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# Bad Attitude

- ★ Squished Bureaucrats
- ★ Strangled Restarters

- ★ and more...

- ★ Parenting on our terms

- ★ Pit Camp Women - Rid Ourselves of the Government!



- Dykes Do It ★
- Brighton ★
- Washington ★
- Moscow ★
- Managua ★
- Brixton!... ★

Striking Women Strike Again



# FLARE SCARE

## NO FLARES HERE!

On many occasions we've been asked about our political and editorial line. When we say we don't have one, people are shocked, disappointed or don't believe us.

So we've taken this criticism to heart. Yes, we can sit on the fence no longer! In the struggles ahead sides must be taken - for the side of freedom against the forces of reaction. Due to popular demand, here is the line. A line everyone in the collective is wholeheartedly and unequivocally clear about: we hate flared trousers.

## FLAPPING IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WINDS

When I walk into Miss Spendthrift and see wall to wall sartorial refugees from my childhood do I get upset? When I see the flared frighteners that neatly demarcated some of the very worst experiences of my life, do I start sweating and wobbling a bit? Do I have to sit down and ask for a drink of water? When it comes, do I clutch the sales assistant with a clammy hand and start muttering obliquely about Jimmy Tarbuck, jaunty belts, and men with barely restrained facial hair? Nope. I'm smug. Well almost.

'Why?' I hear you ask. 'Tell us your secret so that we don't come over all funny and go marching up to people in the street and asking why they want to look so stupid.' Well, girls, I have a plan. Or not exactly a plan but a theory. Basically, my theory is that flares are the harbingers of the new feminist revolution. They come swishing in advance of an army of be-clogged and en-platformed sisters who will come marching up to the patriarchy and put a cork-soled and very heavy boot into it's

balls. 'You,' they will cry, 'have made us look like idiots. And stuff all this crap about fashion being liberating choice and a lucky dip of pleasure and sexuality. Bollocks. We're tired of our feet hurting, of not being able to get from A to S very fast, of not being able to run for a bus, or run away from mad bastards. We're sick of it. So hand over world government to us now, or we're going to take these and stick them up your arses. And the flares look stupid too.'

Yes, sisters, I know cos I was there the first time. And I've seen the 'photos. All those stropy women - in flares. So, patriarchy, watch out. Put a woman in flares and you put revolution in motion...



## WHY WE'RE LATE

Well, if you have tried to contact Bad Attitude over the last month you might well have been a bit pissed off at how slow we've been getting back to you. Also, you might notice that we're a bit later than usual with this issue. Here's why.

It seems a group of fascists have decided to mount an offensive against some bookshops. Freedom Bookshop in Whitechapel has been attacked twice in the last month - most recently a serious arson attack, Index Books in Brixton and Kilburn Bookshop have also been attacked. 121 in Brixton, where Bad Attitude is based, has also had a couple of arson attempts and threats. Consequently, we've had to alter our routine a bit and everything has been slowed down.

This is happening against a backdrop of increasing racism. Right wing groups across Europe have been capitalising on the effects of the depression and gaining some support, from those hit economically, for their disgusting and stupid racist views. It's no excep-

tion here in Britain.

There has been an increase in hate crimes in general, against people of colour, lesbians, gays and people in anarchist and left-wing groups. Not all those perpetrating these attacks belong to organised fascist groups: There are enough freelance fascists around from every from every part of society. But there has been an increase in organised fascist activity.

In South-East London, people are being murdered whilst pathetic liberals wibble on about 'curtailing free speech'. When will they realise that it is violence, it's backed up with racist actions and it's backed by the state, and it 'curtails' lives?

Well, fuck the fascists, we're staying, just like everyone else in this country they don't like. And we'll protect ourselves and fight back. However, if you have lots of money, we could do with better security at 121.

As for the post, well that's a mixture of getting burned, getting stolen and MIS.

## A letter!

### Radical dyke counselling project - wanna set one up?

So far, we are a group of five dykes who are excited about being part of setting up a radical counselling project for dyke survivors of sexual and physical violence and those who have in the past, or are now, experiencing ongoing emotional abuse.

We're concerned that there should be a lesbian counselling project in London that has radical politics. For us, this would include dykes working within the project having a positive lesbian identity and choosing to put

energy into other dykes.

We came together because of a shared commitment to counselling around violence against women as well as wanting there to be a place for dykes to go which is specifically dyke-focused.

We feel that as dyke survivors we should be able to contact and get support from other dykes who have an understanding of how our experiences make us feel and the effect they have on our lives.

So, as a start we've organised a meeting for dykes to get together, talk about what we want and to share ideas with each other. We feel it would be great if dykes from all sections of the dyke community could be involved - so we all create the sort of project we all want!

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**Thanks to:** Jill and the women at Trent Road, Susan, Format (lovely) Photo Agency, Leveller Graphics, 121 Bookshop, Rif, Polly, Sanja, Svenja, Heidi, Asti, Savi, Laurence Jaugey-Paget and all contributors and subscribers.

**Distributed by:** Central Books, 99 Wallis Road, London E9 5LN. Tel: 081 986 4854

**Printed by:** Goodhead Press, Chaucer International Estate, Launton Road, Bicester, Oxon OX6 7QF

**Bad Attitude, 121 Raiton Road, London SE24 0LR. Tel: 071 978 9057**

**Cover photo:** Laurence Jaugey-Paget

**Is there still a women's movement in this country? What's happening for women? Where? Why? How?**

Find out in this month's issue.



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# Nicaragua: fighting for a sexuality free of prejudice

In June '92 the National Assembly in Nicaragua passed a law putting gays at risk of between one and three years in prison for practising, promoting or advertising living with someone of the same sex in a 'scandalous way'.

There were strong protests from various groups both nationally and internationally against this law and calls for the President Violetta Chamorro not to sanction the law but to veto it. However, in July '92 she signed it, being the puppet that she is.

Currently, the law is 'sleeping' and cannot yet be used as it is awaiting an appeal at the Supreme Court of Justice. Many groups, centres and collectives are active in trying to stop the law. It is unconstitutional, violating twenty articles of the Political Constitution which contains fundamental rights and guar-

antees for people and the family.

There is no shortage of lesbians and gay men in Nicaragua, they are a strong force and it is clear that the Catholic Church and the UNO government don't like it. Though gays weren't too popular with the Sandinistas either.

Xochiquetzal is the name of the lesbian and gay group at the centre of 'Campaign for a Sexuality Free of Prejudice'. All cards, faxes and telegrams to support the appeal against the law can be sent to:-

Recurso de Amparo, Corte Supreme de Justicia, Plaza España, Frente al Supermercado la Catonia, Managua, Nicaragua

In the next issue of *Bad Attitude* we will be bringing you a more in-depth report on women in Nicaragua.

# Dynamic campaign saves Feminist Library

When did you last go to a lobby or demo and get what you were asking for? Are you starting to wonder if these forms of action ever work?

The recent SAVE THE FEMINIST LIBRARY CAMPAIGN might challenge your cynicism - although hundreds of letters and phone calls, six lobbies and 24 hour round-the-clock work by collective and volunteers might seem worth more than a mere £12,139.

The Feminist Library had survived through volunteer's work without any funding since 1988 until Southwark decided to raise the rent in October 1991. The rent, rates and service charges had been £1 per year; Southwark wanted to charge £12,139 for a building they had been given free.

The first stage in the campaign was getting on the agenda and being able to talk to Southwark. This took most of the first year of the campaign. The letters and phone calls during this time resulted in one visit from the council leader, Sally Keeble, and some discussion at Women's Committee but no real action.

The second stage of the campaign was more direct interaction with the council. Volunteers found out which people and committees were responsible for making the decisions. Phoning the council daily meant the Feminist Library learned when the meetings would be held and could request deputations and send briefing papers to the committee members. Other volunteers visited councillors surgeries to make sure Southwark Council knew residents' views. The phone calls and letters continued and volunteers spoke more frequently to councillors and Council officers.

The first action by Southwark was during the last Women's Committee on 5 May (They have now been forced to become part of an Equal Opportunities Committee). £7,239 was approved for a recurring revenue grant for service charge and rates.

The remaining action occurred at the first council meeting after the yearly AGM. £4,900

**Riot grrrls muff-diving in front of the White House during the dyke march in which about 20,000 dykes raged through the streets of Washington DC, USA. April '93**

**photo: Dana Schuerholz/Format/Impact Visuals**

was agreed on 25 May by the Strategic and Corporate Services (Urgency) Committee. They agreed to a rent transfer—Southwark are the ones wanting the rent; they can pay this rent to themselves. The overall effect is that the rent transfer does not cost Southwark any money.

The Feminist Library is back where it started. It still is housed in five crowded rooms. It still continually looks for volunteers. It still needs a stable source of funding. When will it get the £70,000 it needs to run a full service?

**Feminist Library Resource and Information Centre**, 5 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7XW Telephone 071 928 7789 Open: Tues 11-8pm, Sat & Sun 2-5pm.

# Riots international: part I: Belgrade

The first riots since 1990 happened in Belgrade on 1 June. People demonstrated in front of the Parliament, protesting against the removal of Yugoslav President Cosic and against economic conditions. But the trigger for the demonstration was the fight in Parliament, when one of the opposition MP's was floored by a punch from an MP of the Serbian Radical Party, which is very supportive to Serbian President Milosevic (i.e. very nationalistic, violent, totalitarian, and most frightening - with a great deal of power).

The number of policemen was enormous; they were heavily armed (armoured cars, tear gas, rubber bullets, and baton charges) and very brutal. The demonstrators stoned police and smashed the windows in the parliament. Unfortunately, the centre of Belgrade was cleared up in a few hours by heavy force. 121 people were arrested and one POLICEMAN dead. The leader of the opposition, Vuk Draskovic was arrested, beaten up in the police station and severely injured, and indicted by a Belgrade court on charges of

seeking to overthrow the state. The charges carry penalties of 10-15 years imprisonment. Meanwhile, he remains in custody for 30 days.

The opposition in Serbia was depressed enough after the elections in December 1992 when Milosevic won again. Now they are frightened. I don't particularly like Draskovic, nor think that his politics is very different from Milosevic's; but he was the symbol of the fight against the Serbian government. This trial is going to be just another political trial, already seen so many times in different totalitarian regimes. If all this happened to the leader of the opposition party, the safety of small anti-war actions is particularly under threat. WOMEN IN BLACK and BELGRADE ANTI-WAR CENTRE have most of their actions on the streets, completely unprotected; and as women they are specially vulnerable.

It's been ten days since the riots, and another has not happened yet. It must start soon, and I am looking forward to it. Let's overthrow the state!

Sanja



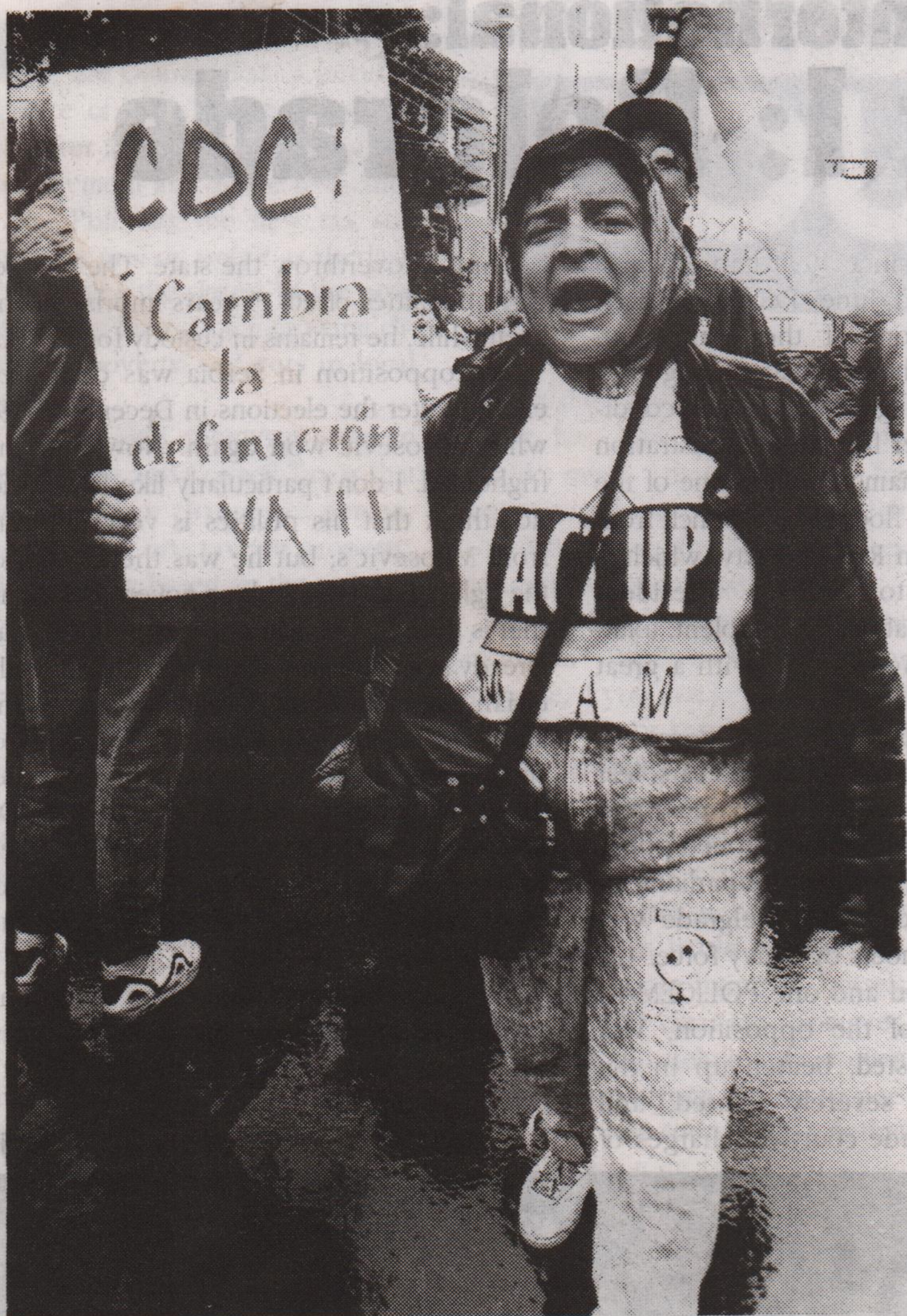
# The enemy within Fortress Europe

Europe's getting right bloody horrible at the moment. Mass, murderous attack on anyone un-german enough and passing fascist-friendly immigration laws in Germany, Britain bringing in more and more racist immigration legislation. France planning 'zero immigration' legislation of its very own. Yuk, oh yuk. It's all pretty bad.

