Government has continued and extended the policies of the Conservative Government to consistently undermine women's possibility of financial independence, through rising inflation, unemployment, erosion in the value of our wages if we have any, in Social Security benefits, pensions, etc. When our right to financial independence is under attack, our possibilities for choosing how we want to live and with whom, are also under attack. To the extent to which the Labour Party has not defended women's right to financial independence, to that extent the Labour Party is not only behind, but against, the general trend of public opinion which is definitely in favour of women's right to some money of our own. Just last week, for example, Dr. Mia Kellmer Pringle, director of the National Children's Bureau, said that, "... child-rearing is both a vital and demanding job that deserves adequate remuneration". (The Guardian 25/10/77).

These are the real issues at stake. There ~~are~~ <sup>is</sup> no doubt that the National Executive Committee has intervened either overtly or covertly on previous occasions. The question seems to us to be not whether the National Executive Committee is ready to intervene, but on what issues the National Executive Committee

is ready to intervene. It has not passed unnoticed that for example we have not seen the kind of support for Maureen Colquhoun that we saw for Reg Prentice. In that case, major figures in the Labour Party went to speak in his defence in his constituency, despite almost universal opposition to him from the local party. He has now joined the Conservative Party.

You say that "we bureaucrats in Transport House" are concerned about what should or should not be done "from the standpoint of democracy". Who else but bureaucrats in Transport House, or in any house, would think that democracy was being served by booting out a Representative of a section of society which is being discriminated against?

We repeat our demand that Maureen Colquhoun be reinstated and that the Labour Party take a position on this issue.

*Anne Neale*

Anne Neale  
WAGES DUE LESBIANS

Wages Due Lesbians  
74, Princess Road  
London NW 6 Tel: 01 624 6364  
12 October, 1977

To the Conservative Party National Executive Committee:

We are writing to demand that the Conservative Party take a position on the recent sacking of M.P. Maureen Colquhoun by her local Labour Party branch. Whatever reasons have been offered to defend this action, it is quite clear to everyone that it is because she is a lesbian woman and, what's more, has refused to hide or act ashamed of it. This is not an internal affair of the Labour Party. Maureen Colquhoun is a member of parliament and her sacking must be of no less concern to your party than to hers. In addition this is an issue which affects all women of whatever political affiliations and therefore transcends party political boundaries.

Maureen Colquhoun is not the first woman to be sacked for being lesbian. There have been many. For millions of women in this country the reality of our daily lives is that we have to "choose" between hiding who we are from all but a few close friends and "coming out" publicly and risking the loss of our jobs, our children, our homes, our friends. It is this that makes Ms. Colquhoun vulnerable. Her situation highlights the fact that because most women have little or no money, even women who appear to be immune to the pressures of a day-to-day life of poverty and dependence on men, are also under attack. She was able to leave her husband but she has been denied her right to money and her right to live independently how she chooses and with whom she chooses. On the one hand, the lack of power of most women and of lesbian women in particular makes Ms. Colquhoun vulnerable to this attack. On the other hand, if Ms. Colquhoun is sacked as an MP that is a precedent for even more lesbian women to be sacked from jobs and for courts to take our children away in custody cases with even less hesitation than at present.

It is not uncommon for members of both Houses of Parliament to sleep with women and with men. When the MP's are men no one is very bothered, not even when it's a PM involved. Yet when women are involved with each other it is immediately a subject for public scrutiny and alarm. Whereas men's "morality" is on the whole a private affair, women's "morality" is always being attacked and examined under a microscope. Although lesbianism is not illegal in this country, we are punished as though it were a crime. So much is it expected that all women should be poor, and dependent on men, that when any one of us steps out of line and takes our independence, we're treated as criminal.

Political parties seem to think that in order to find favour with the working class they must find favour with the trade unions. They are quite mistaken: the working class is single mothers, is lesbian women, is women who are divorced, prostitute women, pensioners, full-time housewives, women who have two jobs, Black women and immigrant women--all



fighting the drisis despite a wage freeze and the budgets of successive chancellors. Far from our concern being "conventional morality" (as Mr. Ashby, Chairman of Northampton North suggested), our main concern is money. Our fight has always been to break away from a woman's place, from a woman's work and a woman's dependence. Every government has always profited when we stayed in "our place" and worked for little or nothing there.

Women in particular are fed up to the teeth with all political parties since none has ever spoken to our needs and all have conspired to keep us poor. No political party has defended the right of all women to money for all the unpaid housework we're expected to do or the single mother's right to adequate social security or the married woman's right to independent money of her own or our right to jobs with decent wages. We don't know where Ms. Colquhoun stands on these questions, but we do know that even if she wanted to help women her hands would be tied. We are supposed to believe that women in the Houses of Parliament will give us power, but it is clear that Ms. Colquhoun does not have any political power unless she dissociates herself from the rest of us.

All the political parties have had to reckon with the widespread rebellion of women against what's expected of us as mothers, as wives, lovers, daughters, etc. Even the Houses of Parliament have not been immune, e.g. Bernadette Devlin as the first single mother in the House as far as we know and the MP who brought her child to "work." And now a publicly lesbian woman. The fact that lesbiansism has surfaced in the Palace of Westminster is some indication of how very widespread it is, and that any politician who chooses to ignore us as a force will do so at their own political peril.

We demand that the Conservative Party take a position on this issue. Millions of women, lesbian and non-lesbian, all over the country, are waiting to see whether the Conservative Party supports this attack on women's right to keep our paid jobs and to have an independent personal life or whether it will defend that right. In doing so the Conservative Party will be taking a position against women or for us-- and we will deal accordingly. Your party once opposed suffrage. We hope times have changed.

Power to all women and therefore to the rest of the working class,

*Anne Neale*

Anne Neale, Wages Due Lesbians

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MAUREEN COLQUHOUN ACTION COMMITTEE - STATEMENT

It is clear that Maureen Colquhoun was sacked by Northampton North Labour Party Management Committee because she is an unashamed lesbian and a feminist. The local management committee have attempted to cloak their prejudice with a variety of feeble allegations.

FICTION: Maureen Colquhoun is a racist (accusation by the local management committee, blown up by the press.

FACT: In fact, the management committee withdrew the accusation of racism when it became clear that they had misunderstood what she meant.  
"Powell has the most appalling racist solutions."  
"Blacks are not a problem, poverty's the problem."  
"What I was trying to point out is the irrelevance of Powell.....  
....all that effort against a tin god, instead of dealing with the problem of money."

She has exposed the charade of the Labour government's ineffective policies to combat racism

"I was exasperated at politicians pretending that no race problem exists, setting up Powell as the bogymen. The real bogymen are in the Labour Party, who use soft words and put no money into solving the problem of poor blacks and poor whites in the inner cities."

It is worth noting that when she was a councillor (Shoreham, Sussex Urban District Council 1964-7 and West Sussex County Council 1970-1974) she was thrown off all her committees in 1972 for suggesting that 10% of council houses should be given to inner city blacks.

FICTION: She has neglected her constituency during the last six months.

FACT: Her constituency surgery is held every Friday, except that once a month it is replaced by a talk-in for all constituency Labour Party members. The committee considered this neglect of the constituency. Her attendance has in fact been over 85% (higher than for most MP's) The 15% non-attendance is accounted for by speaking engagements, both in the constituency and elsewhere, attendance at Parliamentary debates and twice when she had flu. In addition she has spent 25 out of the 28 weekends working in the constituency.

