

WALKING A TIGHTROPE



60p

BIG FLAME WOMEN'S PAMPHLET

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This pamphlet was produced collectively by Big Flame women and friends.

Our special thanks to Chris and Gerry and Community Press.



JO NESBITT

Photo on back page by Sue Greenberg

SOCIALIST REVOLUTION — THE ONLY ANSWER

Capitalism means war, unemployment, poverty, sexual and racial oppression. Big Flame doesn't believe in patching it up with piece-meal reforms through Parliament. Nothing less than the destruction of the capitalist state will pave the way for socialism.

Socialism means the end of all forms of exploitation and the creation of a free, equal, and classless society in which all human beings will be able to realise their potential.

SOCIALISM — A STRUGGLE OF THE WHOLE WORKING CLASS

There's no substitute for the mass involvement of the working class in the struggle for socialism. People must fight for their own freedom. Nobody can give it to them.

Unity cannot be imposed from above. It must grow out of the struggles of the working class. Socialists have a duty to recognise the differences that capitalism creates to hold back our unity — and to fight to overcome them. We support the struggle of women, black people, gays, and youth against their special oppression. We support their right to their own independent organisation.

Ultimately, Big Flame believes in the need for a new revolutionary party of the whole working class, which will play a leading role in the struggle for socialism. There is no short cut to the creation of a new party: thousands of independent socialists and militants must be won to the idea that we need it.

BIG FLAME AND WOMEN'S STRUGGLES

We are active in the women's movement and the socialist feminist tendency, where we fight for:

- A Woman's Right to Choose on abortion, contraception and sexual relationships.
- Freedom to walk the streets without fear of sexual violence.

Refuges for battered women.

An end to the division of labour between men and women, inside and outside the home.

AGAINST SEXISM AND RACISM

Big Flame supports the struggle of black people to live in equality and free from the fear of racist attacks. We support their right to form their own independent and self-defence organisations.

We fight for the Anti-Nazi League to take an anti-racist stand against all forms of official harassment of black people.

self-determination for the Irish people as a whole. A united, socialist Ireland will assist the liberation of the British working class.

IN THE WORKPLACE

Our aim is to build independent rank and file organisations opposed to the reformist leaders of the trade unions. We support the fight for higher wages, shorter hours, a lighter work load, and for full pay — work or no work. Differentials deepen the disunity and we want to see them narrowed. We oppose redundancies, incomes policies, and every device to increase exploitation.

IN THE COMMUNITY

We argue for closer links between the struggles in the community and those at work. We fight for better, community-controlled public services and for decent homes for all.

If you agree with us, why not find out more about us? We have branches or members in many cities throughout England and Wales. Send off the form if you want to find out more about Big Flame.



TROOPS OUT OF IRELAND NOW!

Capitalism is international. The struggle for socialism and national liberation abroad aids our fight against British capitalism. The international unity of the working class is crucial.

We are in solidarity with all socialist and republican movements fighting to free Ireland from British imperialism. We support the United Troops Out Movement and call for the immediate withdrawal of British troops and

To Big Flame, 43a Hardman Street, Liverpool 1.

I would like more information about Big Flame.

Please send me a copy of Introduction to Big Flame

I enclose a postal order for 18p.

NAME

ADDRESS

Introduction

THIS PAMPHLET has been produced collectively by women in Big Flame. It is our first public statement for some years, and that time gap, as well as the collective discussions that went into each article, illustrate the difficulties we have faced.

Women's autonomy is not some abstract theory developed because it seems a good idea to get women involved on an equal basis in the struggle for socialism. In this society we are oppressed specifically because we are women. Our needs and experiences therefore make the women's liberation movement a necessity. At the same time, we recognise that both men and women must be involved in fighting for fundamental changes.

WALKING THE TIGHTROPE

We are always walking a fine line — between seeing the need for autonomous movements, and seeing the need for a mixed national organisation such as Big Flame. We want our organisation to be a place where we can work out ideas together, make links between different struggles, understand the relationship between sex and class, and generalise our politics. We are producing this pamphlet despite the difficulties, precisely because we feel it's vital to walk that line, vital to develop an approach which many people share with us, and we feel confident enough that those links can be made. We do not have all the answers, but would like to think that we have a specific contribution to make in pointing out ways of fighting as feminists and as socialists under this Tory government.

The Tory attack is both economic and ideological. This government has revived the old Tory 'virtues' of individualism, competition and nationalism. It relies on the reactionary idea that a woman's place is in the home, and is trying to drive women back into isolation.

Any attempt by socialist organisations to emphasise the point of production alone means that they play right into the hands of the Tories, who are desperate to divide any opposition to their government. The new nationality laws divide black from white. The political attack on unemployed 'workshy' and social security 'scroungers' divides the employed and unemployed. The assertion of the traditional role for women divides women and men.

WOMEN SPEAKING

In this pamphlet we are trying to illustrate some of the areas of women's oppression, and some of the ways that we are resisting. Many women speak of how they came to see their lives not as their own private nightmare, but as an experience mirrored in home after home. This brings out the need to understand the ways that consciousness actually develops. Women represent the private world of family and feeling. We have to work hard to



ANDREW WIARD (REPORT)

The cleaners' lobby, June '80

— not quite what Thatcher had in mind.

overcome that separation between public and private, without denying the importance of our personal lives. The stubbornness and optimism that is needed to bring us out of the family has far-reaching implications for everyone's struggle against the individualistic values of competitive capitalism.

THE TORIES ARE DIFFERENT

Just over a year after the Thatcher government came to power, we are beginning to realize the full extent of the political and economic onslaught on women. It is true that despite a widespread acceptance of equal rights for women under the Labour government, things had in fact been getting worse rather than better. The Equal Pay Act came into force in 1975, but by the end of the 70s women's earnings were actually going down in relation to men's.



ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Today women are one of the main targets of the Tory attack. More and more women are becoming unemployed, as part-time shifts are dispensed with and school leavers face the dole queue. The cuts in social services radically affect women as we are expected to take the burden of 'community care'. Everywhere women's projects are being cut as grants are not renewed. But to understand the seriousness of the situation we have to realize that Thatcher's policies are not just worse, but also different from those of Callaghan's government. Thatcher's appeal to the electorate as a woman of 'common sense', with a 'housewife's approach' to the country's budget, disguised a clear perspective on the need to radically restructure Britain's productive base. Naturally the ruling class are to be protected while this upheaval takes place, and old industries are run down.

WOMEN AT THE CENTRE

The working class meanwhile pays the price in increased unemployment and a cut in the social wage, which means a rapid decline in services like education, health, housing, public transport and social services. The one area of public spending that has been vastly increased is spending on law and order. It's important for Thatcher to remain in control of the social unrest and opposition that will be stirred up. It is for this reason that the antagonism between black and white is maintained and encouraged, and that the aims and aspirations of women's liberation have to be crushed. But we must ensure that it is impossible for the Tories to succeed in strengthening these divisions. There is, after all, a real possibility that instead of women returning to our isolated situation in the home, the women's movement, in its broadest sense, will become a real focus for struggle against the Tory government.

The Employment Protection Act provided for maternity leave, but there were many loopholes and so little nursery provision that few women were able to take full advantage of this benefit. Abortion was available under the 1967 Act, but in reality only half the abortions were carried out within the NHS, the rest being provided by private practice and charities.

Every right we had won still had to be fought for on the ground. The 70s were marked by the determined struggles of small groups of women, often for basic trade union rights and the implementation of legislation.

At the same time, the Labour government had been running down public services and nationalised industries and Callaghan desperately tried to stay in power.

This run-down of the welfare state, begun in the mid-70s under Labour, coincided with growing criticism of bureaucratic state intervention in everyday life. We were involved in fighting cuts in public expenditure, but we were also involved in demanding state money from short-term schemes like Manpower Services and STEPS schemes to set up small but important centres of resistance. We fought to control these centres ourselves, in Women's Aid refuges, Rape Crisis centres, nursery centres, abortion counselling services and many others.



Under Our Control

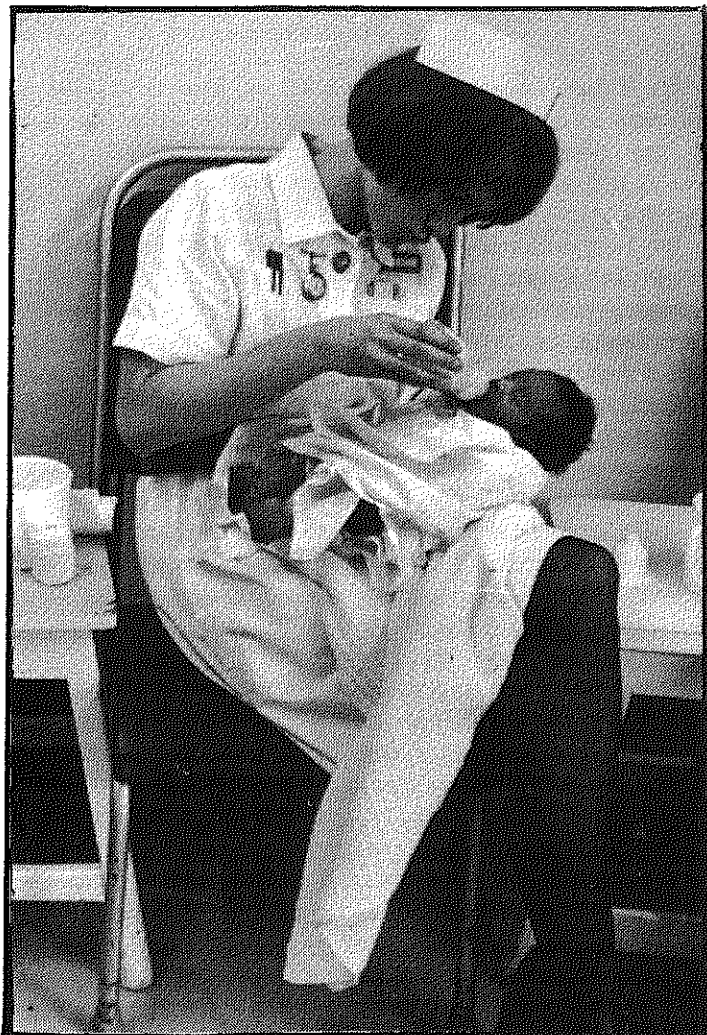
OUT of every women's magazine, the odds are very high that some article about health will catch your eye. It might be a new diet to try out on your family, how Petula Clark copes with her disability or just an article on career opportunities as a nurse.

Everyone reads the stories because health is part of every day of our lives. We're in and out of hospitals and doctors' waiting rooms from the moment we're born to the day we die. We're there as patients with contraceptive pills that don't suit us, assembly-line childbirth, and saying goodbye to our wombs when they've lost their use.

We're there because we're responsible for our family's health. We have to take the kids to the clinic, make sure they're well-fed and get our men to take more exercise. The experts tell us what to do, but they don't tell us how to find the time or money to look after ourselves properly!

IMAGES OF WOMEN

Finally, we're there as the great army of cooks and cleaners, nurses and clerical workers that keep the health service humming. Squeezing in the job between doing the housework, we work odd hours, nights, evenings. We hardly ever are able to meet all at once to organize against our conditions and low pay.



