

1) WOMEN, CAPITALISM & CLASS STRUGGLE

Women's struggle isn't separate from the class struggle. It has particular features, but its the class struggle as fought by women. What's more, we're not a small 'part' of it. We're half the world and half the working class in all its forms - black and white, Irish or English, of every age, race, religion and nationality. And womens struggle isn't an extra "issue" tagged on. Its part of and crucial to class struggle on every level. The chains that bind women bind the whole working class. Our fight for liberation shakes up everything. To win we must achieve total revolutionary change in every part of society and pe ople's lives. Women have to build the power to put our interests at the centre of the fight for socialism, as the interests of the whole working class.

So the Womens Commission isn't an isolated compartment or an added extra of Big Flame. Women are everywhere, inside and outside BF. To understand our struggle we have to understand the whole lot. This report sums up our ideas and activity so far, and some future plans. There's still a lot missing. For example, we're not in a position to say anything useful about the struggle of black and immigrant women, but we have a lot to learn from it.

2) WOMEN AND UNWAGED WORK IN THE HOME.

Women's position in modern, western capitalist society hinges on the unwaged work we do in the home. Housework. This is fundamental to the exploitation of all women in every part of our lives.

We know there are differences between women, and even divisions. We may be waged workers, full time housewives; married or single; lesbian or heterosexual; young girls or pensioners; black or white; white collar or manual workers; middle class or working class.

We also know womens struggle is incredibly varied because of these differnces, and because there's so many things to fight. It can't all be channelled into single issue campaigns.

But the unwaged work we do in the home is the framework in which all women live and struggle. Especially the mass of working class women who experience it most hard. What we win in our struggle as housewives will affect what we win on everything else.

Housework is work, organised by capitalism in the interests of ruling class profits and power. We reject the idea that women are just "oppressed" at home by their "ideological role in the family"; and that they only get "exploited" when they get a waged job and become 'working class'. Women are working class inside and outside the home; and our work in both plays a part in the creation of surplus value (profit.) Housework is one way in which the ruling class organises the work of producing and reproducing labour power. The Welfare State is the other way. In the 'social services' the State directly supervises this work inside and outside the home. Making sure the bosses get a working class in working order to make their profits.

Both are areas of class struggle. The ruling class wants workers. The working class wants to live. The ruling class organises housework and the social services to meet the needs of production. It tries to keep the cost to the minimum. The working class wants the social care it needs as human beings. Women bear the brunt of it, saving money for profits by shouldering an incredible amount of work for no pay at home and low pay outside. Like all workers, women have to fight for the money to live on and against the work. In the process they challenge capitalist organisation of society and the working class.

3 main points have to be made about housework, to show its importance to womens struggle and how we assess that struggle now:

(i) Housework is "womens work". The vast majority of women are housewives, whether or not they also have a waged job. This means full or major responsibility for the housework for themselves and other people. All women do housework, whether or not they're known as housewives. We're told its natural for us to do it. We're trained for it in the family and school and we do it till we die. This is still true, despite the fact that some women have won more power to refuse it, and despite pressures on more families to share the work. The increase in waged jobs for women has meant an increase in work, and not an escape from housework. For the mass of women there's no escape except through a direct struggle for more money, against housework. The whole system is organised to maintain this division of labour. Wage structures, job organisation, social security, housing etc are all based on tying men to their work as "breadwinners" and tying women to their work as unwaged, dependant housewives. And while housework is "womens work" the same jobs outside the home are too, e.g. cooking; cleaning; childcare. And all women are defined by this work being seen as a 'natural' part of their personality.

(ii) Housework is unwaged work. For example, childcare organised in nurseries is paid for by the State - in wages, buildings, equipment, bills. Childcare organised at home is paid for by women - rent, bills, food, toys - and the women get no wages. The less money and facilities there are the more work and time is given by housewives and the more tied they are to that work.

The ruling class uses the idea that women do the work 'naturally', and the idea that its not 'real work' because its not productive, and is just a personal service. And while it continues to be unwaged these ideas are reinforced and its hard to fight against the work and the division of labour. The 'personal' nature of the work is highlighted. The fact that its work which is paid for either by the ruling class or by the working class is hidden. The fact that the social care we need isn't provided for is hidden. The cost of the work is shouldered by the working class - in the work of women and the lower wages that can be given when the work isn't paid for. And the work remains a part of womens personality.