Yet despite the governments of european countries mass collusion with the forces of right extremism, people are mounting some stiff opposition. In Germany, there was organ-

ised disruption and rioting as the legislation to prohibit immigration was passed, with some serious attempts at blocking the entry of MPs into the Bundestag. Now, following the attacks on Turkish people in Solingen, there is mass civil disturbance and rioting there, with more promised. Good.

In France, street protests against the new legislation are planned for June 14-19. So if you want to combine a little protest with a continental break, this might be your ideal opportunity.



**'Centre for Disease Control (CDC) change the definition now!' Hundreds marched in pouring rain to the CDC, in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. The list of opportunistic infections that define AIDS (according to the CDC) does not include illnesses specific to women who are HIV positive, limiting treatment available to women and the allocation of research money. Demo 1990 - the definition still hasn't been changed.**

photo: Dana Schuerholz/Format/Impact Visuals

## Malaysian women combat domestic violence

Malaysian women, including the All Women's Action Society (AWAM), are lobbying for MPs to pass a Bill on Domestic Violence. At present there is a lack of protective legislation in Malaysia for abused women and their children.

AWAM was born out of the 1985 Malaysian Campaign Against Violence Against Women and has been involved, together with the Joint Action Group, in raising awareness and spear-heading reforms on rape and domestic violence. November 17th began the 'Asia Pacific Week to Campaign Against Violence Against Women'.

Malaysian women have also been working on grassroots projects for battered women. In 1982, the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), the first refuge of its kind, was set up. It offered battered women and their children "a decent alternative and the opportunity of a new and more fulfilling life".

The first shelter was made possible by a single large donation. Today WAO has grown to run two centres: a shelter and a childcare, which has childcare facilities for ex-residents who have decided to leave violent partners.

WAO's fundamental belief is that "no one deserves to be battered...all human beings have the right to self-determination and should have control over the conditions that shape our lives".

WAO gets an annual grant from the government, but depends largely on public donations. Day to day running of the centres depends on staff and volunteers. One big problem the refuge faces is harassment from angry husbands.

WAO also hopes to see the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act.

Info from: *Waves* (newsletter of AWAM), 43C Jalan SS6/12, 47301 Kelan Jaya, Malaysia.

# Native sisters fight against the Feds

Mary and Carrie Dann, the Western Shoshone Indian sisters in Nevada, have been fighting the S. government for 20 years for their right to ranch in their ancestral lands. This land is claimed by the U.S. government as their property although they cannot provide any legal document to prove their claim. The US Supreme Court ruled in 1991 that the title had been transferred "in the latter part of the 19th century". The Indian Claims Commission (ICC), created by the Congress in 1946, had ruled in 1962 that "the lands were taken at some point in the past". In 1966 money was placed in the US Treasury for this land and although the Shoshone Indians have not accepted the money it was deemed

by the court in 1991 as having been legally paid.

The only fair legal document in existence proves the land still belonging to the Western Shoshone Indians. The document is The Treaty of Peace and Friendship of Ruby Valley which was agreed on in 1863 by the U.S. government and the Western Shoshone Indians. In it the Indians agreed to stop fighting the U.S. government and permit roads, railways and mines to be built in return for tools and livestock to enable the Indians to ranch on their lands. According to this treaty the lands still belong to the Western Shoshone Indians and the US government and courts have no jurisdiction over the Indians.

The federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) started

impounding the Dann's livestock, along with the wild horses grazing the Shoshone lands, after the Supreme Court ruling in 1991. Their attacks have culminated in the conviction of Clifford Dann, the brother of Mary and Carrie, of the assault on federal agents while trying to free wild mustangs. Per (= she, he) was sentenced on 13th May 1993. Per and the Western Shoshone National Council are appealing on the grounds of the sovereignty of the Western Shoshone Nation recognised in the 1863 treaty.

Information for this from *New Directions for Women*, Volume 22, Number 3, May-June 1993. Further information: the Western Shoshone Defense Project, General Delivery, Crescent Valley, Nevada 89821, U.S.A., 702-968-0230.

## And where are we supposed to go then?

The evil Tory government, manic in its plans to drive the poor to the complete edge of a liveable existence, are planning to make squatting a criminal offence, with fines of £5000 or 6 months in prison being talked about. At the moment it looks like they might try and rush this through, as part of the Criminal Justice Bill, this summer.

Criminal Justice, ha, ha. What justice? Many people in squats would be homeless if they hadn't moved

into some deserted, usually dilapidated, property. Is everyone poor supposed to sleep on the streets until a harsh frost wipes out the deficit between incoming monies and welfare payments? Phew! says Mr Bastard, that's the pension problem sorted out. Of course not. People will still squat because people have to squat - it'll just be ridiculously unpleasant.

If you consider that people having to sleep on the streets is

not just sad but grotesquely immoral by any objective standard, then the fact that people are allowed to use property to speculate and thus stand empty whilst people are homeless and that the government owns property lying vacant or falling down silently is disgusting. Clearly, this bunch of scum aren't interested in doing anything about homelessness, just in attacking those who do something for themselves.

## Esen Yilmaz Campaign

A British Turkish women's group is campaigning around the murder of Esen Yilmaz, a 29 year old Turkish woman found brutally battered to death in her flat in Stoke Newington.

Esen Yilmaz was brutalised by her husband and his family throughout her marriage, eventually they threw her out, after which she lived in a women's refuge for eight months. During this time she was forced to make her daughter a ward of court through fear that her former husband would abduct the child.

Esen Yilmaz remarried in Turkey but her husband was unable to enter Britain upon return as a result of racist immigration laws. She faced the further problem of being refused access to her daughter. Unable to take her out of the

country, Esen had been forced to leave her with her former husband.

Esen was victimised by her community for having dared speak out about the violence she had faced and for asserting her independence. In the last six months of her life, she as subject to violence, harassment and abuse, particularly from male members of her community. Eventually, both Esen and her neighbours became so worried about her safety, they contacted Stoke Newington police. The neighbours also contacted the housing department of the local authority.

They failed her completely. She was murdered and her killer/s remain unknown.

The Turkish women's group spearheading the campaign is a forty-strong group of women from a variety of backgrounds. On 22

March they organised a very successful march protesting the institutionally sanctioned woman-hating and racism that allowed this murder.

Contact: **Justice for Esen Yilmaz Campaign**, c/o Justice for Women, 55 Rathcoole Gdns, London N8 9NE

### Bigamy Pays

Enterprising Chinese women have found a way to get rich quick. Bigamy is the answer as it seems that two hubbies are more lucrative than one. These can then be tricked into giving women money. Unfortunately, it seems that the Chinese police are cracking down on all this.

Info.: *Women's News Digest*, no. 28, Jan 1993

# No pay — no way

The Government has been threatening for some time to start US style "workfare" forced labour schemes for claimants. So far this has meant threats through the existing Restart system and schemes such as Employment Training, Job Plan and others - the names change but basically its the same old piss in a different bottle.

Workfare basically means working for your dole; the term comes from 'Welfare', but you work for it, gettit? In the States income support or 'welfare' is pretty much limited to families, and it is single women with kids who are the main targets of welfare 'reforms'. Obviously this state offensive against women is not limited to the USA - we see it here with the Child Support Act as just one example. And it's not limited to extreme right-wing Republicans; President Clinton, the great liberal hope of America and husband of that ultra-fab feminist Hillary, is a supporter of Workfare and pushed such a programme as Arkansas governor.

On both sides of the Atlantic the talk about 'training' is nonsense. These programmes are really about enforcing work-discipline on the workless; the political and intimate personal control of the wageless, particularly wageless women. There are also some important political differences: in the US there's less acceptance that 'income support' should go to anyone that needs it; even less that people may choose to reject waged work. Welfare recipients are much more isolated and stigmatised than the average doleer in this country - exactly what current government policy aims for here. Again, this isn't limited to Tories - there are left-wing versions of the work ethic and austerity /cuts as well. Remember the 'Social Contract'? That was the last Labour government's strategy to boost British capitalism.

## Call me irresponsible...

And speaking of social contracts, Clinton's keen on them too! In his policy statement on welfare, he calls for 'a new social contract...to put government back on the side of people who play by the rules' and talks about making responsibility 'an instrument of national purpose'. He calls on Americans to take 'personal responsibility...for the religious faiths they follow, the ethics they practice, the values they instil, and the pride they take in their work'. Sound familiar? This 'responsibility' shite is applied to poor and low income women; they're on benefit because they are 'irresponsible', and women who raise children without being attached to a man represent the height of 'irresponsibility'. Lesley Wolfe from the Center for Women Policy Studies wrote: "I think it's the kind of rhetoric that can be used by people who want to punish women... To some extent we have to talk about how the rules are invented to punish women, especially women who break the rules of patriarchy".

Clinton calls for a two-year limit on benefits, which has been coming into law (or being considered) in many states since the beginning of 1992. This means that benefit is cut or

reduced for able-bodied AFDC (Aid For Families with Dependent Children) recipients with children over two who 'refuse' to work or participate in a state-mandated job programme. Along with these limits come various statutes aimed at controlling the personal behaviour of women on benefit, or 'behaviour modification' tactics. A New Jersey law (the Family Development Act) going into effect in July encourages women to marry someone (not their children's biological father), promising they will be able to keep more of their combined income without losing AFDC benefits.

## 'Family cap' - family crap!

This law also contains a provision called "the family cap" which cuts off all benefits to any child born while a woman is on AFDC (of course the "family cappers" are also anti-abortionists!). Some states are considering "fertility" proposals, in which women on AFDC are offered 'bonuses' if they "volunteer" to be sterilised or implanted with the birth control device Norplant.

Other states that have passed or are considering "family cap" legislation include California, Maryland and Ohio. In Wisconsin "Bridefare" has received a federal go-ahead and awaits approval by the state legislature. Welfare mothers aged 18-22 will be allowed only one child. The second child receives only \$37 per month, additional children receive no support at all. There is also pressure on mothers to marry. In Maryland AFDC benefits were cut by 7% in 1991, and the Governor has proposed slashing them an additional 30% if parents did not pay rent or keep children in school.

## Bunk off & starve

Which brings us to 'Learnfare', operating in Wisconsin and Ohio. When the child of an AFDC mother has three unexcused absences from school in one month, her share of benefits is withheld the next month. Teen-aged mothers are required to return to school by the time the child is 90 days old, or they lose their benefit.

The very existence of this law is horrendous in itself, and made even more oppressive by arbitrary enforcement. There's been many errors, with little leeway for mothers to defend themselves or appeal decisions. Benefit has been stopped when children were attending school. Or teen-aged mothers staying home from school with sick children have been punished with loss of benefit.

So what's this all in aid of? They try to justify these schemes in terms of saving money, with racism and the old "family values" thrown in. Clinton talks a lot about "training" and "self-



sufficiency" - crap!...even in their own logic its crap! In Wisconsin 1987 when AFDC benefits were cut 6%, \$3.5 million were taken from the poor allegedly to create jobs. But with only low-paying jobs made available; women ended up worse off than on welfare after shelling out for transport, childcare, clothes, etc. Training programmes lasted 6-8 weeks, leading only to dead-end low-paid jobs if any at all. AFDC mothers who wanted to go to college were discouraged from doing so, and pressured to accept the first shitty job that came along. Programmes in other states followed a similar pattern.

## Expensive scumbags

Pat Gowens, founder of action/support group Welfare Warriors, points out that job programmes only created jobs for the administrators and supervisors - so that money taken from poor women created lucrative jobs for the middle classes. Learnfare in Wisconsin cost more in taxes (3.5 million) than it saved - and the cost of hiring enforcers exceeded that amount! In fact, the expensive army of snoopers, scabs, grasses, and bureaucrats these programmes require show the real aim of the state isn't simply economy, but social control over women and working class people - waged and unwaged. The rhetoric and pro-

paganda put about is meant to turn 'respectable' waged workers against lazy, shiftless dolees and scroungers, especially single mothers who dare to raise children without the blessings of husband or state.

How have women on welfare organised against these measures? An example is Welfare Warriors, formed in Milwaukee Wisconsin 1986. They took their inspiration from a group of low-income women in Mexico called the Marias, who showed how to make "low-income women's culture more visible to each other, to share information, and to unite to gain power over our lives." They publish a newsletter, staff a help-line, organised anti-rape and lead poisoning self-help groups, and started a support and day care group.