SALLY AND RICHARD GREENHILL

On the other hand, you might have bought a glossy image of women where health blurs into glamour, and vitality and exuberance become sexually marketable. Stories are no longer about our responsibility for other people's health, but about how being healthier can make us more attractive to men. Jogging with your man in the park will make you feel not so much better as more desirable, one notch up in the sexual sweepstakes.



Of course, the two images are only different sides of the same coin. The mother figure and the sophisticated sex bomb have to face men as husbands, lovers, doctors, social security officials, when reality reappears. On our own we can't win as we're slagged off for being an easy lay, fun to be with but not to have kids with, left on our own to cope with VD or an unexpected pregnancy.

LOUD AND CLEAR

Through the Women's Liberation Movement we have found a new collective way to challenge this lack of control over our bodies, our health and our sexuality and to fight for our choices. Women's Liberation shouts out loud and clear for an alternative, for pleasurable, exhilarating sex lives with men and women; for humane, safe birth control and abortion; for a new way to relate to each other at a personal level; for socialised, free child care; for changes in housing and environment to help change family structures and pressures.

One of the most important methods of struggle developed by the Women's Movement is to encourage every woman to participate directly in discussions, campaigns and actions.

We have taken 'personal' matters like sex, birth control and health out of the bedroom, the kitchen and the doctors' surgery into our discussion, on demonstrations and into all areas of life.

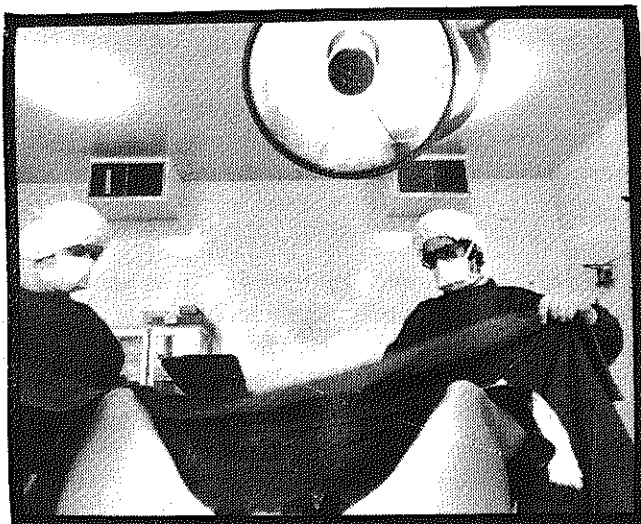
The following articles demonstrate how far women have come in fighting for control over our bodies, defining our own sexuality, organizing to set up a Well Woman Clinic and fighting for our right to abortion.

But let's face it, continuing to fight for a liberated sexuality, for fertility control and for feminist health care is going to get bloody hard. Every little step had to be bitterly fought for.

Not only are our ideas dangerous because they directly challenge the personal and material role of women and men in our society (with all the passion, bitterness, violence as well as new levels of love and tenderness that this involves). But also, in the present period of worsening crisis and severe austerity for the working class, the struggle for all aspects of sexual liberation will be characterized by some sections of the socialist movement as a luxury in the face of massive unemployment, low wages, drastic cuts in health, education and welfare, and the desperate struggle to make ends meet. Our answer must be clear and final: there can be no compromise on women's liberation.

The Tories are out to revitalise their profit-making system at the expense of our jobs, our wages, our organisations, our health and education, our personal lives, and the future of our children. It is a class confrontation, but one which uses the ideology of sexism at the most basic level to attack *both* women and the working class.

The fight against the crisis includes the fight for our right to determine our own lives. It requires a united response from us all, and women must be at the forefront.



Patient's eye view of operation

SALLY AND RICHARD GREENHILL

Local alternative

FOR over a year now, a small group of women from Levenshulme in Manchester have been campaigning for a Well Woman Clinic to be set up in the newly opened Health Centre. One year into the campaign we're realising how our political ideas have developed — about the health service and what we want from it as women; about the way we should organize the campaign and who we should work with; about the fight not just to defend the health service, but to fight for one worth defending.



The Junction Road Project

We didn't know where to start at first. Our first aim was to campaign for a woman doctor to be based at the new Health Centre because many women would rather see a woman doctor, particularly about health issues that affect us all as women.

We had come together through work, groups such as Inner Cities and Women's Aid, and through knowing each other socially. We had a lot of varied experience, but not much about trying to take on a structure like the NHS, so we decided to do a survey of local women to find out what needs and criticisms they had.

We were amazed by the number of women who said they didn't like to bother busy GPs with 'minor' problems, such as premenstrual tension, thrush, and cystitis, and who said they didn't feel able to talk to a male doctor about emotional worries. Women complained about lack of time to talk, 'not being taken seriously' and being fobbed off.

It became clear that there was more to the problem of inadequate health care for women than the sex of the doctor. The lack of time to talk in an unhurried atmosphere where you could feel more than a poorly slab of meat; the poverty of our knowledge about our bodies and what is done to them 'for our own good'; our complete lack of control over health services, how they're provided and who they're provided for, all pointed to the same thing — women's health isn't taken seriously, and that says a lot about the whole way in which the NHS is structured.

BUILDING SUPPORT

Following the survey, we ran a course on Women and Health which was funded by the WEA. The meetings were packed with women of different ages, race and class backgrounds. None of us had a clue beforehand that we'd get that kind of response. It confirmed everything we'd felt to start with, and we began to think there was real support for demanding a Well Woman Clinic.