She supports the idea of MP's accountability to their constituency and over the leadership issue she changed her vote after consultation

"I was one of the few MP's to consult them (the local management committee)....I would have voted for Tony Benn, but they wanted me to vote for Michael Foot, and Callaghan as second choice."

FICTION: Maureen Colquhoun has spent her time on trivial issues, such as women's rights.

FACT: She has campaigned vigorously for women's financial, legal and emotional independence. She supported abortion on demand from the beginning. She brought forward a Private Member's Bill proposing that an equal number of woman be given government posts, and protested about the serious discrimination against women in the job creation programmes.

She has consistently spoken on women's issues both inside and outside the House, exposing the sham of the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act, and acting on many issues eg. Action for Lesbian Parents, widows' pensions, separate taxation and mortgage rights for women, VAT off menstruation products, and many others.

We accept that she has spent a lot of time on women's issues. We do not consider them trivial.

The sacking of Maureen Colquhoun is just one example of the current backlash against oppressed and dissenting groups in this country. Many women have faced - and continue to face - the kind of discrimination which Maureen Colquhoun has experienced, but their cases do not receive the publicity given to a prominent figure. Any woman without a man faces abuse and discrimination in this society in her dealings with the welfare state, the courts, doctors psychiatrists etc.

The single woman is seen as weak and disadvantaged, like the spinster, the 'unsupported' mother, the lesbian, the prostitute, the widow or the girl. The existence of a single woman who sees herself as strong and independent shows the possibility of women living

living without men and not needing to rely on them. All women who are open about their sexuality and who seek to define their own identity challenge the normal expectations about women. The strength of women is a force for social change, which the Labour Party, like other political parties, attempts to disarm by treating our needs as marginal, by fobbing us off with the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act, and attempting to silence those of us in a position to speak.

Any well-known lesbian, such as Maureen Colquhoun, is a powerful source of support to other lesbians and a public example of an independent lifestyle for all women. The private lives of women in a position to influence others, e.g. teachers, supervisors, nurses and midwives, and of course mothers, have always been subject to particular scrutiny. Norman Ashby, chairperson of the Northampton North Labour Party Management Committee, states that Maureen Colquhoun was originally adopted as candidate because of her "good family image", supposedly necessary to fit in with the "conventional morality of a marginal working class constituency." The fact that she is now a lesbian appears to make her unacceptable in spite of her work record.

Society tries to absorb, commercialise and defuse our militancy, so Women's 'Lib' and Gay 'Lib' become household words in such a way that their significance is watered down and made ridiculous. One way that such movements are neutralised is by treating their members as isolated cases, freaks, 'sick' people or extremists, whose 'personal' lives should be kept neatly away and separated from everything else they do. This is the apparently permissive, liberal morality of "what you do in the privacy of your own home is nobody's business". As long as women who have lives which do not fit in with "conventional morality" keep those lives private, or are not in a position to influence anybody else, then society can afford to tolerate them because it can control them. This means that such women are prevented from leading open, active lives. All women are controlled, by the use of the words "lesbian" and "whore" as terms of abuse against those who do not conform, and by the treatment received by those who are openly lesbian. The courts frequent denial of child custody to lesbians and other women whose lifestyles are thought to be incompatible with motherhood, is one obvious example. It is not therefore necessary to have a law against lesbianism, because the social pressures on women to be heterosexual and married, through the family, education, the media and advertising, are so pervasive.

Maureen Colquhoun has been outspoken about her feminist ideas and has not tried to conceal her relationship with a woman. She has clearly become an embarrassment to the Labour Party because she challenges them to do something about issues to which they have paid little more than lip-service, including poverty, racism, and discrimination against gays and women. For the majority of women, not in any position of power and often not able to speak out about their situation, the system finds other means of containment, at times quite literally, for example through committal to mental institutions, should they reject 'normal' feminine behaviour.

The fact that someone like Maureen Colquhoun can be dismissed from office shows that the demands of women and gays cannot be met within this system. Our demands threaten the status quo, and the only way that the state can really respond to our growing strength is through repression. It has been made quite clear to us that the state is prepared to use force, as police brutality against blacks and gays and recently against pickets and marches at Grunwicks, Lewisham and Ladywood has shown. The homosexual newspaper Gay News has recently been under attack. Both lesbians and gay men have been harassed and violently assaulted on the streets. This year again witnessed an anti-abortion bill which aimed to further limit women's right to control their bodies. Cuts in public spending have led to the closure of hospitals and the deterioration of services.

It is important for us to remember that the gains of 'progressive' legislation and attitudes can easily be reversed when their provision is no longer convenient. The dismissal of a Labour M.P. who has proved too much of a threat to the 'respectable' image of a party calling itself socialist is a reminder of this. Far from being intimidated, we support Maureen Colquhoun and will continue to fight for our rights.

1 National Executive Committee  
Labour Party  
Transport House  
Smith Square  
London S.W.1

English Collective of Prostitutes  
c/o James. 20 Staverton Rd.  
London N.W.2 tel. 459 1150

Dear Sirs and sisters,

We are writing to you in regard to the decision taken by Northampton North Labour Party that Maureen Colquhoun M.P. should retire at the next election. Whatever the excuse, it is well known that she may lose her job because she is a lesbian woman who refuses to keep quiet about it.

As prostitute women, who are driven underground everywhere, we have plenty of experience of the penalties women face when we tell the truth about ourselves. We therefore want to make the following clear to your Party.

Many women have lost their jobs because they are lesbians; and for millions of women in this country, our daily "choice" is between keeping who we are hidden among ourselves and few friends, or coming out from hiding and face the attack of government and employers.

If we are lesbian mothers, we are forced to hide, because the courts can take our children away. We are forced to stay in marriages we hate, marriages where we are battered or raped by our husbands, or where our husbands beat our children, because we can't afford to leave and take our kids with us. If we are living on Social Security, we are forced to hide our relationships with men because they may help us financially, or hide that we have a job on the side, sometimes as part-time prostitutes, because they can cut off our cheque.

If we are Black or immigrant women, there are places we can't go to, things we can't do, benefits we can't claim, because the police harass us, because they can demand our passports at any time, and the authorities can find any excuse for sending us "back where we come from".

If we are prisoners' wives or relatives, if one of our family is in psychiatric hospital, if we have a disability, if we are depressed, if we have no money, we are forced to hide these facts because they may reflect on our chances for friends, jobs or State benefits. All of these can be turned against us in custody cases, in divorces, in any court case.

As prostitutes, the law is against us; our children, our job, our home and belongings can be taken away also at any time. They can put us into prison, into "care" if we are under 18, or deport us if we're immigrants. Our girlfriend, boyfriend, husband, children, relatives and anyone who associates with us can be charged for pouncing and sent to prison.

Nobody in society is protected by the laws against prostitution. The government is making huge profits on our work through fines and taxes. But already Baroness Vickers in the House of Lords has called for the abolition of these laws. Our only crime as prostitute women is that we ask for money for what all women are supposed to do for free.

Many lesbians are prostitutes because this is the only way they can afford to be independent of men. Like the label "lesbian", the label "prostitute" is also used against other women when they try to get more than women are supposed to have and put our own needs first.

Any woman who is able to be public about the fight she is making is a strength for all women and makes it easier for other women to come out of hiding. In attacking Maureen Colquhoun, all women are being attacked and warned to stay underground, not to step out of line, out of "a woman's place", a place of poverty and dependence. The fact that Ms Colquhoun, a lesbian mother,

could step out of line in Parliament, should give the Labour Party an indication of how widespread lesbianism and women's rebellion is. If only in consideration of numbers, the Labour Party should reconsider this unpopular decision to dismiss Maurcon Colquhoun.