There may be more groups doing work around these issues in the USA, and we welcome more information about them. If the Government is trying to change Income Support into a USA style Workfare system, we can learn from the ways women have organised against it. \*

Most info came from articles by Kathy Astor and Esty Dinur in: *New Directions for Women* 108 Palisades Ave, Englewood, NJ 07631 USA

Rozanne

# Parenting on our terms

When you have a child by self-insemination, what are you letting yourself in for? What's it going to be like for the child?

Everyone's experiences are different, but there's a lot to be learned by hearing how it's been for women who have done it. A new book, *Alternative Beginnings*, by Lisa Saffron, tells it like it is. In the following article, with extracts from the book, she emphasises that there is no one correct way of creating a new kind of family.

Most of the women who consider and practice self-insemination are lesbians along with a smaller number of single heterosexual women. This book is written for all these women with an emphasis on the experience of lesbians. It gives a mixture of practical advice and personal experiences to explore the many issues raised by choosing self-insemination. It is intended not only as a guide to help women with the mechanics of getting pregnant, but as a way of sharing experiences of the consequences of self insemination, parenting and co-parenting, single parenting, splitting up and staying together, relationships or not with donors, communicating with the children, not getting pregnant, telling others, the risk of infection and disease, and the legal position of all the people involved.

Sharing our personal experiences is one way of making our lives as lesbian mothers visible, of validating our choices and of learning from each other. It is important for all of us to know that there are other women doing self insemination. The women interviewed for this book as well as the children and the men are not necessarily typical of all people doing self insemination, yet they represent a wide range of experiences. I want to convey that there are as many ways to go about this as there are individuals doing it and that each of us is creating our own future.

## Threat to family values - too right!

There is no formula for successful family-making and very few role models of lesbian parents or of single mothers by choice. There is no right way to do it. It is not more right-on to have an anonymous donor than a known donor or two lesbian mothers rather than one or vice versa. We are part of a lesbian community which is very diverse with women making widely differing choices about the kind of families they create. This diversity is something to celebrate and honour. We live in a society that passively denies or actively attacks the rights of lesbian-led families to exist. The courage and strength we have to live our lives as we choose comes from each other - from knowing there are other lesbians having children and from acceptance of each others' struggles.

The existence of lesbian and single mothers is a threat to traditional family values.

Consciously or not, we are challenging the need for fathers, the institution of marriage and the male-female couple as the model of the ideal parents. We are saying that families can be made up of different people with a variety of relationships to each other and still be healthy places in which children grow up and in which women can be mothers. We are changing the basic definition of a family. No longer is it a group of people related by blood, marriage or divorce, but it is a group of people who love and care for each other. It doesn't even have to include children. Our families are not lacking in anything. There is no need to compensate for the absence of a father or to apologise for not conforming to the expected family norm.

This book presents no justification of lesbian and single motherhood since none is necessary. It starts with the assumption that women are going ahead, despite society's prejudices towards our methods of conception, the families we create, our lesbianism or our ability to be good mothers. As more babies are being born and our children grow up, we too are growing up into greater acceptance of ourselves as lesbian and single mothers.

The following account is by Toni, a woman who did self-insemination in 1984 and has a daughter named Claire.

## Decisions Decisions

"I chose to get pregnant on my own. I don't regret the decision because I love my daughter Claire so much, despite all the pain of parenting, and because I don't see what else I could have done.

Ideally I wanted to have a partner to share this activity with, but I had little confidence in my ability to form a secure long-term relationship. I was in a rocky relationship with a woman at the time I made the decision, but I never saw her as having any long-term part in my plans. We split up when I was pregnant. I felt that if I postponed the baby until after the right woman came along and after we had established ourselves together, I might well be into the menopause. I was strongly influenced by a friend who had waited until conditions were right in her life before starting inseminations at the age of 40. After one miscarriage, she never succeeded in getting pregnant again and was very bitter.

In fact, it turned out that I was right not to expect a partner to appear on the scene for

quite some time. It wasn't until Claire was five and a half that I met Theresa, fell in love with her and set up home with her. We've now been a family for three years and I no longer think of myself as a single mother. But for five and a half years, I was on my own with Claire and at first it was hell.

During that time, the one saving grace was Marie. Marie has looked after Claire at least once a week and on occasional weekends since Claire was six months old. She is an exceptional friend and has only let me down once that I can remember. If something came up and she couldn't have Claire when she'd promised, she would find another babysitter herself. This has given me valuable child-free time, so desperately needed by any single mother. But that's only a small part of Marie's involvement. What she has given Claire is just as valuable - another long-term relationship with someone who loves her. It has prevented me and Claire from developing an overly intense mother-daughter relationship. It has also been wonderful to have someone who loves Claire with whom I can share my joy in Claire as well as my troubles. I am incredibly lucky to have had Marie in our lives.

Before my daughter, Claire, was born, I had thought vaguely about how I would explain self-insemination and the donor/father person to her, but my experience of actually telling her has taught me that telling is not a one-way process, nor is it a once-and-for-all-time matter.

I explained the procedure of self insemination in very simple terms several times between the ages of two and five. It was hard to say how much she took in and I didn't want to overload her. I got a few right-on books on the subject which were dreadfully tedious and neither of us could be bothered to look at them more than once.

## Pierre's Prezzie

When Claire was just three, she began to ask about her daddy. In fact, "Where is my daddy?" were nearly her first words, after she had perfected the word "no". I gave her my prepared line that her daddy was a very nice man named Pierre who had generously given me sperm so that I could have a baby and she was that very much wanted baby. I had decided not to describe him to her as a donor because I can't relate to that term. He was a real person, not just a source of sperm.

She bought this story for about a week. Then, out of the blue, came the next logical question: "I want to see my daddy. Where is he?" Again I was ready with the line about different kinds of families with different kinds of daddies. We have the kind of family where the daddy does not live with us. I found I was able to provide examples from people she knew for most of these variants of family life. I was quite pleased with myself. At the end of this recital, she said very firmly, "Why can't I see my daddy?"

If I had never known Pierre, I suppose Claire's curiosity could have gone no further. But in fact I did know him (although I had had no contact with him since I became pregnant) and I was happy about them meeting. Since he had only agreed to be a donor, I didn't feel I had the right to change the conditions we had set years before. Unknown to me, Pierre was thinking along the same lines. He too wanted to meet Claire, but felt he couldn't invade my territory or presume that he had a right to see the child he had made possible. I wrote to him and he and I met without Claire to discuss what we were getting into.

## Conform Please

I tried to be very casual when I told Claire, then age four and a half, that she would meet her daddy for the first time, but she was absolutely manic when we finally did meet at a museum. She held his hand, told him she loved him and dragged him around the museum at a furious pace. She certainly had internalised a traditional view of "daddy" because she tried to get me and Pierre to hold hands too as we walked along the street.

Pierre began coming over about once or twice a month and we gradually evolved relationships which became very friendly and not so intense. Four years on from that first meeting, Claire is relaxed about her daddy and happy with the friendship they have. She knows who her daddy is, but seems not to want anything more. It feels more comfortable to me as well to have Pierre's involvement with us and to be able to tell Claire something more than that her daddy was a very nice man.

I have explained about me being a lesbian, but have been cautious about telling her too much about homophobia. She is easily upset. I know that Claire does hear a lot of rubbish from her classmates, especially from

the boys. They tend to lay down the law, saying things like a lesbian is half girl and half boy, the halves being the right and the left. Claire told them that they were just wrong. I find it hard to get a balance between preparing her for the homophobia she will continue to encounter and terrifying her with reality before she is ready to cope with it.

### Three mummies + a daddy

One day she came home from infant school and told me this story: at school we had an assembly about families. My teacher asked me if I would stand up and talk about my family. I didn't mind. I told everyone that I have three mummies and a daddy. I live with my mummy Toni and her girlfriend Theresa who is my mummy too. I also have a part-time mummy, Marie, who I live with some of the time. Marie has a new girlfriend. My daddy, Pierre, lives with his boyfriend and I like them both a lot. After I told everyone about my family, lots of children raised their hands to ask me questions. A boy in my class asked the first question and he wanted to know how many cars our family has. I was going to count them, but my teacher said that the assembly was about families, not about cars. Someone else asked which mummy had sexed with my daddy to make me. I said that they didn't sex. Pierre put the sperm in a jar. Then another boy asked, "Shouldn't some of those people be married to each other?" I said, "No, they don't have to. They can do what they want."

The following is Jean's account. She and her lover Cathy have two children, Alice born in 1984 and Elaine born in 1987.

"The response of Alice to her family unit has been completely accepting. She's always been open about the fact that she has two mummies. She's been very lucky because she was born at a time when a number of our lesbian friends were also pregnant. She went to a childcare group when she was two where there were more lesbian mothers than straight parents. She knew a whole load of other kids in her peer group who were also children of lesbians or single parents. What we used to do was name all the children who lived differently, who didn't have fathers or who had fathers they never saw. They were the majority of her friends and that makes a really big difference. Even when she went to school, it didn't appear to be a problem. She has been supremely confident and assertive about it with other children. She never felt she had to hide it. She is a confident child in herself anyway, like first children often are. Her family unit hasn't been a problem.

When I go to her primary school, the children in her class all call out to her, "Alice, Alice, here's your mummy". Then always somebody says, "Alice, Alice, have you got two mummies?" She says yes in a very matter of fact voice. Alice is lucky with her teacher who is quite open and supportive. She read *Heather Has Two Mummies* (a children's book about a lesbian couple who get pregnant by donor insemination) to the class and Alice was made to feel quite important and special because she did have two mummies. It has been a status symbol rather than an area to be teased about.

It was quite interesting when we went to visit a friend who has a son by self-insemination the same age as Alice. There was Alice, Elaine and Rhys making paper chains. We

overheard this conversation which appeared in the middle of their playing and then receded again.

### Pass the Red Paper

Elaine said to Rhys, "Is John your daddy?"

Rhys said, "No, no. He's not my daddy, I haven't got a daddy."

Alice and Elaine both said in chorus, "Oh yes you have."

Rhys said, "No, I haven't. I've got a birth father."

Elaine said "Oh".

Rhys explained, "A birth father is somebody who helped make me, but he's not a father who lives in my house with me."

Alice said, "Oh yeah. Just like us".

Elaine said, "Pass me the red paper."

They were dealing with the issues of their own lives by themselves. Elaine was really lucky that she was sitting there with two kids who said that they hadn't got daddies and that they're all in the same situation."

These are just two of the accounts you can find in *Alternative Beginnings*. The book is based on interviews with 27 women, two children and four men who were donors. *Alternative Beginnings - Donor Insemination: Pregnancy and Parenting* by Lisa Saffron, published by Sheba Feminist Press, 1993.

So there you are, a lesbian mum - well done! - and it comes time for sprog to start reading children's books. So you trot dutifully down to the local library or bookshop and - aaagh! - it's compulsory hetero-patriarchy for the very young. Shelf upon shelf of Kings and Queens, evil, warty spinsters, golden princesses waking up to manly princes and so on and so on. Oh dear. Well, it depends on where you live and what your local bookshops/libraries are like but there are a number of kids books available that present a different worldview to the Mary Whitehouse fantasy. Listed below are a few of those presenting lesbian and gay parents as normal and positive.

☛ **GLORIA GOES TO GAY PRIDE** by Leslea Newman. (Alyson Wonderland/G.M.P. - £5.95) Gay Pride is presented as a festival/celebration

on a par with Mother's Day, Christmas and Chanukha. The 2 mums' relationship is presented as real and normal, eg on Mother's Day, Gloria brings the 2 mums breakfast in bed. On Pride day, other local people, such as Gloria's music teacher and post lady are on the march too. There are also a couple of bigots protesting at the march. It's all handled very nicely. Unfortunately, the pictures are in black and white but you could turn it into a colouring book.

☛ **HEATHER HAS TWO MOMMIES** by Leslea Newman. (As before.) Heather joins a playgroup and discovers that other kids have daddies. The book discusses artificial insemination, the birthing process and the needs of a lesbian household.

☛ **FAMILIES: A COLOURING BOOK** (Alyson Wonderland - £2.50) Lots of pictures of lots of

different families and a little text which introduces them as friends of the narrator. Families made up of people who are multi-racial, gay, lesbian, disabled.

☛ **THE DADDY MACHINE** by Johnny Valentine (Alyson Wonderland/GMP - £5.95) This one is my personal favourite. It's a colouring book all about these 2 girls with 2 mums who get a bit wistful for this thing called a daddy. Anyway, they make a machine and all these daddies come out and don't stop coming out. And they do all those dad-things, like staining the carpet with oil and taking things apart and not being able to fix them...but it all ends happily. It's great.

☛ **THE DUKE WHO OUTLAWED JELLY BEANS** (Alyson Wonderland) 5 colourfully illustrated fairy stories featuring lesbian and gay characters. (I'm getting a bit

tired now!)  
☛ **ASHA'S MUMS** (Women's Press of Canada/Turnaround - £2.99) Asha wants to go on a day trip from school but needs the written consent of mum and dad. Teacher doesn't believe Asha is telling the truth when he says she has 2 mums (all too typical school behaviour!) but it all gets sorted out. Asha's classmates accept the fact without too much trouble and it transpires a few of the others don't have the prescribed number of mums and dads either.

These books are a bit expensive, they come from America in the main and are published by small companies, so they don't have a lot of money washing around. It might be a good idea to get your local library to order them. Or you can get in touch with **Letterbox Library**, Unit 2d, Leroy House, 436 Essex Road,

N1 3QT. 071 226 1633.  
**IF YOU'RE CONSIDERING...** here are some books that can provide useful information about becoming a lesbian parent:

☛ **DIFFERENT MOTHERS** edited by Louise Rafkin (Cleis Press - £ 9.50) This contains lots of interviews with children of lesbian parents of differing ages.