We drew up proposals for the clinic in autumn '79, and circulated them widely around women's groups, community organizations, trade unions and health service bodies. The proposals called for preventative health care based on a positive attitude towards health (after all, being healthy is more than not being ill!), in the form of regular screening for cancer, anaemia (particularly sickle cell anaemia), weight checks and urine tests. It also called for a community-based health education programme, a service run by and for women, at convenient times, in an unhurried atmosphere, with creche facilities, information, counselling, self-help groups, and run by a user/support group of women from the community.

WOMENS NEEDS

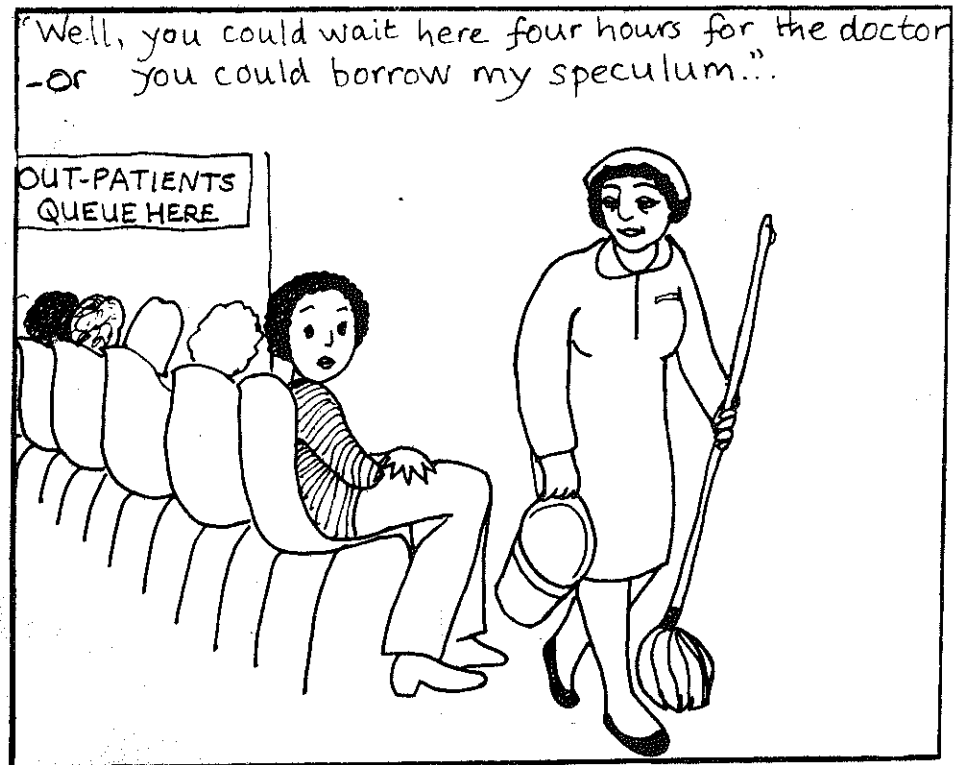
We called for a service which would be responsive to the specific health needs of different groups of women, particularly those who don't have real access to the NHS. The health service poses language, cultural and racist barriers for black women, gay women don't benefit from the regular check-ups at FPCs, and working-class women are more at risk from bad working and housing conditions — their health isn't regarded as important, even by themselves.

We got widespread support from many groups and radicals in the health service. The management predictably mumbled about financial constraints and plainly couldn't see what the fuss was about — we supposedly already had effective preventative services provided by GPs and FPCs.

It is incredible how secretive and self-protective the NHS is able to be. Its unwieldy structure can diffuse attempts to challenge power over its 'consumers', just by creating another committee.

It became obvious after a few preliminary exchanges with the management that we wouldn't see Well Woman clinics in Manchester by asking nicely for them. We had to learn a lesson in reformism from the behaviour of the Community

We are gradually getting more involved with the fight around the cuts, to make connections between our positive initiative on health and the fight to defend the meagre services we already have. Links are growing with other campaigns around the country. We're planning to write a report of the campaign so far which will pass on our experiences to other women who might be thinking of taking similar action.



Health Council who didn't like the word 'campaign' because it sounded too aggressive. It thought that the way to the NHS purse was through cosy chats with the right bigwigs, getting proper health care by adding on a few extra services here and there to make the whole thing a bit more bearable. But you don't change anything that way — power is never given away by kindly paternal figures.

SPREADING THE WORD

Other women's groups are now doing health courses in their areas and we are giving talks to women through mother and toddler groups and schools to get discussion going. We have the support of the Trades Council and many individual trade unions, and it looks as if we may get the use of the Health Centre itself for meetings and more public discussion.

A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE

We shall probably be getting more involved with NAC, as there is now an ever greater need to affirm 'a woman's right to choose' in every aspect of our lives, not just abortion. At the same time, we are determined not to lose the local base of the campaign as that is where its main strength lies — where women are living and working.

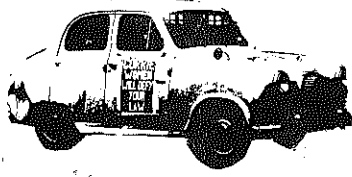
It's very difficult to know where the campaign will lead us and how it will develop, especially as it is dependent on the energies of a handful of women with other commitments. However, one thing is certain — we can't go back on the work we've done so far, by accepting token offerings from the Health Authority.

CLARE NUTTALL

'We Want the Lot'

Big Flame (BF) women produced a very controversial paper for the 1980 NAC Conference. We tried to look critically at the campaign against the Corrie bill and to develop our politics in the light of what we had learnt.

We challenged two of the assumptions current in NAC. Firstly, we challenged the notion that the organized labour movement is the central source of united political power in this country. We argued that labour movement support was important, but should be won on our own terms — we would only reap the



CALLING THE TUNE

BF starts from an understanding that the working class is divided. Divided by sex and race foremost, but also by divisions between employed / unemployed, young / old. No abstract, easy calls for unity will overcome these divisions. There is a material basis for the oppression of women, as there is for the oppression of black people. Any mixed grouping, be it a union branch, a revolutionary organization, or 'the labour movement', reproduces that oppression in some form.