We demand that the Labour Party reinstate her.

Power to women and therefore to the working class.

E. C. P.

*English Collective of Prostitutes*

AND

*Prostitution Laws Are Nonsense*

## TO THE LABOUR PARTY NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

We are writing in support of the Maureen Colquhoun Action Committee, to protest at the action of Northampton North Labour Party in sacking Maureen Colquhoun as their candidate at the next general election. We demand that you, the National Executive of the Labour Party, rescind this decision, by any of the means available.

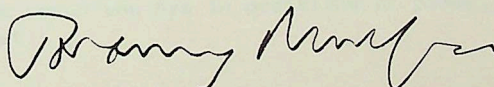
As men, we agree with Wages Due Lesbians, in their letter to you, that a vote against the reinstatement of Maureen Colquhoun is a vote against *all* women, not only against the millions of lesbian women in this country. We would add that it is a vote against all men, too. Indeed, it is a vote against the whole working class.

Maureen Colquhoun's action in coming out publicly as a lesbian is a threat in the first place, not to 'conventional morality', but to the bondage of financial dependence on men which keeps women in their place. This dependence on us means that we are kept in *our* place, as 'head of the household' whose function it is to keep women and children to their allotted tasks, and which in turn is a discipline on *us* in the factory or the office or wherever our waged work is.

From the point of view of government and industry, gay men are 'bad enough', in stepping out of line and refusing their allotted task. But lesbian women who refuse all the work that is tied to dependence on men represent the biggest threat of all, because the whole of this society is *based* on women's unrecognised and unpaid work in the home.

In punishing Maureen Colquhoun for coming out as a lesbian, Northampton North Labour Party is giving a lead to all those forces whose interest is in maintaining the status quo; whose interest it is to keep all the different sectors of the working class in our places—miners in mines until they are 65 (or maybe 62½); children out of the way in schools for at least eleven years, officially for their own benefit but learning precious little; countless lesbian women looking after husbands because they have no option because they have no pay . . . All of us in our places—and *divided against each other*.

The action of Northampton North Labour Party does not surprise us. Using a small electoral majority as an excuse (under the guise of 'pragmatism') for an attack on the working class is all too familiar. But Northampton North Labour Party, and the Labour Party generally, should know that, in response to actions like the sacking of Maureen Colquhoun, the working class is increasingly going to be coming out against *them*. In particular, all the sectors of the working class—notably women—whose needs have traditionally been put last. Since their coming out is in the interest of us all, you—the National Executive of the Labour Party—should consider urgently whether *your* interest is with them, or against them.



Jeremy Mulford  
for PAY DAY  
London and Bristol  
79 Richmond Road  
Bristol BS6 5EP  
0272-422116

IN SUPPORT OF THE MAUREEN COLQUHOUN ACTION COMMITTEE

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WE DEFEND MAUREEN COLQUHOUN TO DEFEND AND BUILD OUR POWER AS WOMEN

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No one trusts political parties any more, especially women, for our interests have never been a priority for them. When Ms. Colquhoun has raised our interests in Parliament, her local party called them 'trivial'.

In fact we women have suffered from THE LONGEST WAGE FREEZE IN HISTORY - WAGES FOR OUR WORK AT HOME HAVE BEEN FROZEN AT ZERO FOR CENTURIES BY EVERY POLITICAL PARTY.

But we defend Maureen Colquhoun, Member of Parliament for the Labour Party, against her party's attempt to sack her.

WE DEFEND MAUREEN COLQUHOUN

- because we know it is us women who have given her the power to speak the truth and say openly that she is a lesbian woman.

WE DEFEND MAUREEN COLQUHOUN

- because this attack on her is an attack on us all for refusing to be poor, to be dependent on men, refusing to be thrown out of paid jobs and go home to the housework wage freeze, refusing cuts in funding for nursery schools, hospitals, school meals, education, refusing to be declared 'unfit mothers' when we are lesbian or on the game or just poor!

WE DEFEND MAUREEN COLQUHOUN

- because we know that in sacking her for her sexual choice, all women's right to sexual choices is under attack.

WE DEFEND MAUREEN COLQUHOUN

- because with her sacking the Labour Party - and every party - wants to put us all back in 'our place'. But every woman's place is wherever she wants to be. A lesbian woman's place is also in the House - of Commons!

WE DEFEND MAUREEN COLQUHOUN

- because many of us are Black or immigrant and she seems to understand that our crisis is money. That is the crisis for all women, and no political party wants women who are in positions of power, like Ms. Colquhoun, to spell it out.

WE DEFEND MAUREEN COLQUHOUN

- because in attacking her right to a decent wage and the independence that gives her, our money and our independence, which is not a luxury but a right, are also under attack.

IN DEFENDING MAUREEN COLQUHOUN, WE DEFEND OUR GAINS AND BUILD OUR STRENGTH AS WOMEN WHETHER POLITICAL PARTIES LIKE IT OR NOT!

The Wages for Housework Campaign  
London - 138 Drummond Street, London N.W. 1 - Tel: 624-6364, 221-5754  
Bristol - 79 Richmond Road, Montpelier, Bristol 6 - Tel: (0272) 422116  
Cambridge - 19 City Road, Cambridge - Tel: (0223) 57142  
BLACK WOMEN FOR WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK, ENGLAND -  
94 Richmond Road, Montpelier, Bristol 6 - Tel: (0272) 426386  
WAGES DUE LESBIANS, ENGLAND - 74 Princess Road, London N.W. 6 - TEL: 624-6364  
ENGLISH COLLECTIVE OF PROSTITUTES - c/o James, 20 Staverton Road,  
London, N.W. 2 - Tel: 459-1150

An attack on Maureen Colquhoun is an attack on all women and undermines women's fight against rape.

1) W.A.R. has seen the Labour Government permit the courts, judges, police force, army and navy commit and encourage rape. They have allowed courts to give licence to rape to members of the armed forces, which are supposed to protect the women of this country. They have allowed the police to interrogate and intimidate women. When the courts have dismissed men and given ridiculously low sentences, Marilyn Rees has remained silent despite our specific requests for a public statement from the Home Office.

Maureen Colquhoun is one member of the Labour Party who has taken a stand against this 'go ahead' to rapists and has supported women in our fight against rape and the authorities which condone and encourage it; she has fought many battles for women to have independence and money of our own. Maureen Colquhoun has thereby helped us to win a stronger position against rape, since dependence and poverty are fundamental to our vulnerability to rape, in the street, in our homes, by strangers or husbands. Ms. Colquhoun's opponents, however, consider these trivial issues. We cannot allow the Labour Party to remove a member who, unlike the Labour Party and all other parties, has sided with women and against rape.

2) As Women Against Rape we believe that every woman has the right to decide about her own sexual life. The right to say 'no' to any man means also the right to say 'no' to men generally and to live a lesbian life if we choose to. Rapists often find such independence from men 'provocative'. They say we are 'asking for it'. We are shocked to see the Labour Party responding in a similar way, in taking measures against Maureen Colquhoun.

In moving against Maureen Colquhoun the Labour Party is moving against a member who has fought for her rights and the rights of other women. But Maureen Colquhoun is only the tip of the iceberg of women who are speaking out.