☛ **CONSIDERING PARENTHOOD** by Cheri Pies (Spinsters Book Company - £10.99) A workbook for potential lesbian parents. It's very well thought out and thought provoking and has an updated version on AIDS.

**CONTACTS: Rights of Women**, 071 251 6577 - Organised, helpful and informative. They have contacts for parents groups.  
**Lesbian and Gay Switchboard**, 071 837

7324 - apart from being very useful and knowledgeable about many things, they also have some contacts for lesbian parenting groups.  
**London Lesbian Line**, 071 251 6911

**Lesbian Custody Project**, 071 251 6575 - Not a social group, they specialise in legal aspects of parenting, custody, fostering and adoption.

**National Council For One Parent Families**, 071 267 1361

**London Friend**, 071 837 2782 - Once again, friendly and informed and they have a women's phone-in on Tuesday and Thursday evenings.  
**Nestwork**, PO Box 153, Manchester M60 1LP - Primarily organised around becoming pregnant.

It's also worth checking out women's centres near you because they could be able to put you in touch with a local lesbian parenting groups.



Laurence Jaugey-Paget

## not a monster, nor an angel,

This article is about the difficulties of bringing up a child in a society that does not advocate or always even approve the principles underlying our efforts. One of the most important of these principles is that from birth a child is a person, not a possession, deserving respect. This means that a child's voice has an equal right to be heard to anyone else's. And what a child is saying, be it a non-verbal cry of a baby or reasoned words of an older child, must be listened to and taken into account in decisions and actions. And the more dependent a child is the more per (= her, him) has to be listened to and heeded. This is not to say that an older child should not be heeded at all. An older child who was heeded from birth (or even before, i.e. having the most natural and gentle form of birth possible for the child) would be more resourceful and confident in getting herself heard and fulfilling her needs. If need be per would shout until heard, knowing that per would not be put down for this.

Respect for a person means respecting her feelings. It means respecting her privacy. It means that a child should be allowed to have secrets and private thoughts and private mail, if that is what a child wants. It means not forcing our affection on a person: not kissing and hugging when this is not wanted. Personally, I find this extremely important for a girl child in this society that still operates on very confusing standards on sexual matters. As girl children grow older they have to have confidence to express their wants, whatever they be, and not be afraid of being rejected.

### Respect isn't violent

A respected person is not smacked or hit. Even the youngest baby should be allowed the respect of being given a reason for not allowing per to do something harmful to herself or others. While, of course, removing the baby from harm or harm from the baby. However, any sudden snatch of the baby from harm, can be quite frightening for per. The words of reason, even if not understood, when spoken in a calm friendly voice can have a soothing effect in this urgent situation. And speaking to a baby in every situation is good for her language development.

We want our children to respect us. They learn to do that if we respect them. Respect does not grow out of violence, but out of respect. A person who suffers violence in any form will learn to fear. A child who is taught with violence to obey her parents and other adults will do so out of fear, not out of respect. Fear also teaches other things to a person like cheating, lying and bullying.

There are two other principles we find extremely important. One is an emphasis on

the common humanity of females and males. And actions or qualities are not either feminine or masculine but human. The other principle is that a person is not either "good" or "bad" but neutral. The deeds of a person can be "good" or "bad". So when a person does something either way we try and comment on the deed or the person's ability to do something.

Even as I write this I feel the conflict between how I write and standards in this society, still very close to the ones I was brought up with. My conflict is over the word "person" as I use it about a child. I was brought up with a hierarchy of men, women, boy children, and girl children as the least important. Even today the word "person" is not commonly used for a child. However, I chose that word for a reason. I want to make the point that a child is a person with the right to be respected just like an adult. As adults we should be more careful not to wrong a child in this respect than we are when dealing with another adult because another adult is not so dependent on us as a child is.

### No frills for boys!

Our problems began at the beginning. (I wrote about the pregnancy and the birth in earlier issues.) Before the birth I tried to find some colourful clothes for our unborn baby. Pale pinks and blues or white and some other pale colours were on offer. And yet studies have shown that babies respond to bright colours. I ended up dying most of the clothes we got. Later on frills and flowers for girl children and plain clothes for boy children. I recently observed a child's very sad disappointment in a shop. Per was refused a top with a picture of a flower because per was a boy. The child's arguments of per liking it and it being per were crushed. I have observed many young children of either gender liking frills and flowers until society crushes this in boy children.

Our child claimed the right to choose what to wear fairly early on from our store of second hand and new clothes. One of her favourite clothes is a white frilly slip which per wears as a dress. Very often per wants to go out in only a pair of tights and a top. If per chooses something unsuitable for the weather we try to reason and convince per. Very often the coat is first taken in a bag and put on outside. My partner (who now lives at a separate place from me) told me of some battles of will between per and our child over night clothes. Until per came to realise that the issue at stake

was not important and the main thing is not to "win". So our child wears what per wants day and night.

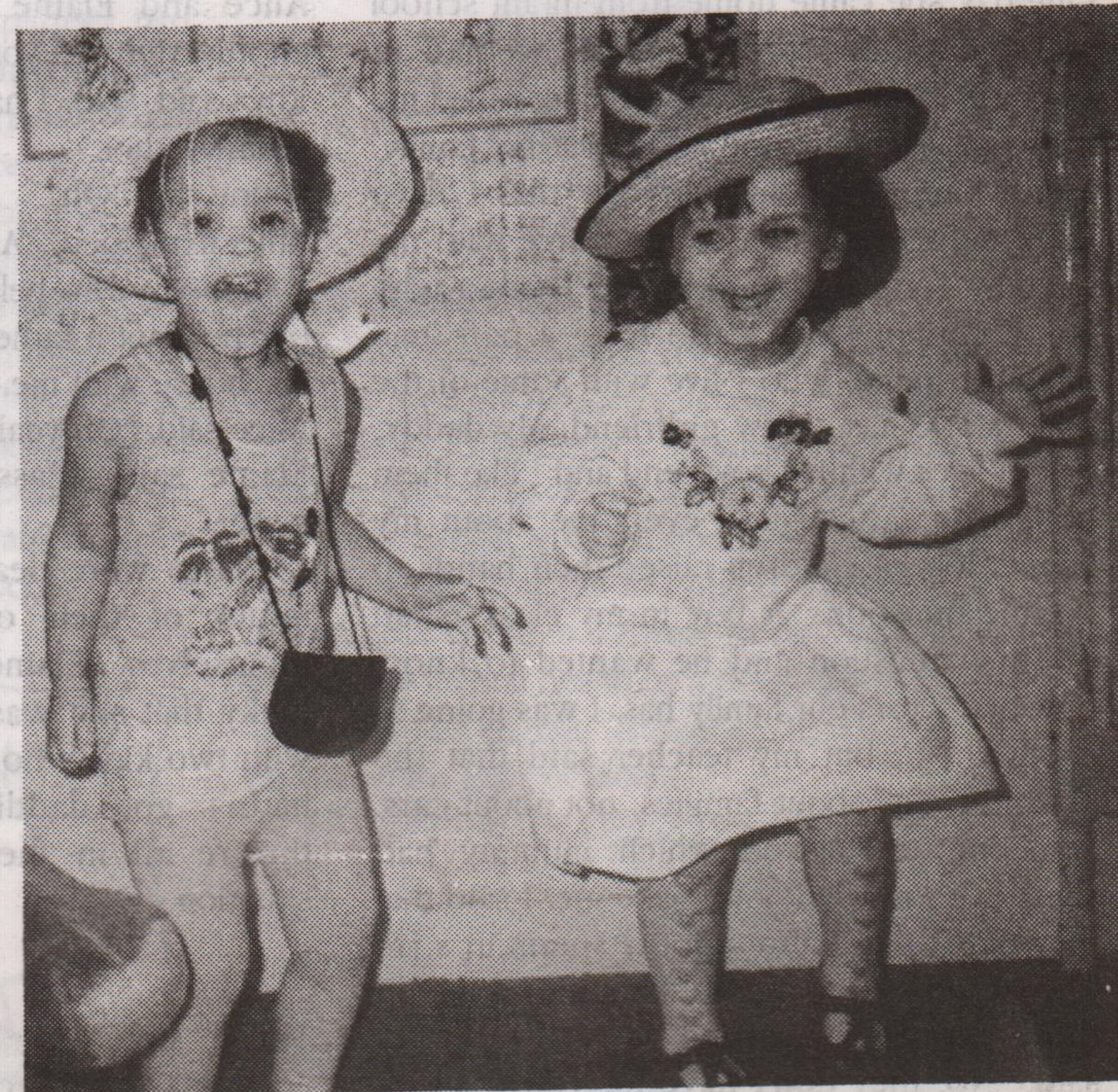
Shopping for new clothes is usually done with our child present and choosing what per wants (limited by our financial resources and the choice in the shop). My partner took per to a shoe shop a few months ago. Per chose a pair of shoes but when they went to pay for them changed her mind and did not want any after all. When my partner told the assistant that our child did not want them the assistant was surprised. Per said in a disapproving manner that our child was surely too young to make up her mind. Our view is that by being taken seriously a child learns that her words have consequences and learns to decide on matters herself. Per is already very sure about her likes and dislikes. And regarding changing her mind. Well, we all change our minds all the time about all kinds of things.

### Girls/boys versus children

One of the first questions asked about a baby is her gender. When a baby is a little older the question is no longer asked; most people assume the gender from her clothes, behaviour, hair length, or name. I want all people to be truly free to be themselves without any of these being specified by gender. We always use the word "child" for our child and all other children. Our child identifies with all children regardless of their gender. No behaviour or achievement is defined by gender and therefore per is free to be herself (as far as society allows it). I have witnessed girl children forbidden to do climbing and boy children ridiculed for wanting to play with dolls. I have heard of young children wishing to be other than themselves - more often girl children wishing to be boy children as boy children tend to be freer than girl children. Our child has never expressed a wish like that. Per has observed the physical differences but so far sees their relevance only in weeing.

### Bad babies

Another early question we were asked was whether our baby was good or bad. I found this incomprehensible. I had to ask what was meant by it. The



rephrased question was whether per cried a lot or not or whether per slept through the night or not. These to me are not moral matters at all but matters of physical need. Our baby slept in our bed and so never needed to cry at night to get fed. Per made little noises and groped towards my breasts. Per was always fed what is called "on demand". I prefer the words when per needed it.

The word "demand" is very commonly used when talking about the needs of small babies and children. The babies, none of whom asked to be born, are totally dependent on those caring for them to fulfil all their needs. For a small baby crying is often the only way to make herself heard. Yet when a baby does this per is termed "bad" or "naughty". Especially if the baby does not need anything physical like feeding or nappy changing but "only" attention.

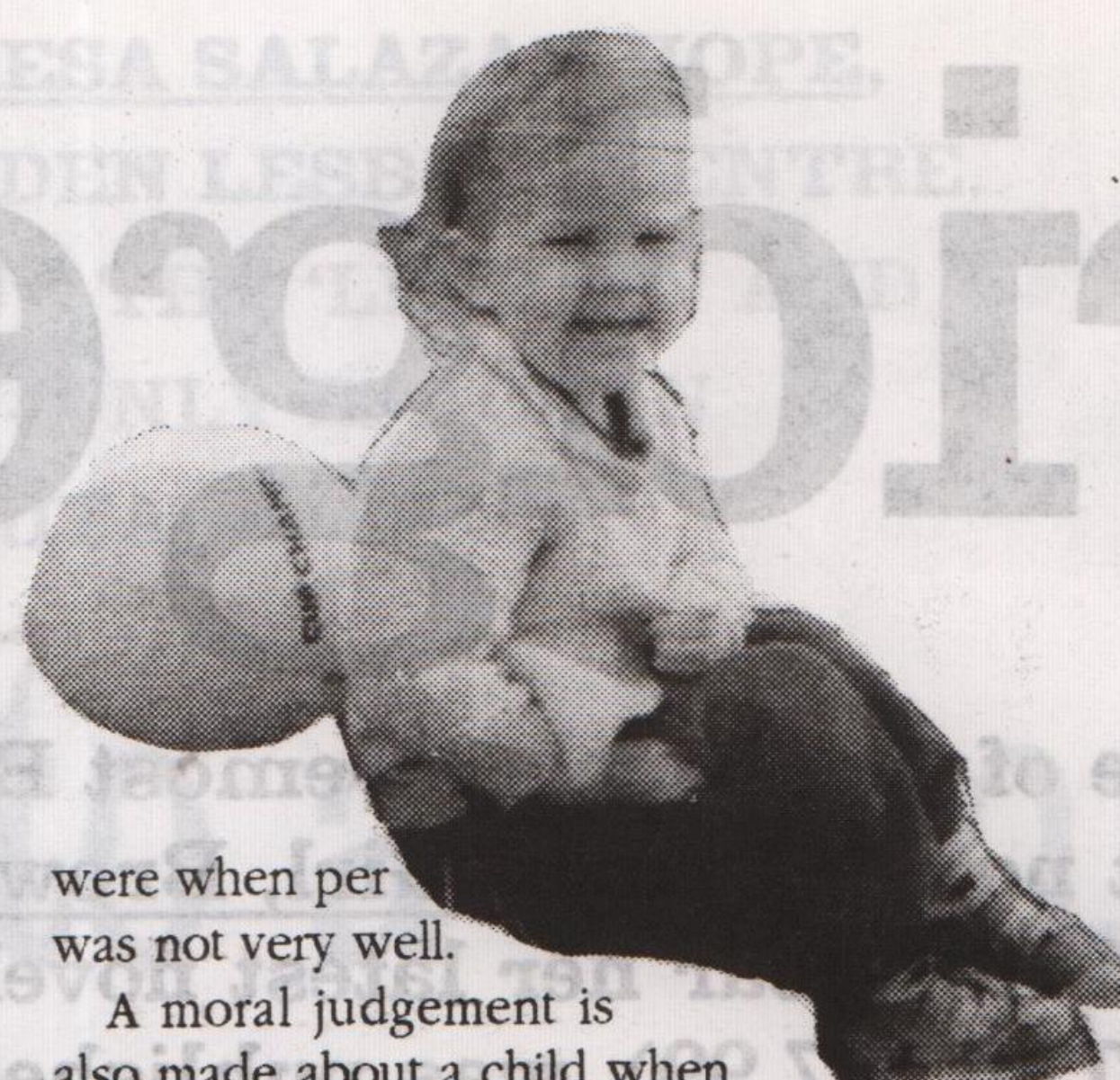
Some parents talk proudly of having trained their babies not to cry at certain times when it is not suitable for adults. I was commended on my "wise" handling of the situation when my oldest (then under 1, now 20) got used to waking up close to midnight. I left the poor child crying alone and most likely afraid until per got used to sleeping. It took three nights, crying for twenty minutes the first night. When my youngest started waking up at about one at night I had learnt better. We always had a night light on anyway for the first couple of years. We allowed per to play with our noses and ears and hands. Per sat up, leant on us, pushed and poked us while we lay there half asleep. Per never cried and gradually the period of activity got shorter (from over an hour to start