So the cost of the work outside the home can be cut. The hospitals for example can run on cheap womens labour. Nurses have been the 'caring' women working for love. Ancillary workers have been the invisible shit workers. Both just like women as housewives. They too fight the idea that its not 'real work' because its not productive. These services and the wages can be kept down, and cut as at present, as long as the work is being done anywhere for no wage at all. (As with any job.)

And womens position as housewives affects their position in waged work generally. Lack of money, dependance and the cost of housework, increase the competition for wages (jobs). The time and energy used on housework makes it desperately hard to fight for higher wages and less work outside.

(iii) Housewives are dependant. Housewives aren't just unwaged. They're also dependant on men for money. And this is a direct result of the work being unwaged. The work is there to be done, it has to be paid for, and the state won't pay for it. Women have to depend on men for the money. To escape that dependance they have to get a second, waged job or separate from men to get money from the state. Either way the situation is affected by the dependence of housewives. Social Security forces that dependence to save the state money - the low level of benefits compared to the cost of housework; the Cohabitation Rule; the harrassment of 'separated' women. And wage levels are held down as described. Economic dependence reinforces sexual and emotional dependence, especially for women with children who have the work and cost of childcare.

### 3) THE CURRENT SITUATION

(For detailed background read first draft of Womens Commission Report.)

Women are hit particularly hard by the crisis because of their position as housewives. Unemployment; cuts in public spending; wage freeze and inflation all

hit housewives directly by reducing the money they have, increasing the workload and increasing the cost of housework. And all ruling class policy is weighted heavily against women because of the division of labour and power.

Women are losing their waged jobs faster than men. Part-time workers are often the first for the chop - women who work part-time because it's the only way they can get money and fit it in with the housework. Public sector cuts fall hard on women's jobs as the majority of the workforce. Trade union policy has let it happen. Without a strategy against unemployment, trade union officials will negotiate redundancies rather than fight them. The division of labour between men and women allows them to get away with it. Men are favoured as the breadwinners and women get the chop.

Women, like all workers, have been forced to tie their need for money to waged labour. Now, on top of the loss of that money, the increase in housework and its cost, more women are forced back into economic dependence on men.

In the crisis tensions inside the family and the burden on women gets even more unbearable. Violence increases. Women's control of their bodies and lives gets harder to achieve - free, safe abortion is threatened by the cuts and women who want children are forced not to have them through poverty. Sexual freedom is even more limited by forced dependence on husbands, less housing, harder work.

Generally, women like the whole working class are suffering a major setback. But we have to look at the particular features of women's struggle. It can develop in different ways and at a different pace from other struggles or the class struggle as a whole.

Women, through their own struggle, have found the space to keep up a rich, extensive and diverse battle for what they need. Their combativity has increased over the last 2 years and their struggles have been more widespread than at any time since the second world war. Phase 2 of the pay policy represents the onset of a major offensive against this broad and fragmented struggle. (The 4½% pay freeze which attacks the lower paid hardest; cutting of food subsidies; scrapping of Child Benefits; retreat and backsliding on Equal Pay).

Over the last 10 years or so women have gained a lot in strength. So when the crisis got underway, they were in some ways in a stronger position to confront ruling class policy than previously. Women's Liberation is now a household word and its attacks on sexist ideology have been taken up and discussed widely. Their need for money, less work, independence and power has been expressed in a far-reaching explosion of struggles for higher wages, more and better social services, unionisation, Equal Pay etc. Government legislation, while never really giving women what they need, has recognised and made public this changing situation - the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts; the liberalising of divorce and abortion laws; the provision of free contraception; the decision to continue payment of Family Allowances to women.

At the same time, when women decide to fight, they're generally in a better position to do so despite the onslaught of crisis policies and propaganda. Because of the division of labour women are less tied to a tradition of trade union and Labour Party politics and organisation; so they're less controlled by them. They will often choose more direct tactics and be more ready to open up and generalise their struggle to other sectors. Through the work they do in the home, women experience capitalism on many different levels (in waged work and the home; in the social services, councils and social security; through their contact with the struggles of men and children as it affects them in the home.) This can be an important counterbalance to the sectionalism and reformism of the trade unions.