We women are the working class whom the Labour Party claims to represent and whom it needs to stay in power. When they attack a lesbian woman they are attacking all women and, therefore, the working class. Attacking the rights of women to live independently from men, to have our own lives and to speak up for our own interests without fear of violence or fear of losing our jobs - which leaves us more vulnerable to violence.

Woman Against Rape supports Maureen Colquhoun and demands that she be reinstated and we ask that the Labour Party make a clear statement on lesbian rights. Women have told the judges who have sided with rapists they will have no peace until women have peace. The same applies to the Labour Party.

Women Against Rape, London  
Women's Centre,  
138, Drummond Street, N.W.1.  
Tel: 01-624-6364



PRESS RELEASE

RE: LESBIAN LOBBY OF PARLIAMENT, WEDS. 7th DECEMBER.

On Wednesday, 7th December, there will be a women only lobby of M.P.'s demanding them to take a position on the recent sacking of Maureen Colquhoun, Labour M.P. for Northampton North, by the Management Committee of the local Labour Party on account of her lesbianism. Now is the time for M.P.'s to demonstrate their support for the right of every woman to choose her own sexuality and take a stand against the harassment and discrimination which lesbians face. They will also be asked to bring these issues up in the House.

Her sacking is but one example of the threat millions of women face daily, (it is estimated that at least 10% of women are lesbian), having to choose between a closeted life and losing jobs, children, homes, friends, freedom. Lesbian mothers usually lose custody of their children, and Louise Boychuk, an office worker, and Veronica Pickles, midwife, are two other recent and well-known examples of women who had to put up a fight when they 'came out'. Because of these repercussions for lesbian women, each woman at the lobby will be representing thousands of her sisters.

As all women are so legally and financially vulnerable even an apparently powerful woman like Maureen Colquhoun is not immune. Her political power is on loan, on condition that she conform to 'conventional morality'. This attack on a woman who has taken this stand for a sexual life independent of men is an endorsement of the harassment and violence that lesbians are now facing. Rapes and 'queer-bashing' of lesbians are increasing, and the number of women in mental hospitals because of their lesbianism is enormous but hidden. The attack on Ms Colquhoun is an attack on the ways that all women are struggling to defend and win more emotional, legal and financial independence as married women, single women, mothers, prostitutes, immigrant women, schoolgirls, pensioners.

The National Executive Committee of the Labour Party has still to meet (on the 15th December) to decide whether her dismissal is justified on technical grounds. The Labour Party has to decide if it is going to ACT on its commitment to women's rights, which must include lesbian rights. The Maureen Colquhoun Action Committee is calling for Maureen Colquhoun's reinstatement and for the Labour Party and all other parties to make a public statement condemning all forms of discrimination against lesbians.

LOBEY: Weds., 7th Dec. 3-7.30p.m.  
St Stephen's Gate,  
Westminster, S.W.1.

MAUREEN COLQUHOUN ACTION COMMITTEE,  
5 Grove Dwellings,  
Adelina Grove, London, E.1.  
Tel: 328 7856/359 8880:

P R E S S     R E L E A S E

The M.P. who told the truth - and faces ~~the~~ sacking

On Tuesday 13th of December at 3:30 pm a sub-committee of the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party will be interviewing Maureen Colquhoun, Labour M.P. for Northampton North who was recently sacked by her local management Committee for being lesbian and saying so. Outside Transport House during the interview there will be a picket, to let the National Executive Committee know that they are not speaking with only one woman when they interview Maureen Colquhoun. The National Executive Committee will later decide whether her sacking was justified.

Despite many fine words and resolutions, the Labour Party has not shown that it is prepared to act and promote women's interests and meet our needs. The opposite is true. They have initiated the cuts in public expenditure and the wage freeze which have laid the brunt of the crisis on women: fewer paid jobs and more unpaid housework - making less housekeeping money go further.

At this very moment the Labour Party is silent while the Trade Union of the women at Grunwick, which is affiliated to the Labour Party, is turning its back on them. Maureen Colquhoun's sacking is just one example of this general attack on women, which aims to undermine the independence we have won and to discipline us back into our "natural" place as the country's free servants. The Labour Party seems to stand for LABOUR and not for those who do it, especially not for those who do it unpaid at home and low paid outside - women.

The Labour Party seems to be unaware that we women have a much higher evaluation of our work and what we are entitled to than it has. This includes the right to choose our own sexual lives.

This attack on Maureen Colquhoun is an attack on all the ways that all women are struggling to defend and win more emotional, legal and financial independence. It is no wonder there has been such an outcry from women, following this attack.

The Maureen Colquhoun Action Committee is calling for her reinstatement and for the Labour Party and all other political parties to make public statements condemning all forms of discrimination against lesbian women, which flies in the face of the spirit of both the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts.

PICKET OUTSIDE TRANSPORT HOUSE, SMITH SQUARE, S.W.1 STARTING AT 3:30pm  
TUESDAY, DECEMBER, THE 13th.

for further informations: Maureen Colquhoun Action Committee  
tel. 328 7856 - 624 6364

# SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

January 8, 1978

Price 14p

## Woman M.P. is reinstated by Labour party

By MARTIN ADENEY

MRS. MAUREEN COLQUHOUN, the controversial Labour M.P. for Northampton North, has succeeded in her appeal against the decision of her constituency party to demand her resignation and to choose another candidate at the next election.

The special Labour party national executive enquiry whose report will go to the party's organisation committee tomorrow has concluded that her appeal should be upheld on procedural grounds.

It says that Mrs. Colquhoun, who claimed after the vote in September that her lesbianism had been an issue in the decision, should be backed because the original resolution against her was moved at the Park Ward last March without any prior notice being given to members.

In the interests of natural justice, it says, the resolution should have been referred to in the notice of the meeting. Only 10 people attended the meeting, of whom seven voted against her. Mrs. Colquhoun claimed subsequently that 15 people from the ward had signed a petition backing her.

### Conduct criticised

Mrs. Colquhoun was asked to resign after a resolution criticising her public behaviour and statements was carried by 25 votes to 18 with one abstention on September 28.

She was asked to explain four accusations; her support for a statement by Mr. Enoch Powell that politicians were not paying enough attention to coloured immigration figures; her campaign against railway tickets stamped "male"; an incident in which she allegedly struck a car park attendant; and publicity



Mrs. Maureen Colquhoun

that she had left her husband and moved in with a woman friend.

After the meeting, Mrs. Colquhoun, who is 49 and the mother of three adult children, said: "The committee should have nothing to do with my private life.

"They may have won the battle but I shall win the war. If the national executive committee do not oppose this kind of trite charge, there will be no M.P. who is safe."

Mrs. Colquhoun, a former Treasurer of the Tribune group of M.P.s, is a left-winger. There may be criticism in the party that the committee of inquiry has found in her favour on a technicality when previous appeals by right-wing M.P.s Reg Prentice, Eddie Griffiths and Dick Taverner were rejected.

But the five-man committee represents a tilted-to-the-right spectrum. It included Mr. Brian Stanley, general secretary of the Post Office Engineering Union, Mr. Eric Heffer M.P., Mr. Tom Bradley M.P., Mr.

Harold Hickling, chairman of the General and Municipal Workers Union, and Mr. Reg Underhill, the party national agent.

The situation now is that the report will have to be approved by the organisation committee and the National Executive committee later this month, but it appears to be a formality.