We believe that autonomy is the only way that women consolidate and develop our political strength, so that we can assert our special needs and demands in a way that will be genuinely integrated with a wider set of socialist perspectives. Autonomy is a political strategy for deciding policy and calling the tune, not separatist or inward-looking.

During the campaign against Corrie, NAC narrowed down our politics to a defence of the 1967 Abortion Act. We allowed NAC's politics — the politics of 'Abortion — A Woman's Right to Choose' — to be pushed completely out of the limelight, despite the fact that NAC supporters were the driving force within the trade union structure which forced the TUC into taking a stand.

We had taken the politics of 'A Woman's Right To Choose' into our union branches when we fought the
6 Walking a tightrope

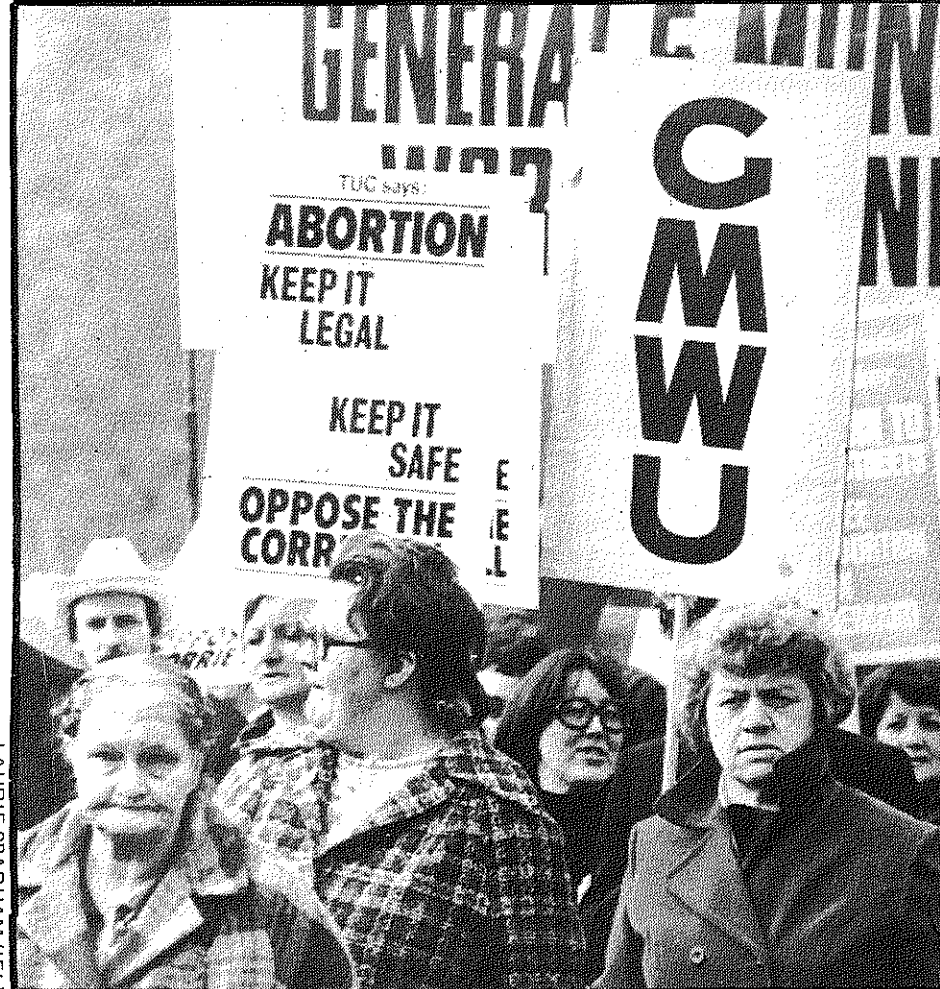
results of political short-cuts in the future. Secondly, we challenged the notion that NAC's fight for abortion rights should be a single-issue campaign. We saw this as a political trap, which would ensure that NAC remained an essentially defensive and reformist campaign.

In retrospect, I think our position that NAC should be an autonomous women's campaign was premature, but it raised crucial questions concerning the lack of feminism within the campaign....

James White bill, and we had won the massive support of several trade unions, particularly in the public sector, on that basis. The creation of the Campaign Against Corrie and a defensive stand on the '67 Act won us the support of the TUC, but our politics of choice, sexual freedom, and women's liberation were lost.

When we talk about women's autonomy and NAC, we aren't

defining abortion as 'a woman's issue' without relation to other issues. Our oppression as women is central to our lack of rights and our lack of choice, and our politics make more sense when this is clearly shown. The campaign and our politics can feed on the anger and frustration that all women experience, so evident when we petition or hold stalls on a shopping parade.



The TUC October anti-Corrie Demo in 1979. It mobilised all kinds of people — but limited itself to a defence of the 1967 Act.

BEYOND A SINGLE ISSUE

A woman's right to choose involves much more than access to free, easily-available abortion facilities without legal or medical restriction — it is about control over our bodies and lives. It is about our right to have children in ways that we choose and about having the facilities that permit those choices to be made; maternity leave, community-controlled nursery provision, more money, better housing, better general health and health care, and much more. It is against forced sterilization of black and working - class women, against dangerous contraceptives such as depo provera, against lesbians being denied aid or custody of their children.

We were amongst the many hundreds of women who rushed from the Women's Assembly to Parliament on 8 February 1980. The angry presence of so many women united behind genuinely revolutionary demands was much more than a symbolic gesture. It was the collective expression of a mass movement of women relating their struggle against the Corrie bill to all aspects of their lives.