The hospital struggles of 1972-4 have also opened up spaces for women's struggle. Nurses and ancillary workers in their first ever national strikes, fought for more money, less work, and the right to struggle as workers. They fought the blackmail that women work for love (with slogans like "You can't put dedication in the bank") and the idea that it's just a personal service, paid cheap because it's not productive.

This fight is now more sporadic and localised, with the set-back in working class struggle generally. Hospital workers are now losing many gains e.g the closure of hospital nurseries in Manchester. But it continues, and has opened up spaces for other women doing "womens work". The struggle of women in waged work continues to extend through previously unorganised, non-militant sectors e.g cleaners; outworkers; 'play workers; women agricultural workers; women in small factories. This fight has generally been around higher pay and the right to unionise.

Equal Pay has been an important focus for womens fight for higher wages as a right. Just as the ruling class wants a pay freeze, the Equal Pay Act comes in. It was forged in the 60s, before the crisis got underway, and had 3 functions for ruling class policy at the time. To sit on and channel the growing wage militancy of women; to help plans for expanding womens jobs; to help the rationalisation of British industry. (The ways employers 'get round' the Act, like cutting down on women's jobs and using machinery, were the aim of the Act.) Now ruling class policy has been altered in the crisis but the Act has had to go through.

Its obvious that the Act doesn't mean Equal Pay, let alone the wages women need. But its given many women the confidence to fight, often for the first time in their lives, and despite bitter opposition from union officials, men workers, and the onslaught of crisis propoganda e.g Trico 1976.

The next few months will be important. Will women accept the 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ % or push on for Equal Pay and higher wages. Big Flame must be prepared to support and help build this fight, as one front of womens struggle for more money, less work, against the division of labour and power.

These struggles in waged work affect the general situation for all women, because they're about womens work, the right to a good independent income etc. The struggle around housework itself is much harder, and full-time housewives who will lead this struggle because of their position in the home, have a much harder battle to win anything directly for themselves through their own action. This affects the situation of all women too, including women in waged work who are also housewives but less able to take part in 'community' based struggle day by day.

Despite the difficulties, however, housewives have also been fighting an increasing, extensive battle. This fight is centred of course in the 'community' around the daily living and working conditions of housewives. This too is very sporadic and localised. Apart from nationally-linked fights like the '72 rent strikes, community struggles tend to be isolated and fragmented. There's not even the minimum kind of national framework and organisation given to waged workplace struggles by the trade union movement. The issues being fought over may be confined to one street or estate. And the work women do confines them to very localised struggle.

Another problem is that even if a particular fight is won, after a lot of hard work, its often a drop in the ocean compared to the massive onslaught from price rises, cuts in services, increased work. e.g Women in Manchester fought for houses and can't afford the rents. Housewives in waged work have had the space as described to offset this a bit and win higher wages. Housewives at home full time haven't had this space.

But there's no signs of this fight dying out. In many areas women are fighting the cuts e.g the closure of wash houses in Leeds and fighting for the extension of services that never existed e.g safety barriers and play areas on Tower Hill. This struggle too is involving women who've never organised together before, and is incredibly important for destroying the isolation of housewives and giving strength to womens struggle as a whole. In this struggle too, women experience taking the lead, and controlling the fight, which begins to break down their sense of powerlessness.

There are signs that through this too, women are gaining more confidence and consciousness of their own needs. The fight is continuing despite all talk about "the need for cuts". One strength is that its so obviously in the interests of the working class e.g. facilities for kids. (This is a weakness when women submerge their own needs in the fight for everyone else.) But also there are signs that women are sticking their heels in because they're becoming clearer what their work is all about and just how much they've been cheated. On Tower Hill there's been a raging battle of ideas over the safety barriers - the council and press saying kids are the mother's responsibility (job) and the women saying they do their job and its time the council did a bit. And on the Liverpool demo that stopped cuts in housing maintenance, women from Hetherley sang,

We are the Liverpool mums  
Working hard all day  
We do the corpy's work  
But the corpy gets the pay

They say that we are hard-faced  
So hard faced we will be  
Without the Liverpool mums  
Where would Liverpool be?