# A CHILD

## but a person



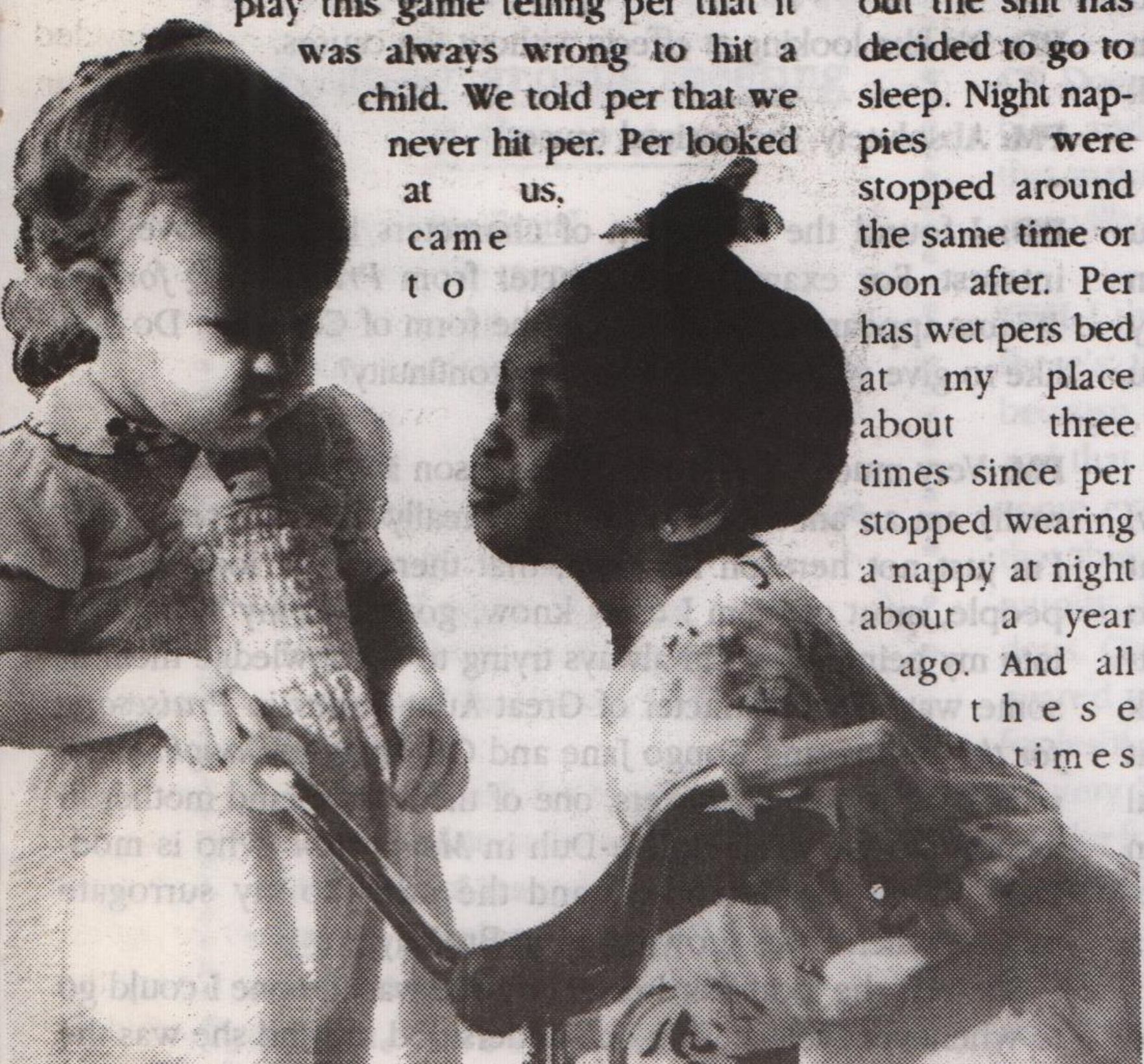
with) and within a couple of weeks per slept through the night.

My partner and I have always attended to our child as soon as possible when per cries. We have tried to avoid telling per not to cry. At first I found myself telling our baby not to cry. Then realising what I had said I quickly corrected myself saying: "Cry if you want to." It took three or four corrections like this for me to stop saying "Don't cry". Telling children not to cry is a way of belittling their sorrows and pains. Added to this are very common remarks like: "It was nothing really." "It did not hurt." "A big child like you should not cry over a little thing like that." On the other hand, when children do not cry over things they are told that they are "very brave". And even worse, they are told that they are "good" not to cry. How very confusing for a child. And all to stop children from showing any emotion of sorrow, pain or disappointment which we as adults are unable to deal with because as children we were forced to suppress them instead of being helped to deal with them.

We have found that our child never cries for any prolonged time. I remember only one incident of per doing what is called "throwing a tantrum" and that was very short. When that happened we let per get over it and then I held per because per wanted it. I explained to per the reason for the denial which caused per tantrum. Whenever per is upset or angry we talk about the reason for it. We acknowledge that per has a reason for being so and sympathise with per. And if possible we try and deal with whatever has upset per or made per angry. Sometimes this may mean acknowledging that we have been in the wrong and saying sorry.

### A promise

Recently, our child wanted to play a game with us in which per was a mother angry at per children and hitting them. We refused to play this game telling per that it was always wrong to hit a child. We told per that we never hit per. Per looked at us, came to



me and said: "You never hit me." This was said as a statement not a question. I said it back to per as a statement and a promise. I believe our child had picked this up from seeing some people, especially mothers as mothers tend to be those most commonly looking after young children in our society, shouting and hitting their children.

The other day I was asked if our child was toilet trained. Although I do not like the term "train" I answered that per had been going to the toilet for about a year now. A moral approval followed my statement. Our child was so "good". We never really "trained" our child although there is much pressure in society to do this. I felt this pressure more keenly when visiting Finland than I ever felt it in England. Although I do know that the pressure also exists in England. We decided to ignore the pressure and let our child lead the way. We stopped putting a nappy on per when per was physically and emotionally ready for it. It was so natural that I hardly remember how it happened.

First we stopped putting a nappy on in the daytime. To start with there were quite a few accidents, but I was surprised how quickly per stopped having these accidents. At the beginning per did not use a potty at all because the others at home used the toilet. Nowadays per uses the potty and the toilet. The toilet is always used for the shit because I do not like cleaning the potty. Or as I put it to per it is more difficult to clean after the shit than after the wee. Per accepts this without any arguments.

First we stopped putting a nappy on in the daytime. To start with there were quite a few accidents, but I was surprised how quickly per stopped having these accidents. At the beginning per did not use a potty at all because the others at home used the toilet. Nowadays per uses the potty and the toilet. The toilet is always used for the shit because I do not like cleaning the potty. Or as I put it to per it is more difficult to clean after the shit than after the wee. Per accepts this without any arguments. We always have wonderful discussions about shit in the toilet. Our child usually has a whole family of shit coming out. Sometimes when it does not come out the shit has decided to go to sleep. Night nappies were stopped around the same time or soon after. Per has wet per bed at my place about three times since per stopped wearing a nappy at night about a year ago. And all these times

were when per was not very well.

A moral judgement is also made about a child when per does not do what an adult wants per to do or even when a child explores and experiments with per surroundings. Whenever a child causes any anxiety to an adult or does not conform to adult society per is "naughty". I went into a bus with my child who had an icelolly stick in per hand. Per put it in per mouth and a person on the bus scolded per as "naughty". I saw the danger for the child in walking on a moving bus with a stick in per mouth but felt so annoyed with the person calling per naughty that instead of taking it out I guided per carefully to a seat further back. There I talked to per about the danger and per took it out of per mouth. Unfortunately, I have no moral courage to confront people on streets and buses even when I feel very strongly about these issues.


"Good" children say "sorry" and "thank you" and "please". If they don't they are naughty and are forced to do so. Children do learn to say these things if forced, but when forced it does not really mean anything. Our child is not forced and hardly ever says these words to anyone. We use these words with per all the time. And per does use them in per play. It remains to be seen when per will start using them to people outside per play. Perhaps per views per needs for food and clothing and presents as per right, which

they indeed are, and therefore not needing any comment upon receiving. I think that fair enough. Per does often ask "may I have" or "may I do" without ever having been "taught" to do so. And when per hurts someone per often goes to stroke the hurt part. When someone is hurt or in pain per does it expecting this to make the person better immediately.

### Nuisance to society

Our society is very adult centred. Children are seen as a demanding burden to parents and a nuisance to society at large. They are seen as crafty little things out to trick and cheat adults. Adults have to be vigilant all the time to outwit these monsters. The head of one of my older children's secondary school held this view and ran per school with this philosophy as a guiding principle, as I found out when I became a school governor. This philosophy is still the guiding principle in this society. Hence the talk about discipline and punishment and more discipline and punishment, instead of making sure that those who care for young children have all the support they need to do the work properly. And much support is needed. This job is too much for one person. Two or three or more people sharing allows some of them to go and recharge themselves while others attend the child. This way there is much joy and fulfilment for everyone around.

I.S.



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# a bridge between

Paule Marshall is one of America's foremost Black women writers. Her first novel, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* was published in 1959 and this year her latest novel, *Daughters* (Serpent's Tail, £7.99), was published in Britain. Born in 1929 in Brooklyn to Barbadian parents, she once described herself as acting as a bridge between the two cultures. Here she talks to Sheila Auguste and Beverley Duguid about her latest novel.

**BD:** *Daughters* is about a woman coming into her own analysing her relationships with men and others. We thought that *Daughters* therefore culminates to some extent into a novel about damaged relationships. For example, the relationship Estelle was trying to have with the PM but which could not continue because he went his own way, is reflected in the slave story about Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe, the subject of Ursa's thesis. Would you like to comment?

**PM:** There is an element of damage; some of the relationships in the novel demonstrate this damage. Certainly to a significant degree in the relationship of the PM and Estelle, because she had really hoped, and he too had hoped, that together the two of them would have been able to do something really significant, meaningful and progressive for his district. The sense of the two of them working together at the beginning was so strong.

Another damaged relationship, of course, is that of Ursa and Lowell Carruthers. They have this period during the 'free zone' when they were really together, but he has allowed this job so to take over his life that they are no longer able to have the same relationship. This happens so often, I am struck by the fact in ordinary when you listen to what people talk about, especially men, they are complaining about their job situation. Their job has taken over their lives and I suspect that it's because of the way that men are socialised and reared in our societies, where they get their sense of who they are and their self definition is from the work place, that large world of work and commerce. Whereas traditionally women have got their sense of self from family and women friends etc: a very different socialisation pattern.

So I think for men, especially black men, trying to get this definition of self from that larger world and being so frustrated, takes over their lives. It's a kind of corroding. That is exactly what happens to Lowell Carruthers, what begins to damage his relationship with Ursa. But of course there's Viney... There's so many black women - I don't know about here, but certainly in the States, trying to find a partner who's really a partner.

**SA:** As you introduced Viney, we were interested in the idea of the test tube baby she decides to have. There are many women who can come to terms with not having a long term relationship, but they still want children. How did you arrive at this idea?

**PM:** A number of black women in the States are making those kind of choices. Some of them want children very much. Some of them would like a family, whether it's an actual husband or it's with a partner...you know that there is some commitment. But so often it's not available to them and what do they do? They want a family; they want a child. But a number of them who have the where-with-all, the means, to be able to afford day-care and help with the child and so on, go ahead and either have an affair which is going to commit them to get pregnant or go to the sperm bank.

**SA:** It really struck a chord, this idea that what are you going to do if you're not in a relationship?

**PM:** And Viney tries her hardest to do as well by that child as she can. Robeson is really a privileged child, but she realises that when he's arrested, hand-cuffed and taken to the police station, she can give him these material things, but ultimately she really can't protect him from that larger and essentially hostile society. That's when she feels the aching lack of the partner. It's not that anything different would have happened to Robeson, but just to have someone else there with her, standing by her side, when the policeman in his condescending, insulting way calls her *Ms* to emphasise that she is a single parent. So to reflect on what you asked me earlier, there is the damage.