ORGANISING LOCALLY

Making the campaign a feminist one means changes at all levels. In our propaganda and organizing we should incorporate women's needs and experiences. In Leeds NAC, we produced a series of posters for mass fly-posting. We tried to put across the wider issues by using cartoons and other visual material. We wrote our own 'Why an Abortion Campaign' pamphlet, making it interesting to look at, local, and chatty. We tried to use the voice that other women recognize: the voice of our own experience.

Trade Union activity is important, but we have badly neglected the places where women are not necessarily part of the labour movement; local factories where women are not unionized, and the vast housing estates where women are often isolated.

A working-class woman in our group, living on an estate, started doing pregnancy testing at 15p a go. She saw this as a way of break-

ing down isolation, producing a useful service, and having a chance to talk about the wider issues around fertility control.

And, of course, we must draw on the strength and experience of the Women's Liberation Movement. In our own campaign, this involved an all-night vigil outside a local hospital; a massive, all-women, torchlight demo; and several women-only motorcades through the town centre that caused havoc with the traffic. It also meant regular petitioning on the shopping parades and in the town centre.

In my local NAC group, we try to organize our group democratically, and break down cliques. We try to share skills for producing pamphlets and public speaking. We have a policy whereby an experienced speaker always takes an inexperienced speaker to a meeting. After being the inexperienced one on two occasions, you then go as the speaker. As a result we now have several women in the group who are able to speak publicly, and the number grows constantly. We also try to remember that some women may not be participating as much as they would like, because of responsibility for children.



MARK RUSHER (IFL)

NAC exhibition & caravan

A POSITIVE CAMPAIGN

How can we bring out the wider implications of the abortion campaign on the national level? It is easier in local groups. Campaigns for day-care abortion provide the opportunity to raise questions around the sort of health care we want, our choices for having children, childcare, sexuality, and so on. NAC can be represented on local anti-cuts committees. It can support campaigns around childcare. It can ask to speak on the importance of fertility control at anti-racist and anti-fascist committees and campaigns.

It is vital, too, that NAC makes links with campaigns in the women's movement. Rape and violence against women is about men having power and control over our bodies. NAC has a part to play in supporting campaigns such as Reclaim the Night, Women's Aid, rape crisis centres, and should show how they are part of the same struggle.

NAC should also challenge the notion that sexuality is only legitimate when it is heterosexual and aimed at reproduction. We are fighting for a free sexuality — freed from the fear of pregnancy, free to redefine traditional practice, and free to have lesbian relationships without discrimination. Our opponents feed on repressive attitudes towards sex and fears of sexuality. We need to be quite clear on the issues and fight for our sexual politics in a positive way.

At a national level, positive legislation is central if we are not always to be fighting restrictive proposals. But a change in legislation alone will not grant a woman's right to choose. We should support initiatives on the part of ALRA, LARC and other legislative groups, rather than put a lot of our energies into a parallel effort.

In the present climate of political defeat and demoralisation, we must go on a mass offensive, with clear perspectives about women's real choices, always making links with other feminist and socialist campaigns.

Battered But Not Beaten

It has always been clear to us as feminists that women are first and foremost seen and valued in terms of their role as sex objects for men. That's why one of the first big protests of the recent women's movement was against beauty contests, the disruption of the Miss World Contest in 1970.

We were angry at being made to feel that our most important qualities as women were simply our physical attractiveness to men. We knew this divided us, humiliated and degraded us — forcing us always to see ourselves through men's eyes, living to please them, competing with each other.

What it took us longer to realize and act upon, was the contempt, the violence, and the hatred which men show to women. We had to learn to face up to the fact that men beat women, men rape women, men constantly harrass, humiliate, degrade and ridicule women, night and day. No woman is ever free from the fear of sexual attack from men.

We now see that violence is central to our oppression as women — physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence. It's one of the ever-present sanctions used against women who are trying to escape or challenge conventional behaviour — or even just cope with its contradictory demands. As women we are brought up to be the servicers of men, the mothers of their children and the fulfillers of their sexual fantasies. It's impossible to be all these at once, but failure in any one of these areas carries the threat of male violence.

The left has been reluctant to face the question of violence against women but as feminists we must make sure that this remains central to our politics.

We don't want to deny what is particular to our oppression as women.

We think that the central issue of violence against us as women can't be explained by a class analysis alone. We need a feminist theory to explain this oppression, and we can learn a good deal from radical feminist explanations of violence against women, while disagreeing with an analysis that puts it all down to biology.

Having established that the problem exists, we are expressing our anger about violence against women and organising against it. Demonstrations like Reclaim the Night marches, national networks like Women's Aid refuges and Rape Crisis Centres are some of the important areas of women's struggle.

The articles in this section illustrate some of these struggles. Women are no longer prepared to put up with violence and humiliation at the hands of men. The article which begins the section is an account by a woman of the sexual violence she has experienced within marriage. Though distressing to read we have included it because it is important to recognise that rape is not something that always happens between strangers in deserted areas. Many women's experience of marriage is similar to this woman's. So we would argue for a widening of the definition of rape.

The other two articles are about Women's Aid. Big Flame women have been particularly active in this area and these are two women's experiences of Women's Aid.

The theme of this whole section is that the defeat of male violence must be central to the feminist defeat of patriarchy. It must not be subordinate to class struggle, but work parallel to it.



MARK RUSHER (IFL)

When rape is legal

☛ THE worst part of violence is the fear of what's going to happen to you. My marriage was all violence, physical, mental and sexual.