The question of how this struggle goes forward is a political as well as an organisational one. This growing consciousness has to be supported and built on. Cuts Committees in our experience have failed to include housewives and their political interests. We support the need to base the Cuts Campaigns in local action groups that are accessible to housewives as well as everyone else. But we also have to fight to include womens needs in the political direction of the campaign. This means helping to build a strategic perspective and a programme based on the needs of women as housewives. And helping to build the autonomous womens organisation that will build and fight for it e.g. local Abortion Campaign groups; womens centres.

And finally, in the last 2. years womens struggle over Abortion: A Womens Right to Choose has become the most significant, feminist struggle that's been fought for a long time - not just in this country but throughout Europe. Thousands of women have been involved in local action groups and national demonstrations (again, many of them for the first time.) And in that same period the Womens Aid movement has emerged as a crucial, concrete alternative to dependance and unbearable marriages and as a demonstration of how womens autonomous power can be built. (These are discussed in the later section on the Womens Movement).

#### 4) STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES + WHAT WE'RE FIGHTING FOR.

Over the last few months, the Womens Commission has been discussing the need for a more strategic perspective on womens struggle. Given that we say the position of women as unwaged workers is fundamental, this must be the starting point of that perspective. "Wages for Housework" has been the centre of the discussion. The Commission is divided on this itself, but we all agree that the political questions raised during the discussion are crucial, and have not been adequately discussed.

Because of this we don't want a vote taken on Wages for Housework at the national conference. We feel a vote on this particular slogan, at this time, would confuse and cover up the real issues involved. Instead we'd like to put forward 4 main points, which should be voted on all together because they are all related to each other. These 4 points, taken together, should provide the outlines of a strategic perspective on the struggle against unwaged housework. They should be the guidelines for a developing programme; for newspaper articles and leaflets on womens struggle; and for women's activity.

- (i) The socialisation of housework, paid for by the state, controlled by the working class.
- (ii) Guaranteed, adequate, independent income for all women, including housewives.
- (iii) Housework to be paid for by the state, whoever does it and wherever its done.
- (iv) No division of labour between men and women, inside or outside the home.

Big Flame needs to be clear what these points mean. For example, socialisation of housework has been stressed by the womens movement and all revolutionary organisations. But it can mean many things, and Big Flame must separate itself

from reformist and anti-feminist ideas about socialisation. We don't want it so that "women can go out to work and join the class struggle". We want it because women do work and are engaged in the class struggle when they fight to work less. Although many women now fight for e.g nurseries, so they can go out to work, their struggle can't be reduced to this. If it is, womens struggle in the home is submerged and misinterpreted; the struggle for money and independence is tied to wage labour i.e the needs of capitalism, not women; and socialisation itself is defined in relation to production instead of the needs of the working class. We don't want nurseries for example, so that kids can be 'put away' and women can 'produce' more. We want to stop childcare being organised at the expense of women and children themselves.

In the long term, socialisation isn't a question of organising housework more "efficiently", getting these "backward" women out of the home and organising it all in the service of socialist production. Its about the quality of life, and a society in which people's needs come first. It means re-appropriating human activities which are now organised as hard work on the backs of women e.g childcare; it means integrating the social organisation of society as part of the unification of the working class and the building of working class community and socialist society. We don't want an uncritical adoption of bourgeois socialisation which institutionalises children, the old, the sick, the handicapped in ghettos, isolated from the rest of the working class.

In the class struggle now it means fighting every inch of the way for the power to control the services we get and to make the state pay for them. This puts the struggle of women in the open - as a fight against work, for money and a better life. And it puts forward the anti-capitalist content of the struggle of the whole working class.