The constituency party will then have to consider whether to restart the lengthy process of impeaching Mrs. Colquhoun and reselection with the prospect of an early election still looming. The Labour majority in the marginal seat was only 1,538 in 1974.

The inquiry's findings relate to the meeting of one of the wards which make up the constituency. The meeting was of the Park ward, which submitted the resolution. This was then discussed and passed by the management committee of the whole constituency in September.

### Minority's power

OUR POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT writes: Mrs. Colquhoun's victory—for the time being at any rate—will almost certainly be upheld by the party's national executive, which is left-wing dominated.

But her case highlights the problem affecting many Labour M.P.s, the fact that a handful of people (10 at one meeting and 42 at the decisive one) can determine an M.P.'s future.

By upholding her appeal on procedural grounds the Transport House inquiry has opened the way to wider changes in the methods used to adopt candidates or drop an M.P.

General Election: Mrs. M. M. Colquhoun, 16,314; R. Tracey (C.), 14,776; R. B. Baker (L.), 6,160. Ms., 1,538.

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## Labour chiefs support Mrs Colquhoun

By PETER GILL  
Political Staff

THE Labour party's national executive allowed the appeal yesterday of Mrs Maureen Colquhoun, MP for Northampton north, against her constituency party's decision to replace her at the next general election.

The decision, based on the local party's failure to have followed the proper procedures in dismissing Mrs Colquhoun as its candidate, confirmed the view of the party's organisation committee which found for her earlier this month.

Mrs Colquhoun, 49, said after the local party's vote last September that her lesbianism had been an issue in her dismissal.

Among reasons cited by local Labour party workers for seeking to replace her was the publicity that surrounded Mrs Colquhoun's decision to leave her husband to live with a woman.

### 'Bitterly disappointed'

Last night Labour party officials in Northampton said they would not continue to work with Mrs Colquhoun despite the decision by the party's national executive.

Mr Michael Thomas, chairman of Northampton's Park ward, said: "We do not want her as our M.P. We are bitterly disappointed at the national executive's decision and we will start the whole procedure over again in order to have her dismissed."

Mrs Colquhoun's majority at the last election was 1,538.

## MP wins NEC appeal

By a Staff Reporter

Mrs Maureen Colquhoun, Labour MP for Northampton, North, had her appeal against dismissal by her constituency party upheld by the Labour Party's National Executive Committee yesterday.

But officials of the local party said later that they would not work with her and would restart the dismissal proceedings.

Mrs Colquhoun said she hoped that the past would be forgotten and that both sides in the party would work together.

"In extending the hand of friendship to my opponents my message is quite simple: we have worked together in the past and we can do so again. We must put all the past behind us and put the Labour Party first. We will work together again and we will win the next general election."

Mr Michael Thomas, vice-chairman of the constituency general management committee, said it would be impossible to forget the past. Many party members would not be willing to work for Mrs Colquhoun.

Mr Thomas, who is also chairman of the ward that first proposed Mrs Colquhoun's dismissal, said his members would begin the procedure again, with no technical mistakes. The NEC had censured the award for not telling all its members that the dismissal motion was to be discussed.

Mrs Colquhoun's chances of re-election were not good, he said.

Solveig Francis, a representative of the Maureen Colquhoun Action Committee, said she was delighted by the decision. "The real reason was the outcry among women that Maureen's dismissal produced", she said.

**LETTERS**

Edited by Ben Vos and Mary Collins

# Women can make a caring couple

I AM not a lesbian, but I have met women who are and it's nonsense to say, as Jean Rook does, that a lesbian relationship is "often more neurotic, passionate, jealous and highly sexed than a standard marriage."

The main reason that there are not more passions and rows in standard

marriages is that women are kept in submission.

It would be much better for a child to be with two women who wanted it enough to go through the difficulties of artificial insemination than to be brought up in a household where the father is violent. Yet no one would ever think

of suggesting that such men should be banned from having families.

MARCIA LIGHTFOOT,  
London, S.W.1.

I MUST complain about the prejudicial remarks in Jean Rook's Column on the argument as to whether lesbians should be allowed to have children by artificial insemination.

As a lesbian myself, I think I know a little more about us than she does. The most ridiculous comment was that one half of a lesbian couple likes to regard herself as a man.

I certainly don't know any

who do, and if any woman did feel that way I would suggest that she was in need of a sex-change.

Name and address supplied,  
London, W.

THE most nauseating news which I have ever read is that lesbians want the right to have babies by artificial insemination and bring them up as a normal family.

As always it would be the children who would suffer most; the sniggers and taunts of others.

WINIFRED CURTIS (Mrs.),  
London, W.

## Milk shaker

DO YOUR readers realise that milk is now dearer than petrol. Milk is £1 per gallon!

H. W. GOLD,  
Dorchester-on-Thames,  
Oxon.

I AM NOT a lesbian and am happily married, but I don't see why lesbians should not have children by AID (artificial insemination by donor).

There are thousands of women who bring up children without the help of a husband. Indeed, many had to when widowed during the war.  
—Mrs. L. M., North London.

Mirror JAN 16 1978

# I'M SO HAPPY WITH MY TEST-TUBE BABY, SAYS LESBIAN MUM

THE WOMAN who claims to be the first lesbian to have a child by artificial insemination with the help of a British doctor said last night: "We are living proof that this idea can work."

Janice Hetherington, now 31, was inseminated in 1971 after she and her lover Judy had approached many doctors looking for one who would help.

Her son is now five. "He's a perfectly normal child, and we're very happy together," she said at her flat in North London.

"I knew a lot of doctors, but hunted around to find a sympathetic one. They all thought Judy and I were cranks."

Eventually one doctor agreed to help—if Janice underwent psychiatric tests.

Then she ran into more trouble.

"The psychiatrists thought I was mad too," said Janice.

"They seemed to think it would be OK for me to have intercourse with a man, and become pregnant that way, but not in the way I wanted."

Finally she got the go-ahead.

## BATTLE

Judy had been married, and had custody of a child by her husband.

But Judy died suddenly after Janice's test-tube baby was born.

And Janice then fought and won a long legal battle for custody of Judy's child, a girl.

The donor for Janice's artificial insemination was the doctor she had seen and she became pregnant on the first occasion.

It was revealed last week that a London doctor was helping lesbian couples to have children by AID (artificial insemination by donor), but Janice says she was treated by another doctor.

The women were referred to the London doctor by Sappho, a lesbian organisa-

## News of the World Reporter

tion. One of its organisers is Jackie Forster, formerly TV personality Jacqueline Mackenzie.

Jackie lived for eight years with Babs Todd, the woman who left her to live with Northampton MP Maureen Colquhoun.

"I met Babs in 1965, and we started having an affair a short time afterwards", said Jackie. "We set up home together in 1967, but two years ago she left me to live with Maureen."

Jackie first became involved with lesbian groups in 1964, and was a founder member of Sappho in 1971.

## TALK

"The London doctor came to talk to us, and some of the women there said they would like to have children, and he was obviously sympathetic," she said.

"One couple went through with it, and gradually others came forward. I knew of six babies, but there are obviously more than that."

"Ten in six years is not an avalanche of people, but it's a great start."

# Lesbians reply

LAST Friday, following two articles in the Evening News about a London doctor who helped lesbian couples to have babies through artificial insemination, 50 women invaded this newspaper's offices.

The Editor, Mr. Louis Kirby, has agreed to publish their reply. See Page Eight.