I used to dread my husband coming home from the pub. I felt like running away as the time got nearer for him to arrive. I couldn't sit down and watch T.V. and I didn't dare go to bed. He would come in and drag me out. I used to break out in a cold sweat and get big red blotches over my body.

I know now that my husband never loved me and that I was never made love to but raped. My husband would come home from the pub, take all my clothes off me, send me out of the house with just my coat and shoes on, saying 'go and get raped and don't come back until you do.' I would wait outside for about an hour, hoping he would be asleep when I got in.

If he was asleep, I would sneak in, get into bed lying right at the edge, not daring to breathe in case I woke him up. But most times he would be awake, waiting for me to tell him who raped me and the things he did. All the while I was telling him, he would be making love to me. He used to enjoy making love thinking I had just been with another man. I remember getting a beating for not knowing the address of someone I had made up.

He would humiliate me in front of my daughter, telling me to go upstairs and take my knickers off and put a very short mini skirt on. Then he would say to my daughter, 'now watch what your mother is doing, because you'll have to do that one day.' Sometimes he would come home take his trousers off and show himself to my daughter, saying 'don't you think your dad's got a big one.' My

husband used to tell me to go to bed with his dad, which I had to pretend to do.

Making love with him was awful, because I didn't love him or want him. He forced himself on me all the time. He would make love to me morning, noon and night. If I pretended to be asleep he didn't care. He would still come inside me. I would never dare tell him I didn't want him. He would kill me. Wives are not allowed to refuse their husbands. He didn't care how he made love to me. I would be sore and bruised but still I wouldn't dare say no.

When my daughter was in her teens, he thought it was his right to go to bed with her. A friend of mine told me her husband would go home and tell her to get undressed, then he would sniff her to see if she had been with a man while he was out. ☛☛

'You can only take so much....'

Cathy Jones had been married for 14 years and had six children before she finally left her husband who had beaten her up for 12 of those years. She came to Nottingham and went to live in a squatted women's refuge, and later joined BF.

Q. What was your married life like?

CJ. I was living in Manchester with my husband and the kids. During my marriage I was regularly beaten up, knocked around, blamed for things I didn't do and finally I couldn't put up with it any more. I was married 14 years before I decided I'd had enough of being thumped, kicked, knocked around, abused and used; my children not being allowed to talk to me or ask me questions because they would get hit as I was supposed to be daft and didn't know anything. All I knew was how to cook, clean, shop and look after six children.

Q. Why was it so hard to get away?

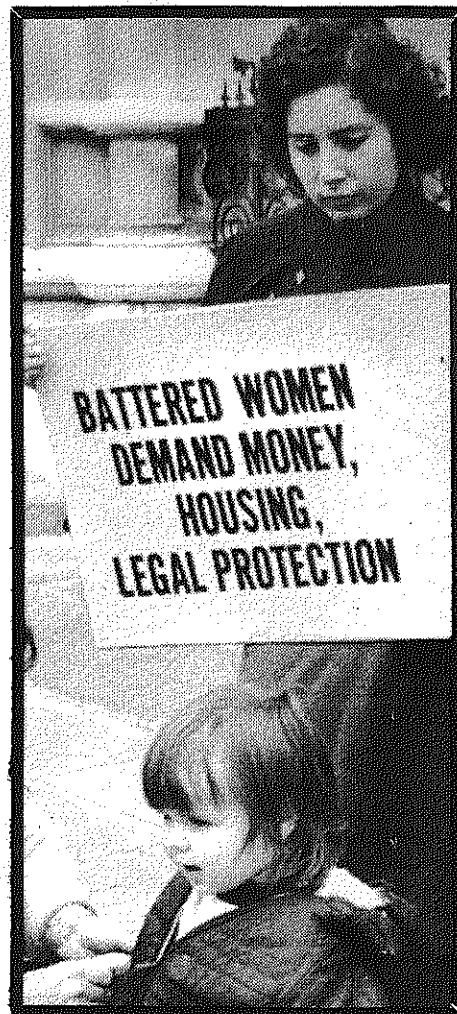
CJ. I was always in fear of being beaten up or humiliated in front of my children.

I used to wonder how long I could put up with it. I used to think lots of times 'I wish I could leave' but where could I go? Most of my marriage there were no refuges and I did leave once but ended up going back. With six children it's not easy to walk out. Who would take me in? Most of the time you're advised to go back. Women are always to blame.

People say 'Men don't hit women for nothing.' That's why battered women don't leave the home, they don't tell relatives or friends they're battered because you feel so guilty that your marriage isn't working. You must be doing something wrong. But what? I'm sure battered women work much harder, keeping the house clean and the children looking nice. And you do more running after the man, making sure his shirts are clean and ironed nicely, trousers pressed and meals on the table. I know I did. The nights I sat up knitting and sewing all night just so my kids had nice things to go to school in.

Marriage wasn't like you read about in books or see in films. Women never used to get together and talk, I never knew I wasn't the only one to feel like this.

Another thing that makes it hard to leave is all the hard work you've done making a nice home and buying things for the house. Why should it be the *woman* who has to leave the house? But you can only take so much, that's when I decided to go. My life just wasn't worth living.



Q. How did you get away?

I left Manchester and came to Nottingham with the children and stayed at my mums for a week and went to Social Services, hoping they could help me. They sent me on to a squatted refuge which had



Inside the refuge

ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)

just been started by the left wing of womens aid, and some community activists. The kids didn't like what they saw, this old house, all boarded up, a far cry from the new house we'd just left. But I was glad to just have somewhere safe, somewhere where I wasn't frightened to go to bed, fearing the thought of a drunken husband coming home to beat me or kill me.

There were three other women in the squat and their kids. Two more women came after me, so there were 6 women and 18 kids. The house was very big, we had enough room, shared a living room, kitchen and bathroom as well as the cleaning.