Payment for housework is an important demand to make. It is one way in which women can build the power to lay down the conditions for socialisation. The work that is done in the social services and in the home is the same work organised in different ways. If this work is unpaid for anywhere the position of waged workers doing the work is weaker. And while its not paid for at home housewives are forced to do more work and are also forced to accept existing services that don't meet their needs e.g so they can get a waged job. This question is raised specifically around particular jobs e.g the State has had to consider paying women looking after elderly parents; and registered childminders in London are fighting for wages. The general demand helps to draw out what these struggles are about and the long term aims of womens struggle. Its not an alternative to socialisation. We don't accept payment of this work in the home so they can cut down services that organise the work outside. But, for example, women who choose to look after dying relatives at home should be paid for it, and have all the facilities they need so they don't have to 'put them away'; they also need the socialised services, organised in the interests of the working class.

It also helps in the fight for the 4th point, by pointing out that the work is work and must be paid for whoever does it and wherever it is done. This separates it from the idea that its "womens work" which we do naturally and for love.

Guaranteed income is the framework in which we look at all struggles for money - income based on need and not on productivity. For women its stressed as independent because we cannot destroy our sexual, emotional, political dependence on men while we're still economically dependent. It means fighting for jobs (wages) with no strings; Equal Pay with no strings; more family allowances; for lower rents and more services etc. All the particular ways women fight for money of their won.

The struggle against the division of labour requires a struggle around the other 3 points and a struggle against ideas. Material conditions and ideology define housework and certain waged jobs as "womens work" - and this traps both men and women in ghettos and sexual roles.

This is the general framework. Specifically in the coming period, we've outlined the following main areas of womens struggle -

- (1) FOR MONEY (& against work). Equal Pay with no strings; don't trust the Tribunal. Higher child allowances (at least £3). No to the 4%; higher wages and state benefits for all. Back pay for hospital workers. Independent income for all women, including housewives - against the Cohabitation Rule, for the right to SS and dole. No to price rises; lower rent, fuel and food bills. Wages for child-minders.
- (2) AGAINST INCREASED WORK (and for money). No to the Cuts - less, not more work for housewives - nurseries, hospitals, laundries paid by the state controlled by the working class. No redundancies which increase the workload and axe wages. The right to paid time off work for pregnancy, nursing sick children etc - no natural wastage.
- (3) RESIST VIOLENCE. Womens Aid Centres to be paid for by the State and controlled by the women themselves. Rape Centres ditto. Support all women on trial for resisting violence. The right of all women to organise in their own defence.
- (4) OUR BODIES: OUR LIVES Free, safe abortion on demand; a womans right to choose. A WOMANS RIGHT TO CHOOSE. For the independent right of women to choose sterilisation. For free, safe contraception. No forced abortion, contraception or sterilisation through state planning, medical prejudice, poverty or overwork.
- (5) FOR SEXUAL INDEPENDENCE & FREEDOM. The right to be lesbian. Against attacks on gay people - for the right to organise in their own defence. Support for independent gay organisation. For the right of lesbian women to custody of their children. Against all legal, political, economic, social policy which forces the dependence of women on men, and restricts sexual freedom. For the right of girls and women to information on their own bodies, contraception, abortion etc.
- (6) HOMES FOR ALL AT RENTS WE CAN AFFORD. No housing cuts. More houses. Housing to meet people's needs whether single, married, families, or groups.
- (7) THE RIGHT TO ORGANISE The right to buildings and money for Womens Centres. The right to unionise and have meetings at times and places that we can attend. The right to provision for childcare and other housework during strikes, occupations etc. For local action groups aimed at involving housewives in the Cuts Campaigns, NAC etc. For the right of women to organise autonomously in womens centres, womens groups, in the waged workplace, in the 'community', within unions, strike committees, tenants groups or independently of other organisations.

##### 5) THE WOMENS MOVEMENT.

For women to gain what we need, its essential to build an autonomous, mass womens movement. The sexual division of labour and power is the oldest in the world. Women have been at the bottom of the tip for a very long time, in every area of life - sexually, culturally, materially, politically. We have a huge job just beginning to understand and respect ourselves and each other, let alone change the world.

By a mass movement we don't just mean in numbers - we also mean it has to be an expression of and rooted inside the mass struggle of women in capitalist society. We've explained why we think the position of women is rooted in the unwaged work we do. This is the framework in which we all live and struggle and what we win against that unwaged work will affect everything else. So the womens movement has to deal with this question and build a political strategy to change it. And it has to be rooted in the struggles of all women who are already fighting and will continue to fight around this - especially the mass of working class women whose class position and position as housewives puts them in the forefront of the anti-capitalist struggle against that work.