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Evening News

TUESDAY, JANUARY 10, 1979

# Lesbians reply to the Evening News

*THE Evening News disclosed last week that a London doctor was helping lesbian couples to have babies by artificial insemination.*

*A group of women invaded this newspaper's offices to protest about the articles. The Editor, Mr. Louis Kirby, agreed to publish their views. This is their statement:*

LAST Friday 50 of us from various organisations, including Action for Lesbian Parents, occupied the Evening News.

What we were protesting against was a series of articles in the paper last week about the birth of children to lesbian parents through the AID (Artificial Insemination Donor) method.

The Evening News' treatment of the subject has been extremely sensational. The paper continually suggests that lesbians are freaks with no right to bear children.

Many of us are lesbian mothers and we know we can provide our children with loving backgrounds. We demand the right to choose to live without men.

Our children are wanted children, which is surely the important thing.

We think we were right to storm the offices in protest—our action was mild compared with the damage done to thousands of women and children by the articles.

It is not easy for lesbians wishing to bring up children. Many lose their children in disputed custody cases. Many are even denied access to them unless their lover leaves the house. And all lesbians are subjected to continual discrimination and prejudice.

## Effect

During our conversation with the Editor of the Evening News, Mr. Louis Kirby and Mr. Stuart Kuttner, an Assistant Editor, one woman asked if they realised what the likely effect of these articles would be.

"I don't know," Mr. Kirby replied. "I would hate to think they would lead to victimisation of lesbians."

People outside were shouting "burn them" at that very moment. We were spat at by one of the journalists. That's the kind of hatred this sort of journalism encourages.

Prejudice against homosexuals in our society is so great that many homosexuals are murdered every year just for being gay.

This kind of journalism is not justifiable. Infiltrating a perfectly legal organisation as Joanna Patyna did and posing as a "typical" lesbian, tracking the AID donor, and headlining the articles in a lesbian-bashing way—all of this is contrary to the National Union of Journalists' Code of Conduct and we intend bringing an official complaint.

The Women's Liberation Movement demands an end to discrimination against lesbians and the right of all women to define our own sexuality.

We will live how we want, with whom we want, have children if and when we want. This is a right we demand for all women. We don't need the Evening News to tell us what to be.

# One cheated mass

**MOTHERHOOD, LESBIANISM AND CHILD CUSTODY**

— Francie Wyland (Wages Due Lesbians Toronto and Falling Wall Press, 40p; available from Wages Due Lesbians London, 20 Staverton Road, London NW2)

This pamphlet was written by a founder member of Wages Due Lesbians. As we would therefore expect she sees the lesbian struggle for child custody as just one battle against the many controls which capitalist societies seek to impose upon women's sexuality, reproduction, labour and leisure.

She contends that lesbians' social and economic problems are not different from other women's needs, but rather an extreme expression of them. Our society places more and more emphasis upon the material benefits which parents can confer upon children and new forms of divorce procedures which supposedly aim at 'equalizing' men and women are in fact ensuring that custody goes to the richer parent—usually the father. When parental 'fitness' is judged solely by financial standards almost all women are potentially 'unfit' mothers. For many women economic considerations alone impose a false choice between the free expression of their lesbianism or motherhood.

Propaganda, both from straight society and extremist lesbians, promulgates the idea that it is inherently 'unlesbian' to want children. Some lesbian separatists claim that no 'real' lesbian would want to be involved in rearing a male child. ("With that idea of victory, who needs defeat?" asks Ms Wyland). Legal proceedings themselves are frequently beyond the financial reach of many women. If they get to the courts, they face paradoxical attempts both to criminalize and trivialize lesbianism. "Orgasm means more to them than children or anything else" inveighed Judge Albert Caris (ret'd) when he had first forced a mother to choose between her woman lover or her children and then, when she chose the lover, berated her for being 'unnatural' twice over.

But all women who rebel against the state are liable to 'control' of the most intimate rights of all. Women may be condemned to a childlessness they do not desire (as with compulsory sterilizations performed in Harlem); forced to conceive and bear children they do not want (by the state's withholding contraception and safe

abortion). They may be unable to get work whereby they can raise their children outside the nuclear family if they so desire. Political activity can be curtailed by threatening to deny custody to 'troublesome' women who seem to be intent on raising 'troublesome' children. For lesbians it may be tantamount to a court order to stay in the closet. (One of the reasons why an English mother lost custody, incidentally, was because copies of *Spare Rib* were openly displayed in her home). A mere dozen North American lesbians have ever been granted custody unconditionally.

Ms Wyland points out that there is no contradiction in women's claiming both the right to safe contraception and the right to have a child every year: no paradox in demanding both the right to a job with a decent wage outside the home and the right to stay at home to raise one's children and be paid for it. What matters is that the women concerned should have made a free choice instead of being coerced or tricked into the course most convenient to the state.

Women have indeed begun to fight back. In 1974 the Italian government tottered when a women's referendum demanded legal contraception. In Zambia women are organizing themselves against government pressure to be sterilized. In the USA a massive movement started in the 1960s, led mainly by black women, to fight for adequate financial recognition of the work women do within the home—work without which a capitalist society cannot continue. In France prostitutes are mobilizing themselves against prison sentences which first separate them from their children and then take the children into care because of the mothers' 'neglect'.

Ms Wyland's pamphlet welds black women and white women, gay and straight, mothers and childless, whores and virtuous wives into one cheated mass. She believes that women themselves are coming to realize that they have for far too long been taught to distrust and condemn each other lest they unite against their common enemies. Winning the battle for lesbian custody must automatically entail gains for all women, gay or straight.

You may not accept Ms Wylie's economic analysis *in toto* or at all, but many of her arguments have the unmistakable ring of truth.

Alison Hennegan

From GAY NEWS No. 127 (Sept. 22 - Oct. 5, 1977), page 26

Review of MOTHERHOOD, LESBIANISM & CHILD CUSTODY by Francie Wyland

When ordering from Wages Due Lesbians (address at the head of the review) or from Falling Wall Press Ltd. (79 Richmond Road, Bristol BS6 5EP), please add 10p for postage

TRADE ORDERS to Publications  
Distribution Co-operative, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1R 0AT



# Does Adelphi Times

## 'Wages for Housework a Lesbian Issue, Too'

*The following article was adapted from a speech last Sunday at a Gay Pride rally in Hollywood. The author of "Motherhood, Lesbianism and Child Custody," Private Wynard, of Toronto, is a member of Wages Due Lesbians in Toronto, an affiliate of the International Wages for Housework Campaign.*

### BY FRANCIE WYLAND

The number of lesbians demonstrating in the streets today has been small. Yet there are thousands of us in Los Angeles. So why are so few marching here in Hollywood? The sad truth is that lesbians are invisible—much more so than gay men. It is women's dependency on men—overwork and deprivation of wages—that prevents us lesbians from "coming out" and denies us free choice in every part of our lives.

Where are all these invisible lesbians? Everywhere. We come from all walks of life, all races and ethnic groups. Often we work as many as 18 hours a day, are isolated from other women and have no money of our own. This is true of millions of straight women, too, of course, but it places a special burden on lesbians.

The lesbian woman is a housewife. She cooks, cleans, raises the children. After a day of chores, she sleeps with her husband—another chore if she refuses him too often, he might beat her or leave. Then she'd be stuck with two children, a welfare check and no prospect of rest. This woman loves her neighbor, or her sister-in-law, whom she manages to see some afternoons.