The Support Group had a rota so that there was someone with us day and night. We had meetings every week, the people in the refuge, and the support group. The meetings were quite chaotic, there were always kids running in and out as there was nobody looking after them. In the meetings we were never really asked *why* we were there, it was mostly about running

the refuge, cleaning etc.

The kids had a rough time at school, they were called squatters and the kids down our street threw stones at them.

Then the council wanted us out. The women and the children made placards and posters, the main theme being **BATTERED BUT NOT BEATEN**. And we all went down to the Council and sat in until they agreed to talk with us. We also gave out leaflets to passers-by. Letters were written to trade unions, councillors and community groups. We appeared on TV and radio.

From this protest the Council rehoused two women who were from Nottingham, while the four of us left were given this old house on the condition that no-one else moved in. No garden, busy road outside . . .

One thing that came out of our campaign was the 'official' Womens Aid got a legal refuge. They had got what we had been fighting for.

Q. What's it been like making a new life?

CJ. I found it very difficult bringing up my kids. They wouldn't do a thing I said. They weren't used to me telling them what to do. My husband had been the boss and I'd had almost no say. They wouldn't go to school or help in the house. My eldest daughter was beyond my control and got into a lot of trouble. While this was happening my eldest son wasn't going to school either and then a probation officer told my husband my address and he started coming round making trouble. Things were so bad I almost went back to him.

However, I took out an injunction against my husband coming round which helped. My boyfriend got my son to attend school and keep 'out of serious trouble, while a group of friends — socialists with children, mostly — started going out with me and the kids on Sundays. My eldest daughter ended up in care but now she's out, things have worked themselves out. She lives more or less with her boyfriend, and she and I get on very much better than we did.

Q. When did you start thinking of yourself as a feminist and a socialist?

CJ. I suppose when we had been at the squat at Neal Street — because we had to fight for something, I realised that things weren't fair for working-class women, begging for Social Security after you'd been working all your life.

Going to a refuge made me realise that it wasn't just me treated like that, that it happens to a lot of women. I had to pretend I was a good wife, had to do extra work, I couldn't tell anybody how I was treated, there must be a reason why things happen like this.

Q. What other political action did this lead you to?

CJ. I started going to meetings about the bus cuts. I also went to CACTL (Campaign Against the Criminal Trespass Laws) meetings, Women's Aid and the Women's Group. It was about this time at the CACTL Conference in Reading that I met a working class woman from Liverpool Big Flame. She talked about women in Ireland and women on the Tower Hill estate in

Inside the Refuge

WORKING in a Women's Aid refuge has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life, both personally and politically. It has brought me into contact with women who would not call themselves feminists and yet who often have a kind of feminist 'gut reaction' to their situation. Indeed, they are often suspicious of the term 'feminist' and tend to assume that we are all 'men haters'. On this topic we have had many good discussions in which we have all learned a lot about feminism and what it means to be a woman in this society.

All women are aware of male violence but battered women suffer it in the home, every minute of their lives. For some of us it is the streets that offer fear and danger, for battered women it is their living room, bedroom or kitchen which is the frightening place to be. That is why refuges are so important because they offer escape from an intolerable situation and a place where a battered woman can meet other women who have had similar experiences to her own. Safety is crucial but so is sharing experiences because one of the big problems of

domestic violence is the silence and isolation in which it takes place. When a woman comes to a refuge she learns that it is not just her problem, and not her failure.

Refuges are so organised that women who live in them, workers and support group can talk and work together in a way that tries to break down barriers between women of different backgrounds, experiences etc. For me, that means making many close friends, learning a great deal about what being a woman means, and having the opportunity to relate to kids in a non-authoritarian and relaxed way. Refuges are based on self-help. Our aim is to help each other, take control of our own lives, and support each other in whatever decisions we make. We believe that the best people to help battered women are battered women themselves. That is why in our refuge we have two workers who originally came to the refuge as battered women.

The biggest problem we experience is that in trying to offer alternatives to the women who come to us we are bound by having to work within the state. Women are often in the position of being rehoused

onto grotty housing estates in isolating conditions. And because there are no nurseries for their children they are tied to the home and dependence on social security. Some of this is overcome by women feeling they 'belong' to the refuge even after they have left it and contacts are usually maintained, with women still participating in refuge life and decision-making. Most of the refuges in the country are affiliated to the National Womens Aid Federation. Having some national organisation means that we can put pressure on the government to improve things for battered women and women generally. Work has been done recently on the Housing Bill and the Social Security Bill. Success in these areas is doubtful but battered women do have a voice now. What was once regarded as the problem of a minority is now revealing itself as only the tip of the iceberg. Battered women today are much more prepared to speak out. Because there is somewhere to go they are getting out of violent homes. But refuges will not get rid of the problem of women being battered — only the overthrow of patriarchy will do that.

Continued from page 10

Liverpool. I wondered why there wasn't a Big Flame group in Nottingham, and eventually some of us who took the kids out on Sundays started one.

I was involved supporting the Grunwick strikers — this was very exciting, frightening and good to see so many people supporting those Asian women.

Q, How are things now?

CJ. I find it difficult to change. I feel I should still do the cooking and cleaning. It took me all my life to get used to being a good housewife, it takes a long time to change again. I still like baking and cooking meals. I am in Big Flame really because I feel I belong to something, I know I'm not by myself. I can fight with other people that I like for the things that we want.

CATHY JONES



Over the last two years thousands of women have taken over the streets together 'Reclaiming the Night' in Soho, and other towns in England, Ireland and Scotland, demanding to walk the streets without fear of rape, abuse and harassment. They plastered stickers on porn and sex shops, aware that pornography is a direct encouragement to rape, and degrades women.