By autonomous we mean both political and organisational autonomy. The two go together. Our movement needs to be anti-capitalist so that our struggle isn't used or subordinated by the ruling class or reformism (trade unionism, the Labour Party, the Communist party). Our needs and the needs of capitalist development are directly opposed. We also need to put our interests at the centre of the fight against capitalism, so we have to build our political autonomy against all sections of the revolutionary left who think womens struggle is a 'diversion' or an extra 'issue' tagged onto "the class struggle". The organisational autonomy of the movement (women organising together) means we find the space to think and understand what our needs and interests are. We build our self-confidence, self-respect and power so that we can fight for those interests and not be side-tracked and divided by the interests of men, which have greater power in capitalist society.

The beginnings of this movement already exist. Womens Liberation, the oldest part of the movement, is now 7 years old in Britain. There are also now a whole range of groups out of which an autonomous, mass movement can grow. Women in the National Abortion Campaign; the Womens Aid Movement; local womens action groups and socialist discussion groups; lesbian action groups; black womens groups; the Power of Women Collective; women in the Claimants Unions. There's also the women in the revolutionary left who will be drawn to a strong womens movement, and make a break with the political domination of revolutionary struggle. Altogether we call this the Womens Movement, though at the moment not all these groups are linked together or identify with each other. Womens Liberation, because it has national conferences and first started the movement, is still a main focus for many women. But many women in e.g. Womens Aid don't relate to Womens Liberation as such.

Womens Liberation has had a very important effect on womens struggle. Its given support to many women, even those who don't see themselves as part of it. Its done a lot to change ideas and help the growth of newer womens groups and campaigns. Many Womens Liberation groups have now weakened or dissolved; there's been no national co-ordinating committee since '71; and the national conferences are less and less policy-making bodies for a single movement. This doesn't mean the womens movement is dying - just that its changing and re-forming.

Out of this movement there's been several important developments. There are now a variety of feminist papers and newsletters. WIRES collects and circulates information about the movement. Spare Rib makes feminist news and ideas widely available in a readable way, and sells in newsagents etc. There's also Catcall, a feminist discussion paper, Red Rag, Womens Report. And local and 'special subject' newsletters produced by lesbian women, socialist women, NAC etc.

Womens Health groups find out about and discuss womens health, learn about self-examination and abortion, do pregnancy testing etc. Some groups concentrate on culture and propaganda, street theatre, films, art exhibitions, photos, posters. There are several therapy groups in London especially. Social events have always been an important part of the movement - womens parties, discos, rock groups, camps, bars, holidays. These are often set up by lesbian

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women and enjoyed by heterosexual women too. e.g. Oaklands Womens Centre in Wales, set up as a cheap holiday place for women, used widely by middle class and working class women and used as a playgroup and womens centre by women in the local village.

The womens movement is now committed to the demand that women have the right to define their own sexuality. Lesbian women organise their own conferences as well and have set up groups like CLAN (against attacks on lesbians.) Lesbian women are also closely involved in the setting up of womens centres and womens aid centres - their commitment to and enjoyment of being with women and being auonomous from men often makes them more willing to do this than other women in the womens movement.

In all these activities, the Womens Liberation Movement is still wrestling with the problem of how to become more accessible and involved in the struggle of working class women as a whole. There's always a tension between the personal need for self-liberation, in the small supportive group, with all the energy that requires, and the need to open the group up, spread information, and build the movement with other women whose immediate needs might be different. There's also many women who are prepared to do this but aren't sure where to start or how to do it.

Women in Big Flame are also wrestling with this. We haven't got all the answers, but we have some ideas of how we want to deal with this problem. We should be part of the continuing theoretical discussion about the direction of the movement and talk about how we work. We can contribute articles to Spare Rib, circulate discussion papers and information on our activity at conferences and in Struggle Notes. And, as in Manchester we can be part of Socialist womens discussion groups.