The lesbian woman is a welfare mother. Her lover has to leave her children with their father, since he has the financial means to provide for them, and she doesn't. The two women move to another city, but they have to hide their relationship from the welfare worker, their neighbors, their parents, even the children. If word got out, the welfare department might take the children away.

Even though the pair has made a break from their former lives, they have little time to spend together, simply because making ends meet is a full-time job.

The lesbian woman is a nurse, a bank teller, a teacher, a

typist. Other lesbians at work know who she is, but if the rest of the women found out, they would look at her as a freak; she might even lose her job.

Like most working women, a lesbian earns far less than a man's wage, and she goes home after work to her "second shift": shopping, cooking, cleaning. Perhaps she and her lover get out once a week to a gay bar. It's the only place they can go together and be themselves.

This woman might like to have children some day, but how could she support them and still have a life of her own? And she'll never let herself depend on a man again.

The lesbian woman is a prostitute. The work pays better than waitressing, and money means independence. But if she's ever arrested, her friends and family will find out, and her children might be taken away. After all, society has it rules. They say you're only supposed to sleep with one person—a man—as part of a package deal that includes doing his laundry. In exchange, you get a roof over your head.

Housewife, a euphemism for servitude and self-sacrifice, is supposed to come "naturally" to women. But in reality, the poverty of women and our dependence on men force that work on us.

The current inflation, and accompanying cutbacks in wages, welfare and social services, is hitting women hardest. We feel the effects most because we have the least to begin with. And now, in the face of economic crisis, we're supposed to keep ourselves and everyone around us in one piece with less money than ever. How do we accomplish this? By taking on even more work.

Lesbian women are forced to sleep in marriages we hate, because we can't afford to leave and take our children with us. We're being pushed back into the closet on the job, because work is hard to find. We're under-represented in the gay movement, while the men speak out, because we've got to stay home to do housework. We have less and less time for our lovers and our friends. We put off for a year, then another, the possibility of arranging to have a child.

But we're pushing hard for change. The lesbian movement is emerging, millions strong. Just how great our im-

pect has been can be seen in backlash crusades like the one Anita Bryant is waging against us. Our response to her, and to others who would deprive us and our children of a right to sexual choice, is the slogan that many of you have seen on our placards today, "Lesbian women have rights and so do our children!"

Straight women in the International Wages for Housework Campaign understand that the struggle for lesbian rights symbolizes a greater, common cause. What we all want is what they want: the power to determine our own sexuality, our own lives and the ability to live independent from men—without paying the price of poverty, isolation, overwork and forced childlessness.

Last week, at the International Women's Year Conference at the University of Southern California, straight and lesbian women passed the following resolution, to be taken to the National Women's Conference in Houston this fall:

*Whereas our poverty and social pressure force too many lesbian women to choose between coming out as lesbians, and having and keeping our children, be it resolved that we demand wages for housework from the government for all women so that we have the power to freely choose whether or not to be lesbian, and whether or not to have children, and be it resolved that we support our children's fight for their own right to sexual choice.*

Wages for housework is an issue in which all women have a stake. But every woman's issue is a lesbian issue, too, for every hardship on women's issue—such as unpaid housework—is doubly oppressive for lesbians. No one—gay or straight—will be free until we women see in our hands the money we have earned by our labor.

Until lesbians are strong, all women are weak. Therefore we are fighting to destroy the conventional definition of what is "natural" and "feminine" for women.

"Human rights" for all people necessarily means true equality of opportunity for lesbian women—and that begins with sufficient economic power to step out of the closet.

Sunday July 3, '77

# MOTHERHOOD LESBIANISM and CHILD CUSTODY



**FRANCIE WYLAND**

"... We are demanding not only the power to choose to be lesbian without losing our children, or the possibility of having them. We are also demanding the power to be with those children *in a way that is not work*. And we will apologize to no one for rearing children who are -- like their mothers -- making a ferocious fight for the power to determine their own lives."  
*Francie Wyland*

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# First meeting set for lesbian organisation

**NOTTINGHAM:** The new national lesbian organization, announced by women at CHE's Annual Conference this summer in Nottingham, is to return to that city for its first meeting.

The one-day conference, to be held on November 5, will try to sort out just what the aims of NOGW (the National Organization for Gay Women) should be, and how it should cooperate with existing gay groups both for gay women and gay men.

Much of the work of arranging the meeting has been undertaken by Jackie Forster, Veronica Pickles, Nikki Henriques, and the seventeen other women who backed the project at CHE's conference. But the precise nature of NOGW will be determined by the women who attend the November meeting.

## Talking points

Meanwhile, the advance notices of the day have gone out with a list of four suggested aims that NOGW should adopt, to open discussion and to set women thinking about what sort of organization they want.

But Nikki Henriques made it very clear to GN that "these are no more than suggestions. They may all be thrown out by the meeting. The idea was simply to give people something to think about."

First it is suggested that NOGW should change and educate people's ignorant attitudes to lesbians.

Second, NOGW should act as a national contact point for all gay women regardless of their politics—or lack of them.

Proposal number three is that NOGW should support and affiliate to all gay organizations, including the Campaign for Homosexual Equality.

And finally, the organization should pledge itself to offering "support and warmth to the less fortunate amongst us still



Jackie Forster (above) and Veronica Pickles (below), who have both helped to organize the NOGW



struggling with identification and stereotyping difficulties."

Whilst the first and last suggestions are unlikely to run into serious opposition arising out of matters of principle, the broad ecumenical sweep of points two and three is sure to generate lengthier debate.

## No elites

But those women who have been in on the organizing from the first are clearly determined that NOGW should not develop into "an organization run by a political elite," and they hope that the meeting will not get bogged down in ideological questions. "We want as many women as possible, bringing with them as many ideas as possible. It's a meeting for everyone—so long as they're lesbians of course."

## Details

The meeting starts at 10am on November 5, running throughout the day with a disco in the evening, at the Queens Walk Community Centre, Queens Drive, Nottingham—just four minutes' walk from both the railway station and the bus station. A creche will be available.

There will be an admission fee of £1: "We have to charge to cover the hire of the hall—but lunch will be included in that £1. And please bring your woollies. It may not be too warm."

Advance bookings for the conference can be made through Nottingham Gay Switchboard on Mondays or Thursdays between 7 and 10pm by phoning Hilary or Pat. The number is Nottingham 46881.

Photograph: Christopher Davies (Report, London)

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Summary of comments on proposed aims of NOGW

The following proposals are based on the fact that there is a rapidly growing movement of lesbian women which is becoming more public at the time. There are lesbian women in many different situations, who should all be able to relate to this organisation.

We feel it's important for the organisation to have a stand on:

- 1) Custody - to make clear that all women, lesbian and non-lesbian are entitled to have and to keep children if we want to, and are entitled to adequate maintenance.
- 2) Lesbian autonomy from gay men - that the organisation make clear its position on this question. Groups could affiliate with NOGW on the basis of NOGW's aims. There could be "sister" and "brother" organisations of NOGW for women's and mixed organisations respectively, since the relations between the women's and the mixed groups and NOGW will be qualitatively different. There could be a fee for affiliation - nominal for women's groups and more substantial for mixed groups.
- 3) The organisation could be a clearing house for information to be able to help individuals and other groups to fight specific instances of discrimination e.g. jobs, housing, custody. The organisation could put women in touch with other organisations in their local areas.