But I also try in the novel to offer a positive image of the relationship between the black man and woman and that's why Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe are so important. They stand as a kind of model in that novel: they were co-leaders, co-conspirators, lovers, companions, friends. Even Lowell when Ursa tells him the story about them, he says, "Really what we have to try to do is to get back to that," to that kind of unity and co-operation and equality that Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe had. So it's not all downhill!

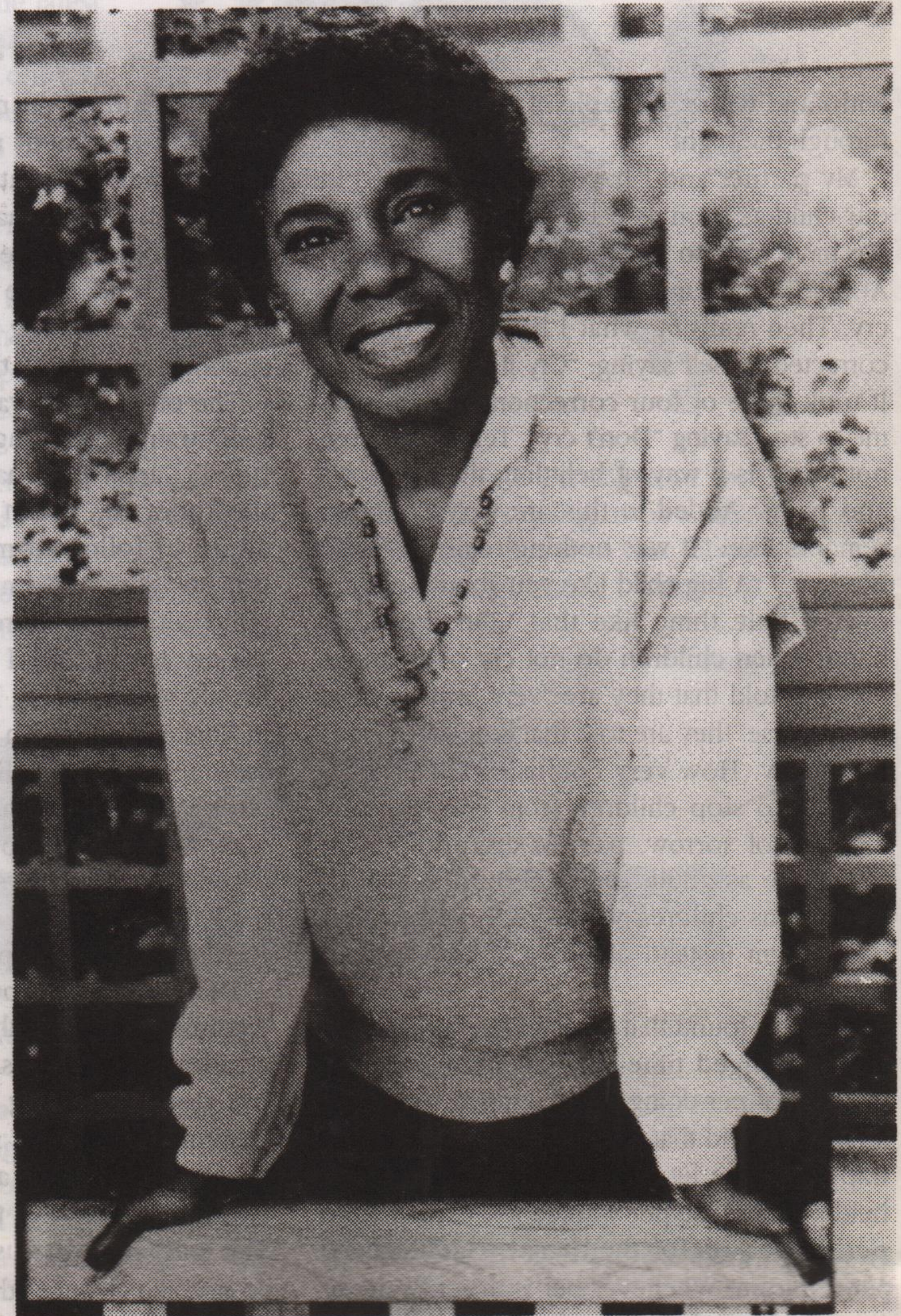
**SA:** Your male characters are very subtle and you develop them carefully. You show the pain of the misunderstanding between black men and women. You manage to have a distance.

**PM:** They are flawed but you can certainly think of them and read about them with a certain amount of sympathy and understanding. I try to accord that to all my characters. I am not about doing anyone in, but rather to see people with all their complexity and contradictions.

**BD:** You don't romanticise the Caribbean; on the contrary, you tell it like it is. Also how you portray the effects of imperialism on your characters is interesting. I was thinking specifically about *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, your first novel. Would you like to comment?

**PM:** In the backdrop of all of the novels is the political reality. I am essentially a political writer. I am interested in what impacts upon my people, my characters. If you're going to write in any honesty about them you cannot exclude the political, because that's what shapes their world. So you cannot talk about African Americans without acknowledging what it means for us to live in a society where we are marginal people. Where we have never, even though we have been there longer than most of the immigrant groups who have subsequently arrived, been allowed into the mainstream. Just a few little trickles that you find nowadays.

So I don't see how you can write about what's happening in



the black family, within relationships between black men and women, without in a sense looking at what that larger society has done to us.

That might be the only point of objection I have with a book like *The Color Purple*, the distortions which take place with those men, if you don't see them against the larger backdrop of that Southern society at that point, almost gives the impression that the flaws were endemic to these people. That they were just naturally that way, brutalizers and wife beaters etc. You really have to give enough attention to that backdrop, that world that they inhabit and I really try to do that in my work. It's always written at many levels.

**BD:** It's like looking at effects without the causes.

**PM:** Absolutely, the societal causes.

**BD:** I found the repetition of characters in your novels of interest. For example a character from *Praise Song for the Widow* appears in *Daughters* in the form of Celestine. Do you like to give your readers a kind of continuity?

**PM:** Very much so, and the other reason is that I believe that I really am an ancestor worshipper. I really have the sense that I'm just not here on my own, that there are a long line of people, most of them I don't know, gone into my being and into my being here. I'm always trying to acknowledge them in some way. That character of Great Aunt Cuney in *Praisingsong for the Widow* and Congo Jane and Celestine in *Daughters* all refer back to two characters, one of them the Grand mother in a short story I wrote: to Da-Duh in *Memorium* (who is modeled on my Grandmother) and the other to my surrogate mother when I was growing up in Brooklyn.

She was the local hairdresser and she was the one I could go to whenever I felt as if no one understood me and she was the

# two cultures

## INTERVIEW WITH PAULE MARSHALL

one who gave me unconditional love and I'm always celebrating that woman and you will see her in every novel I've written. She's there in one form or another.

**SA:** The oral tradition is strong in your work. We're interested in the way you make sure you record these traditions by characters passing on stories and their history: the use of dialect is one example. In *Daughters* you use creole.

**PM:** This is very important to me, because I had my first lessons in how to be a writer in the narrative art long long ago before I could even read or write my name. I came largely from a small group of West Indian women: it included my mother. They would get together when they came back from their jobs, as domestics, because they were unskilled women in the early twenties, so the only jobs they could get were as as domestics. They would gather maybe two or three times a week in the kitchen of my house and my sister and I would have to keep them supplied with tea and cocoa while they talked. And they talked brilliantly. They were masterful story tellers and here I was, this little girl, and as a growing child I had to be in that kitchen with them. I wasn't allowed to run up and down the street.

There I was, not even aware of it, but absorbing from them principles of how you tell stories, because they didn't tell stories any old way. A story had form and structure. They knew the details that you selected to make a character come alive vividly because for example I had never met any of those white women they worked for, but by the time they got through describing them I saw them clearly in my mind's eye. They were my first teachers and the thing that struck me about these women is that they could, in the most casual way, sitting around the table drinking their cups of tea or cocoa, create art. They took that King's English taught to them in the primary schools of Barbados and recreated it. To hear Bajan English is a marvellous thing. It's poetry.

I wanted when I started writing to look like I was fully conscious of this. I wanted to try my hardest to get down something of that poetry on paper, because I had a sense that in my generation it would be gone. I wouldn't have that art. So the oral tradition is very important to me. So there was Bajan English and there was African American English, which is also playing around with the language. Later on in my life, my second husband was Haitian and so I spent a lot of time living between Haiti and the US and I got a sense of the power of creole. I couldn't understand it fully, only little expressions, and I wanted to somehow get that down on paper too. So *Daughters* is a kind of meditation on language. What black folks do with language. I also wanted to get down what we call in the States the 'home girl language' - the way young professional black women talk to each other. To get in all of these voices in one book was really the thing I wanted to do.

**SA:** You achieve it. Also the island Triunion in *Daughters* changes hands many times like St Lucia.

**PM:** That's right. I based that on St Lucia. I stayed there a long time ago and when I came to write *Daughters* I thought about that in creating Triunion. I would create this place like St Lucia which changed hands back and forth so many times and with St Lucia of course it was just between the French and the English, but there were other islands where the Spanish were involved.

**BD:** We'd like to ask you about the mother figure who always appears to be the source of strength within your novels.

**PM:** Strength with qualifications. They are really not simply strong, they have their vulnerabilities; they have their shortcomings. Silla in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* is willing to sacrifice her love and her children for this house, because even though she achieves this vision: she has the brownstone house, she's chased away all of the tenants, so she can now break it up into rooms and make a fortune, she's got the coat with the silver fox fur and so on, but what does she really have? Her husband is gone, Selina is leaving and Ina has escaped into a humdrum marriage. So essentially I can't really see that it's all that strong. I see she's a driving force.

**BD:** She's not the typical stereotype of the strong black woman. She has her faults.

**PM:** Yes, and vulnerabilities. A lot of readers have perceived the father in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* as somewhat weak. I see him as having his strength also. He's saying, I have no opposition to success, but it'll be on my own terms. He has his dreams; he's an artist. I see that as a kind of strength. So again it's about making complex characters who have their contradictions.

**BD:** Finally, could you talk about your process of writing, your discipline.

**PM:** It's been absolutely driven. Whatever that is inside me, that impels me; that drives me. It makes me feel that the day doesn't have form and structure, a framework if I don't work. It has to get to that place with the writer, even if it's just an hour that you set aside for the work that is sacrosanct. You've got to do it. If not, you feel as if you've gone out the house in the morning without brushing your teeth. It's that central to your life. That's the way it's been with me all along, so that when I wrote *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, I had a nine to five job which was very gruelling. I worked for a magazine, churning out a lot of stuff that I didn't like at all. But I just had to, as a kind of antidote in the evenings, work on that novel. That was my salvation. The writing is just a part of my life.

One of the gratifying things about my career is that I have been writing for a long time now and I have been able to weather the ups and downs of being in the literary world. I've been able to stay the course and that's very gratifying for me. So that here I am in my early sixties and still writing and publishing. I think that acts as a kind of inspiration for young writers. I had no models, no figures when I started writing. There wasn't this community of black women writers. It didn't exist, you had to be totally on your own. So I would encourage writers to take advantage of the support you have out there now!



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# Party Weekend?

**Brighton has a reputation, along with most other sea-side towns, of being a place to escape to from the prying eyes of neighbours for illicit rendezvous. It also has a reputation in the south for being a town full of culture, arts and...queers! So, on my last visit to Brighton, I went in search of like-minded lesbians...the problem is...how do you find where they are?**

As with most towns and cities in this country, the scene is so underground it is invisible to everyone who isn't "in the know". Information on Brighton's numerous B&Bs run by and for gay men, the couple run by and for "women only", and regular gay clubs is available from sources such as Gay Times, but lesbians and gay men living in Brighton are demanding more than a weekend cattle market that is geared towards the young, trendy and predominantly male club goer.

A group of lesbians and gay men who want to create an alternative to the claustrophobic and closed scene, have decided to put their energy into setting up a Lesbian and Gay Centre.

The Centre Project group was formed in November 1992, and currently has a core



New Brighton Lesbian and Gay Centre Organisers

groups of three lesbians and two gay men. The lesbians in the group are Melita (who has lived on the Sussex coast all her life), Kaz (who has lived in Norfolk and London) and Bron (who has also moved down from London about ten months ago).

The intention is for the Centre to be self-financing, along the lines of the Oxford Lesbian and Gay Centre. The local council has not been forthcoming with funds (an application from this year's 'Pride' organisers for £500 was rejected, even though the Brighton area is home to thousands of lesbians and gay men). This is probably because last year, a grant of £5000 to the Pride Festival was "exposed" by the homophobic press, predictably, as "a scandalous waste of tax-payers money". Unfortunately, the local council was so obsessed with cleansing itself of "left-wing militants" in the run up to the local elections, they never publicly justified the giving of the grant. When the election resulted in only a one seat majority for Labour, they blamed the bad press they had got because of the grant, rather than their own in-fighting and mis-handling of the situation.

The CP group has been approached by the organisers of this year's Pride events to run an information centre. The temporary centre will be located at 137 Edward Street, in Kemp Town (Brighton's gay village), and will be

open for the duration of Pride (20-31st May) providing information about all of the events and offering a drop-in centre/meeting place staffed by volunteers.

To run this temporary centre, the group needs to raise £647.00.