We can also help to build womens centres in the local areas where we work, and open out all the activity on womens health, culture, etc inside the grass roots activity of women in the area. And help to root national campaigns, like NAC, in local groups, which aim to do mass work and involve women in the area rather than concentrating solely on links with trade unions and lobbying MPs. All this will help to draw the diverse activities in the womens movement together as part of the same process of rooting that movement, and linking it to the mass struggles of women. Only by doing this will the womens movement be able to develop its strategy on a national level and build a womens offensive against the crisis and capitalism.

The National Abortion Campaign and the Womens Aid Movement are the two most important, national developments in the recent history of the womens movement.

In NAC, Big Flame women are part of the anti-capitalist, feminist tendency in the Campaign, summed up in the slogan A Womens Right to Choose. We oppose any ideas that abortion is an answer to the poverty and overwork forced on women by capitalism; or that its about "population control"; or that we need it so we can "go out to work and join the class struggle". These ideas tie womens needs to the needs of capitalism. They're anti-feminist, reformist and even downright reactionary. We fight for the right not to have children and we fight for the right to have them. So inside the abortion campaign we also raise the fight of women for the money they need and against the work they do.

And directly related to this, we fight to root the campaign in local action groups in which working class housewives can voice their interests and build their power to direct the campaign. Mass work in the area which links the campaign to the daily struggle and lives of women is essential. In that way the womens movement will be built and we'll get abortion on our terms.

There are many problems. In some areas NAC groups are dominated by Trotskyist groups who use the campaign and sabotage its anti-capitalist feminism, and who want to direct the campaign solely to winning support of trade union branches etc. Women in Big Flame feel its not always possible to work in NAC when its like this, and its better to work in other ways. Where possible, though, we will and do work with other women in NAC.

The Womens Aid Movement is the first national movement to be based in and created by the struggle of working class housewives. In working class areas we all know the extent of violence against women, made worse by living and working conditions of everyone in the family. We also know that in these areas its especially hard to find solutions - women are trapped by lack of money, housing, the isolation of new estates or the tightness of old communities. Without collective struggle - Refuges especially, and fighting for social security and rehousing - its left to personal solutions and social-working, which fails to change the general situation. Within the Womens Aid Movement there's also a struggle between the idea that refuges should be run by councils and social workers and the idea that it should be run by the women themselves. Again, its the difference between reformism and feminism, between the idea that battering is an individual 'problem' and the analysis that its a product of the position of women in capitalism and that women themselves must build the power to change it.

The development of the womens movement generally, and a political strategy, will greatly strengthen this movement. And Womens Aid in turn will be crucial in building that movement. Where possible, this too should get support from Big Flame through our active involvement.

Background reading. Big Flame womens group reports to the conference.  
Wages for Housework discussion - 5 papers, four of them in Internal Bulletin.  
Womens Aid article in Internal Bulletin.  
Draft reports from Womens Commission (2 from CM L'pool: 1 from Leeds)  
Womens Struggle Notes

Also useful reading - Spare Rib (last 3 issues): CIS Report "Women Under Attack":  
CSE pamphlet no. 2 "On the political economy of women"; Wires.

OUT SOON FINAL SECTION ON WOMEN IN BF:INTERNAL ORGANISATION:STRUGGLE NOTES



## FUNCTION OF THE WOMEN'S COMMISSION

This is the only forum for women to share their experiences and develop an analysis and propose strategies. This has proved to be an almost impossible task because there is always too much to discuss.

### Proposals

1. Women involved in the same areas of struggle eg Women's aid, NAC, Right to Fuel, Hospitals etc., should find ways of sharing their experiences eg holding local meetings and inviting other comrades along.
2. We should be clear about what we want from each other women's commission. Different commissions throughout the year will require a different approach. If we want to collectivise our experience then the women's commission should be open and all women in BF be encouraged to attend. If we have specific issues to debate eg wages for housework, involvement in NC etc, then each group should be responsible for having a thorough discussion on the issue and mandating delegates to go to the women's comm. This should not exclude any other women who wish to go from doing so.
3. The on-going debate should reflect the overall direction of BF in order to support the women on the NC.