WAGES DUE LESBIANS

74 Princess Rd.,  
London NW6

Comments on proposed aims of NOGW

Dear sisters,

We are delighted to hear about the formation of National Organisation of Gay Women (NOGW). We feel there is a great need for the kind of lesbian "umbrella" organisation which you seem to have in mind. We wanted to make some comments on your suggested aims and to make some suggestions based on our own experiences in organising. We feel it's important that the basic principles of any organisation be clearly defined. We've found that being precise at the beginning avoids a lot of confusion and lack of direction later.

1) It's clear that there is a massive movement of lesbian women which is surfacing more and more all the time. Maureen Colquhoun is an indication of that.

Recent articles, e.g. in "19", the "Nursing Times", are yet other indications of how widespread lesbianism is. Whether or not these articles are sympathetic to us, they indicate that everyone is having to discuss lesbian women now because we are refusing to keep silent about ourselves and are becoming a more and more public force to be reckoned with.

2) An umbrella organisation in the lesbian movement (and for that matter, any lesbian organisation) should be available to and of use of all lesbian women, in whatever situation we find ourselves. That includes lesbian women who are publicly "out", those who are able to come out sometimes in some situations, and those who are forced to remain in the closet most or all the time. It will include women who're not sure if they are lesbian or not, who want to be but who haven't the power to be; i.e. the audience of the organisation will be a very wide cross-section of lesbian and of non-lesbian women.

- To address an organisation only to women who've come out is to address only a small percentage of lesbian women and to overlook the reality of most lesbian women's lives. If an organisation is to be a voice for lesbian women it must speak to all lesbian women - "out" or not.

- From this flows a question which we've discussed a lot in relation to events we've organised - whether to say they're open to lesbian women only, or to all women. We came to the conclusion that to say events are for lesbian women only precludes many women who don't know how they define themselves and women who can't come out - because going to a lesbian conference is already coming out. If the event is open to all women it opens the possibility to women of connecting with lesbian women without committing themselves.

- As long as the organisation is firmly in the hands of lesbian women it is unlikely to be taken over by straight women.

3) Although we understand the sentiments underlying point 4) of your proposed aims - the organisation should pledge itself to offering "support and warmth to the less fortunate amongst us still struggling with identification and stereo-typing difficulties", we feel that point makes a division between lesbian women who're publicly "out" and those in the closet, and that to begin an organisation assuming that division would be a weakness.

- Many lesbian women are forced to stay in the closet at least some, if not all the time, because we don't have the money and the power to come out - we've too much to lose - our jobs, our children, our friends. For most of us, our possibility of being lesbian depends on our possibility of being financially independent from men. Whether the money comes from our waged work, from Social Security, or from other sources, we must have it if we are to have lives of our own. There are very few women who are financially dependent on men who can afford to come out - though many would like to.

The current crisis is making it even harder for lesbian women to come out. With high unemployment we've been thrown out of jobs, without a man's wage to fall back on, and we're kept in the closet for fear of losing even the low-paying jobs we might have. With rising inflation it gets harder and harder to manage on our women's wages or on SS, and we may be forced to go back with, or stay with, men - so we can have children or keep those we have, or even keep a decent roof over our heads.

The decision to come out can only be made by each woman on the basis of her situation. But the power to come out is certainly provided, at least to some degree, by organisations which are publicly lesbian, and which welcome all lesbian women on whatever basis they choose to relate to those organisations.

Women in small towns and country areas may be unable to come out because they are very isolated - perhaps not knowing any other lesbian woman. An organisation like NOGW would be well-placed to publish a list of all lesbian organisations in Great Britain so that women know what's available to them.

We feel it's very important for any lesbian organisation to take into account ways in which lesbian women have already taken effective action. Probably the most obvious way has been to organise for ourselves a social life where we could meet and be with other lesbian women with a minimum of hassle. Often we have not had enough money to be able to have discos for women only - because we have less money to spend than men, we have had to have mixed events to cover our costs. Gay men have been able to afford more and so have been able to have a social life of their own longer than we have.

To have moved in the last decade from having very few, if any places to go, to having a variety to choose from (at least in London), is an important way in which our power has grown. For many of us though, to have organised only a social life has not been enough, and we have looked around for other ways to organise. What Jackie Foster has aimed to do with "Sappho" - to provide a social and political life together has been very important in offering an alternative.

- An organisation for lesbian women needs to take account of our needs for a social life and to try to find new ways of organising which provide us with a social life at the same time - without becoming an entertainment "service". What is important to us personally is important to us politically.

5) NOGW has grown out of a strong thrust for lesbian autonomy from gay men. We've found from our experience that it's very important for a lesbian organisation to be very clear and pre-

cise on this question otherwise problems arise.

- Because the presence of women in male-dominated organisations has often <sup>been</sup> overshadowed, it has not been clear just how many lesbian women there are. Nor has it been clear how many lesbian women there are who are black.

- It's very important for the organisation to be powerful enough so that it is not dependent on any male-dominated organisations.

- Having an organisation for lesbian women only doesn't guarantee lesbian autonomy. Unless the perspective of the organisation is a lesbian perspective and is firmly based in the lesbian movement the organisation is open to attack from lesbian women from male organisations whose line is a male line trying to take over. A member of the male Left is a member of the male Left whether or not she is lesbian.

- Being for lesbian autonomy doesn't mean excluding men from all organising - e.g. a number of men were present at the picket of the BBC last year which was organised by women. The organising was firmly in the hands of lesbian women and gay men came along and were able to see that their power as gay men is dependent on our power as lesbian women.

In refusing the discipline of heterosexuality women are breaking the chain of command that ties us to men and men to their jobs. Our revolt frees men from their position as "foremen of the home". Sexual liberation begins with women's refusal of housework, with our increasing reclamation of our time, our energy, our bodies, our sexuality. Then, the struggle of gay men can be seen more ~~clearly~~ <sup>clearly</sup>, not as a wish for "equality" with straight men; but as a revolt against their position: as women's disciplinarians. When we organise autonomously as lesbian women against our exploitation, gay men stand only to gain.

Perhaps the best way for the relations between NOGW and other organisations to be clear would be for groups to affiliate with NOGW on the basis of NOGW's aims (which would include lesbian autonomy). A distinction would have to be made between women and mixed organisations - since the connections with other women's organisations would be qualitatively different from with mixed organisations - perhaps these could be "sister" and "brother" organisations of NOGW.

We think there should be a fee for affiliation - which could be nominal for women's organisations and more substantial for mixed organisations. One of the most concrete ways to support an organisation is to give it money, and we all know that men have more money than women.

6) As a crucial way in which lesbian women are under attack is over the question of custody of children; we feel it's very important for a lesbian organisation to take a position <sup>on</sup> custody, and to be unambiguously for all women's right to have children and to keep them, if we want to, and that if we do want to, we have a right to adequate maintenance. Since this is an area where non-lesbian women are also under attack, it is an area in which lesbian women can give a lead to straight women and a way for them to organise with us.

7) It's important for NOGW to be able to act on specific in-

stances of discrimination e.g. jobs, housing, custody. That means the organisation should be a source of up-to date data and information about different subjects, where people can go for help etc. At the moment different groups have information on different areas and it would be very useful if that could be pooled. Another very useful instrument would be a lesbian newsletter.

8) We've found that organising around specific areas and having a public lesbian voice on as many issues as possible, is the best way to "change and educate people's ignorant attitudes to lesbians".

9) We hope these suggestions will be useful - we feel they reflect the direction the lesbian movement is going in and should go in. As it surfaces continually it needs direction of a kind that NOGW is well-placed to give.

WAGES DUE LESBIANS

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