137 Edward St  
Brighton temporary  
L&G Centre

Unfortunately, the Centre Project group is facing hostility not only from the homophobes, but also from the commercially minded gay scene as well, who fear that the Centre will be in competition with established clubs/bars/etc. The group are clear that their primary aim is not to compete on a commercial level, rather to fill a gap in provision for lesbians and gay men who need advice, information, a safe space to meet and also a base to organise from.

The lack of co-operation from the commercial gay scene and the local council means the group has its work cut out for them regarding fundraising. If you wish to make a donation, want more information or want to get involved in the group, write to:

The Centre Project, c/o The Sussex AIDS Centre, PO 17, Brighton, BN2 5NQ

**PS:** Since writing this article, the Pride Festival in Brighton has already started. However, the council has refused to hand over the keys for the temporary centre to the CP group! They are still determined that the centre will open for the Pride march, and hope to secure the property on a permanent basis. They need all the help and support you can give.

# Cruising at the Moscow supermarket

## East European Lesbians and Gays meet

The Eastern and South-eastern Europe ILGA conference was held April 15-18 in Vienna, with the highest number of lesbians and gays in the history of the Regional Conferences. 250 people, including 80 lesbians, from all over Eastern Europe (except Romania and Albania) got together to discuss different issues. HIV/AIDS was a main issue.

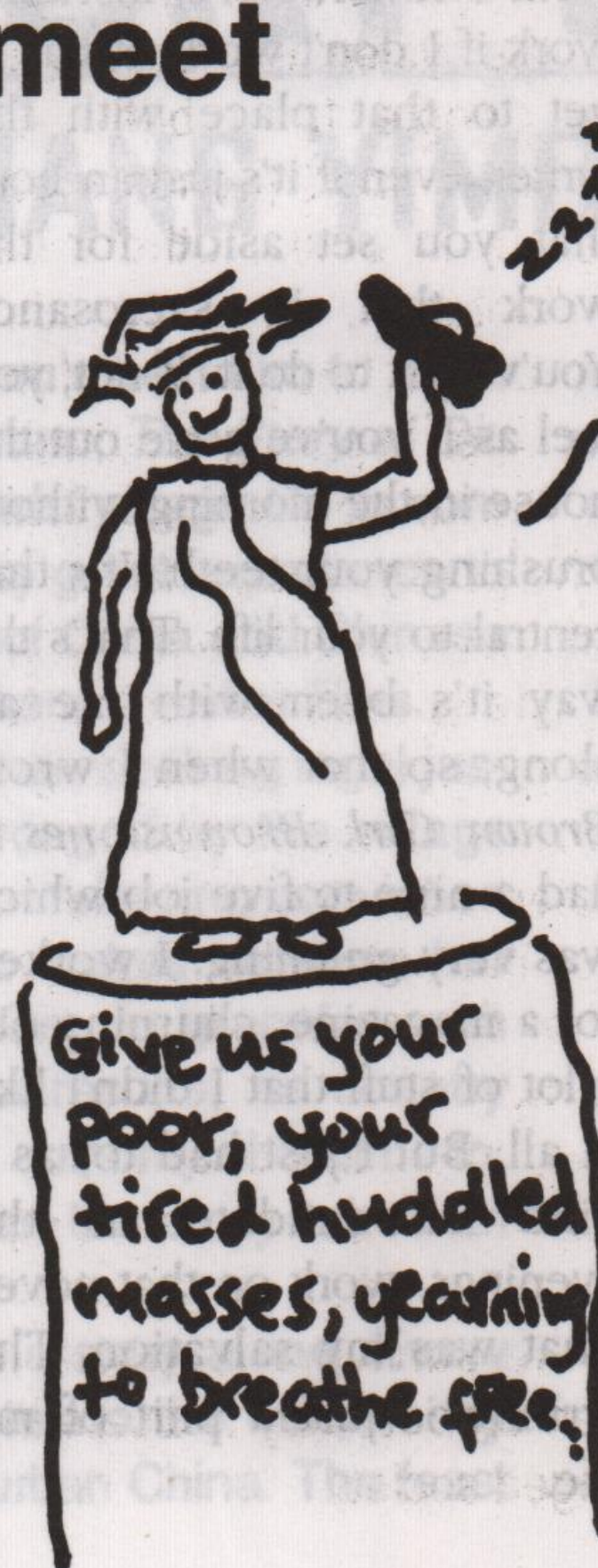
The Conference stressed the difference between Western and East European lesbians again. Lisa Powell, who coordinated the workshop on sexuality, talked about S&M sex and vibrators, not exactly big issues for lesbians in Eastern Europe! For one thing, it is impossible to buy vibrators in these countries, even on the illegal market. And even if you could, you wouldn't be able to find the batteries for them...if you have any money at

all...A group of Russian women came in the middle of the workshop, and left after five minutes thinking they came to the wrong place by mistake. Women preferred to talk about long-term relationships, the reality for most of them in a situation where the "dyke scene" doesn't exist.

The workshop on totalitarian institutions was lead mainly by the Russian lesbians who have been experiencing prison sentences and psychiatric treatments because of their sexual activities.

Other workshops included lesbian and gay media; violence, radical right and racism; workshops on how to start a group; and each country gave a country report (to be published by ILGA).

Lesbians from Eastern Europe are very different from Western dykes. Most don't look "typical", they didn't come out with



involvement in a women's movement, they don't think of themselves as feminists. Russian lesbian songs were about a lesbian marriage in a Siberian prison, and cruising in front of a supermarket...in Moscow, which is very different than the Tesco's soft cheese counter.

All this may not seem politically correct in the Western sense. But the life and soul of the East has always been different; and lesbians from Eastern Europe know that. For a start they've decided to coordinate workshops themselves at the next conference.

East European lesbians also know how to party...for there was a lot of it going on at the conference. Real ravers were dykes from Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana, continuing their tradition of happy pre-war piss-ups.

# Women's Self-Defence

# No Offence!

You might not have heard of Wendo and it's neither something to eat nor is it a new medicine to treat PMT. Wendo is a feminist self-defence art which uses and transforms various martial arts techniques. Wendo means "the way of women—women in movement" and was developed in the 70s by Canadian women who felt the urgent need to give women/girls an alternative to the male-oriented martial arts and which is connected to and comes out of the women's liberation movement.

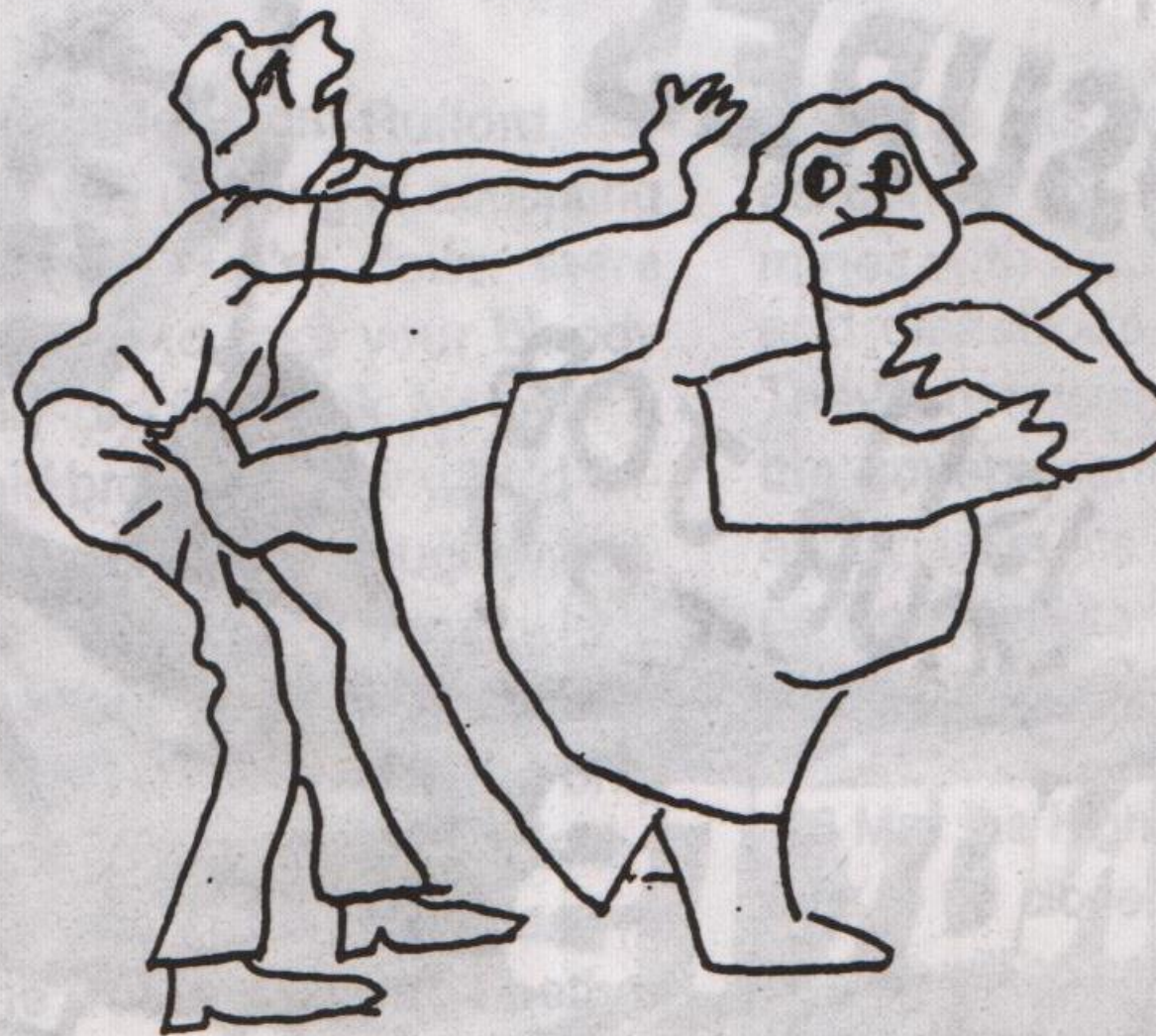
Writing about Wendo for a mixed public isn't without complications, because its analysis of violence against women/girls is radical feminist and therefore men never had or will have access to this kind of self-defence.

Wendo is known very little if at all in London or in Britain, far as I know. The women only self-defence classes I know about are either limited to a short period of time, or classes in classical martial arts like karate, tae kwon do, ju jitsu, etc. It's very good that these classes do exist and women have got the opportunity to do self-defence in a safe, women-only environment, but I also think these classes lack a political context: the complexity of violence against women/girls determines our lives. We all have to live and to deal with it according to our realities and possibilities.

Wendo tries to acknowledge the different life-realities of women/girls, which means that:

1. More or less all women should be able to do

- it, regardless of age
  - Every woman can find her ways in responding to male violence regardless of whether is fully able-bodied or not
  - Black women and women of colour experience racist violence
  - Lesbians are confronted with homophobic violence.
- Working with role play, voice and relaxation exercises in addition to learning self-defence techniques, it is important to come to terms with heterosexism, sexism, racism, ageism, and ableism. They affect how women relate to each other. In order to find ways in which we can act in solidarity with each other and to accept the ways we all respond to male violence, it is imperative to take on these issues.



A further objective of Wendo is to give women the awareness of their own boundaries and the confidence to formulate them. On the whole it is not enough to go to these classes ten times in order to learn some dirty tricks. It is an illusion to believe that with some dirty tricks you are armed for any possible situation and it is also an illusion to believe that after ten years there will be no situations which can do you harm. But certainly Wendo can give you the skills and confidence about successful ways to fight male violence.

And when I'm talking about male violence I don't only mean the tip of the iceberg like sexual abuse, rape, murder, but also the sexist and pornographic ads in the streets,

the way men strip-search us with looks, sexist comments and behaviour etc. And when I'm talking about fighting back, I don't only mean beating up a man, but also the ways we can refuse to be seen as sex objects; to refuse to be touched whenever a bastard likes to touch us, not to be speechless if another sexist comment is made, to be aware of situations when another woman needs help...

Wendo is a forum where women not only share the disturbing experience of male violence, but also the strength and power we give each other through support as well as through the knowledge that we're not alone. There are also lots of stories to tell about how women and girls survived attacks, fought back; stories the mainstream media is not reporting and if at all, to the disadvantage of women.

Wendo is not the thing for organising against male violence. For some women it's very hard to make a commitment. But for many it is a very powerful way to do this. The classes can fulfil various functions: for organising against male violence, for networking with other women's groups, or where information is shared about what's happening concerning these issues, or...

So if any of you know about these kind of women-only self-defence classes in Britain or Ireland, write to BA pleaseeee! And in the meantime give 'em a good kick!

# From Dark to Light

Survivors poetry



strange mixture of emotions in me, for while I share in the pain of the writer, I also celebrate their strength. Reading From Dark to Light was no exception to this. Some poems have very personal meanings, others talk more generally of the system that oppresses so many people from birth. Some show what good friends mean to someone in crisis, others depict total isolation, total loneliness. Some talk of hope and optimism, others dwell in pain and suffering.

The artwork is beautiful. As with the poetry, each one has a different style, a different story, but each one speaks for itself. I found some of them more moving than the poetry, perhaps because they reflected something in me that I couldn't express in words either. A projection of a feeling that I recognised but couldn't have identified myself.

I would recommend this book to you as I not only think survivors' poetry has a rightful place alongside other forms of radical poetry, but also that the survivors' struggle itself should be taken on board by radicals in our fight for a changed society.

This book gives a voice to people who have too often been silenced. It's challenging, strong and most of all it's inspirational.