### Propoganda

#### 1. Struggle Notes.

- 1) There should be a women's publication which is acknowledged as "Big Flame".
- 2) Women who wish to be involved in the editorial collective should put their names forward.
- 3) The resources in the Liverpool office should be used for layout and the publication should be printed.
- 4) The women in BF must be responsible for raising money to support a publication. (NB the National paper is in financial difficulty).
- 5) We must contact all the women we want to involve and ask them what they would like to see and what they are willing to contribute. Without outside participation we should not attempt this venture because realistically the women in BF do not have the resources to make a good publication.
- 6) Attempt should be made to hold women's meetings around any publication (see KT's document). This will go a long way towards providing the forums which we are lacking in BF to share specific experiences. They could also be used to raise money. (See "From Flame-Eating to Flame-Throwing" KT, WLBFF.)

#### b) National Newspaper

- 1) Every women's group should prepare a critique of the paper. Say what is wrong and right, and people would like to see in it, why some women don't read it etc. (Send to editor)
- 2) The women's commission should prepare a series of feature pages.
- 3) All groups should see it as a part of their base work to widen the consciousness of women they work with beyond their particular situation and try and use the newspaper as part of this.

#### c) Other Publications

We should contribute to and sell Spare Rib, and write to it as members of BF.

## MAIN AREAS OF WORK

### Proposals

- 1) We participate in the "Child Benefit Scheme" campaign initiated by CPAG. We use their petition and produce our own national leaflet.
- 2) We investigate ways of initiating a campaign against the co-habitation rule as part of our perspective of independent income.
- 3) We should discuss antifascist activity and how women in BF participate in this. More women should try to go on demos and support each other.

### National participation & commitment within Big Flame

The political perspective outlined in the rest of the report is an accumulation of ideas drawn together from the women in BF out of our practice. We are all in BF because we believe in the creative powers of the working class and work in a mass way in order to draw out that power and direct it towards socialism. In all our areas of activities with women we analyse the struggles in order to find ways of broadening out these struggles beyond the particular issue. Extra to this BF acknowledges the fact that women face special oppression, we therefore support and encourage the independent organisation of women for their own power. Although the general analysis of the report is not complete and is weak in certain areas (eg Women at work), it does show that the women in BF are working towards an alternative perspective to the Right to Work. This perspective is part of the overall strategy of BF and needs incorporating nationally into all base activities.

### National Committee

A lot of work done by women in BF has been lost on the organisation as a whole, often kept in the confines of the Women's Commission if heard at all. The NC is the body of BF which should make it clear debates of local groups and the commissions to the whole organisation. This necessitates the participation of women on the NC to ensure BF represents the necessary feminist perspectives.

The difficulties for women to participate effectively on the NC are numerous:-

1. Time This is the most obvious problem because women within BF have a double role as militants and feminists.

#### 2. Capability

Involvement on the NC requires a particular type of person ie someone able to analyse the general situation and direct the application of this into the wide range of our base activities. A lot of women in BF see this as beyond their capabilities and yet as has already been said we are all doing this all the time in our areas of work. The problem is not that women are incapable but that we try to define our capabilities in "male" terms ie someone who can articulate all situations and make general analyses. (Although you've probably noticed this is often expressed in such an obscure way that its not much use to the mass of people)

Women on the other hand are more sensitive to ideas which arise from everyday situations and of finding ways of expressing their views in a way that is available to everyone.

#### 3. Need a wide ranging knowledge of all issues

This should not be a problem if BF took seriously the process of education.

#### 4. Men on the NC

It is often the case that the men who see the ideological need for a feminist perspective are also the ones that make this process impossible because of the 'heavy' way they act in and out of meetings.

#### 5. Discussion on the NC often irrelevant to the areas of women's work

This is obviously not a problem of having an NC, but reflects the fact that the organisation and particularly the women within the organisation have not put enough energy into the NC.

### Proposals

1. All women's groups should consider which women and men they would like to see on the NC.

2. The organisation needs to take the process of education and cadre formation seriously and find structures to make this effective. At the moment the needs of the organisation are developing quicker than the capabilities of members to deal with the situation.

3. There should be a serious debate among the women as to whether we can overcome the difficulties women face within an organisation with tighter political centralisation, or whether we should accept that women can only go forward outside tight structural boundaries.