From Dark to Light 125pp, £5.95, ISBN 1 874595 00 3. Distributed by Central Books or available from 33 Queensdown Road, London E5 8NN. (But is this a dodgy title? What d'you think? - BA)

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# PIT CAMPS a fight to rid ourselves of the government

Since last January women in mining communities have set up pit camps at eight of the pits closed or threatened with closure. The camps have been a contact point and focus of opposition to the pit closures—both local supporters and groups from around the country can visit a camp, do a shift on the rota and otherwise get involved. The idea of the camps may have been inspired by Greenham, but they're very different in that they are run by women living in the area. They've also got caravans and phones...so it's easier to get in touch!

Women from the pit camps have mounted occupations—at Kiveton Park and Armthorpe (Yorkshire), Trentham (N. Staffs), and twice at Parkside (Merseyside). In the most recent occupation at Parkside (the last pit in Lancashire), women broke in early morning and occupied a 260 ft. winding tower, and pitched a tent on top. British coal had locked a door which stopped them from getting down even if they wanted to...but in any case they plan on staying "as long as it takes" As we go to press they are still there...

## Rufford Pit Camp

We visited the pit camp at Rufford Colliery, near Mansfield (Notts) and spoke to Linda, Linda M. and Audrey. Audrey had been active in the strike of 84/85 and saw the camp as a continuation of that fight. For Linda, this was the first time she'd been active. "I regret not doing anything then, I just thought because I wasn't involved with the pits at the time, it wasn't anything to do with me...now I regret every minute of it!"

Now she lives with a miner, who had also been active in 84/5. When the pit closures had

been announced he "just went upstairs and would hardly speak to anyone, and to see him that way just made me want to go out and start fighting! So I got talking to these other ladies who'd been in the strike, and they had me going out speaking...but there was something more that had to happen." She became a delegate for Notts with Women Against Pit Closures. "When they were talking about starting pit camps, Linda thought, 'if they could do it we could do it as well.'"

They leafletted all the houses in the area, (during this mission Linda nearly got her finger

bitten off by a Rottweiler), called a meeting on a Wednesday night, and set up the camp on a Thursday with about 20 women.

The women faced a big challenge starting a pit camp in divided Nottinghamshire. In areas like Yorkshire or North Staffordshire which been solidly on strike in '84/'85 the camps have a very strong local base. But the UDM which scabbed in the strike still dominates in this area. "We didn't know how people would react," said Linda. "We've had a big response from everywhere, but it's been a bit hard getting local people involved." She added, "If people who'd been connected with the UDM come along, we have to make them welcome if they are now fighting the same fight we are now...as long as they know this camp supports the NUM and fights all closures."

## Arselicks

Linda pointed out that Linda M's husband is in the UDM, "but she has joined us, she has come to this pit camp and we've accepted her." Linda M. quickly added that he hadn't been scabbing in '84/'85, he joined later when he started at Rufford. Linda M. herself comes from a Yorkshire family with 8 members in the pits, for her the UDM "doesn't exist", since its only recognised by the government and not the labour movement. "That's because the UDM arselicks", she said bluntly.

On some of the differences between now and '84, Audrey said: "The most pressing thing

then was to feed everybody, to keep people from going back to work. And now its a problem of them trying to close all the pits." Are the same support networks being used from '84? "Not so much. A lot of people with those contacts have left the local pits. And many in the support groups have gone their own ways." When the new closures were announced in October, there was much more support "because a lot of people realised the strike was right in '84. There was a lot more help this time...we used to get spat on when collecting back then."

But much of the first wave of support has quieted since the beginning of the year. Earlier Linda told me that the camp had visitors from all over, and the rota was always full. The SWP put in a large presence in the early days. "But now they don't come, except for a couple members who are personal friends. I think their HQ pulled them out, they've moved on to Timex, or is it the teachers? It's like we've been dumped!"

Unfortunately, some of the women active in the strike have kept away from the camp. Says Linda M. "They've been through the fight and lost. We know they held out a long time but they lost...and they just can't

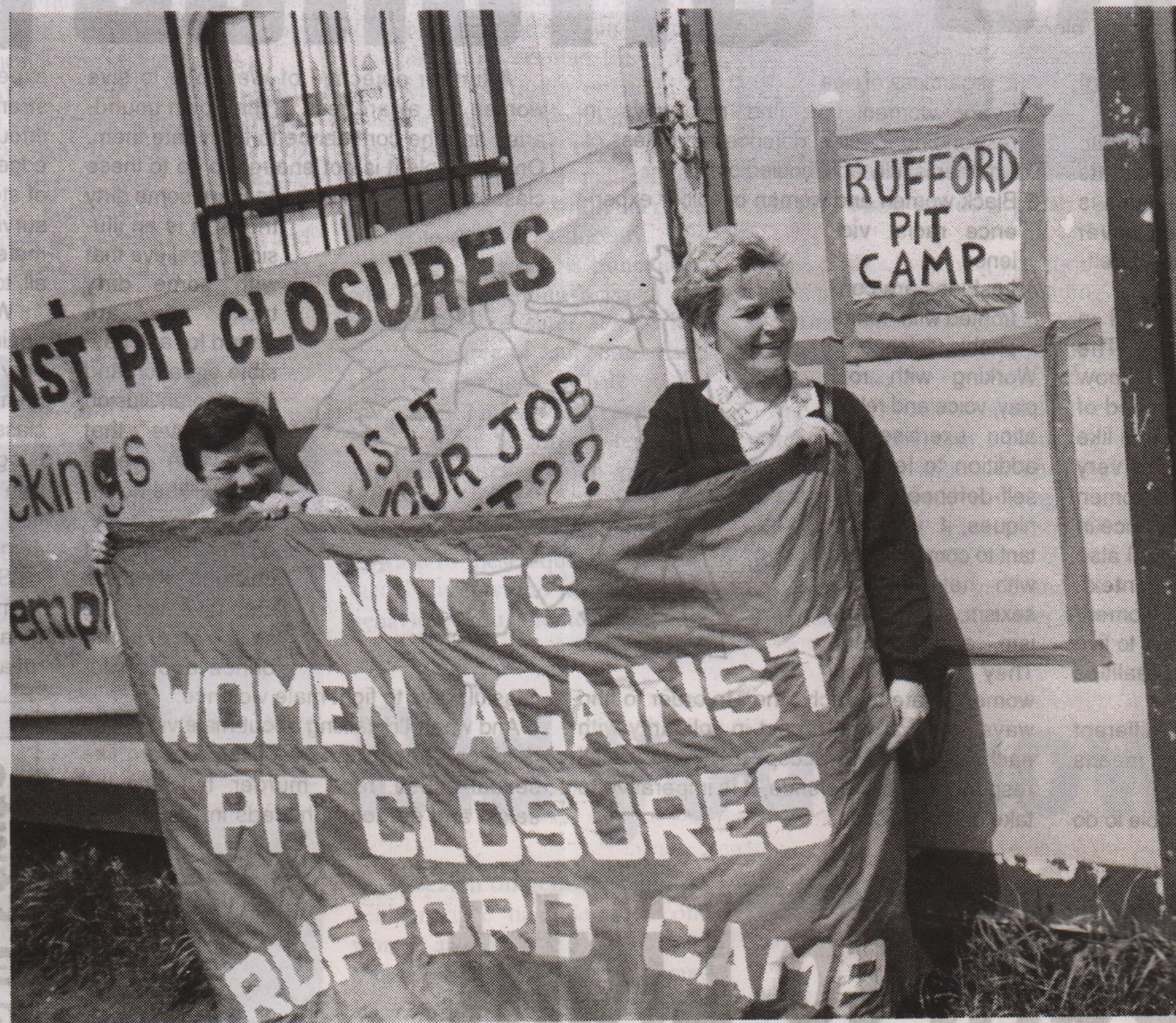
go through with it again. But Audrey's been with us from Day 1. I wish there were more like her, coming back to join the fight!"

## Not Winning the Pools

At the moment they have to counter the pressure the on miners to accept "voluntary" redundancy. The offer of a £10,000 redundancy payment has to be accepted by the end of '93, or else the miner risks compulsory redundancy with no payment at all. But taking redundancy isn't like "winning the pools", for there are a lot of restrictions attached to this payment. The recipient has to live for at least a year on it, and when it's spent he has to prove to the social security that it has been spent "wisely", showing receipts etc. A recent ruling decrees that the families will not be allowed to pay off a mortgage with it! The house will be considered an asset and they'll be forced to sell the house before they could receive any benefit.

As well as keeping their own camp going, the women at Rufford have been supporting actions at other pits. Linda took part in an occupation at Kiveton Park pit in Yorkshire. "It was after the men were working, so we had to break in through the window. Once we were in we were refused any food or drink, but all the women came and managed to shove them in, along with a kettle." They went along to support occupations at Parkside pit and the first one at the Armthorpe pit office last December.

In mid-May when three women chained



Fanning the flames at Houghton Main women's pit camp.

Photo: Joanne O'Brien/Format

themselves to a narrow ledge at the entrance to one of the shafts at Trentham pit, the Rufford women went along with food and drink and sanitary towels. Security and police had the area sealed off, but according to Linda the women managed to get around that:

"I said, well come, let's get going, take no notice of these security men...and we didn't...In the end they finally let the pit camp women through. But when we got to where these women were supposed to be, there were all these security men waiting there like bloody Gestapo, and they put all these trucks in the way and had all this barbed wire up. Then one of us climbed over and then everybody started climbing through. And when we tried to get up to the women these security guards stood in the way, and we tried to throw the food in to them. And as quick as we were throwing the food, the guards were throwing it back.

### Scratch their Eyes out

Then one of the guards got hold of Rose's arm, started pulling her arm and wouldn't let go. The security guards started pushing again and the next minute the women started attacking...fighting like cats! One of the guards got his glasses broken..."

"After all they were nasty with us..." someone added. Too right, we agreed, make no excuses! In the end they got the stuff to the women inside, who were cheerful and singing.

Back when the camp started there would be a rally or march every Saturday or Sunday in some mining community and they would go there to represent the camp. In fact, on the Saturday we were at Rufford we went to a march/rally near Trentham attended by 1000 or so. The Rufford women organised their own march (Feb) in Rainworth that brought 1500 people out. They also hold socials—they raised £100 at last week's social, which they donated to "Women in Black" in Belgrade, Serbia, a group active against war and nationalism. (see BA 2)

### A Fight For Everbody

The women say their fight goes beyond saving jobs at Rufford pit. "It's a fight to rid ourselves of the government—a fight for everybody, a fight for communities. When this place closes this village will be a ghost town." The nearby village of Blidworth is an example of what they want to avoid. When their pit shut down, miners were promised jobs in new industrial parks.

But the industrial parks usually brought their own people with them; many were offices and headquarters and used as storage space. Only one local person actually was employed there...making tea. Yuppies have been encouraged to buy up cheap houses in defunct villages—there's a mainline station, only 1 1/2 hours to London.

How have relationships changed since this started, we wondered, how have you been getting on with your husbands, especially...when we belong to different unions?" Linda M laughed "I just told him from day 1 I was with the NUM so stuff you!!...He believes in what we're fighting for... if we can just get him to sign over, he thinks it's too late you see!

But you know we're all having problems, stress-related problems. We've all been living on the knife-edge for some time. This is not something that's come since the 13 October; we've been hearing Rufford's closing at such and such a date for the last four years!"



Trentham pit camp women march in Hanley, N. Staffordshire, 16 May Photo: Sanja

When the initial 220 left from Rufford, her husband told her he was thinking of accepting redundancy. "You what?? I'm down there fighting and your going to take your bloody money! We actually didn't speak for over a week over it" But his brother in law who'd finished persuaded him not to go through with it. "He told him that he hadn't met a miner who'd taken the redundancy and was happy about it. 'They all regret it. Don't do it!' That's the only time we had problems. He moans if he thinks I come down here too much...but as long as I'm down here when he's at work it don't bother him. He knows I come here..."

But domestic conflict doesn't just come from different union affiliations: "Even though he's in the NUM and I'm fighting for the same thing as he's fighting for, we've got problems..." said Linda. There was still flak about starting the camp and being active:

### Bloody Stupid?

"...I said to him, We're starting a pit camp. He says 'where?' I says at Rufford, and he goes, 'you're not coming down to this village starting a pit camp! Don't be bloody stupid!' So the pit camp went ahead and its doing well...and the next thing I says to him, 'I've got a brilliant idea! If other pit camps in other places can have a rally, so can we!' 'Don't be bloody stupid! How can you have a rally in the middle of the village in Rainworth?' Say no more. The next day I was on the phone...It took ten days to organise that rally, and it went ahead. And it was one of the biggest rallies around there was...1,500. We didn't expect that many to be down here. We thought it would be really difficult especially in a UDM area. We didn't know what to expect, we didn't know whether they'd set the bloody caravan on fire! Because it was like that, some of them were."

Everyone here is angry about other attacks on living standards taking place—the government had just announced their intentions to make people pay for doctors and hospital beds and prescriptions, with no exemptions for unemployed and pensioners. "We've already paid for these things, and they want us to pay again!" And this came on top of social security cuts, which have been felt for a long time. Linda's daughter told us that they've already been putting water meters in the village—she's got one in her new council flat—and received bills for £20 for the six weeks she'd been there. "But I'm not paying it," she said.

"Next thing you know the air will be privatised!" said Linda M. The women speculated

that if the pits were sold off, they may be used as dumps for toxic waste, or as open-cast mines with disastrous environmental results and disastrous working conditions as well. They emphasised that the "pits don't belong to the government. The coal is a natural asset and its ours, its not theirs to sell or dispose of as they feel like."

26 May the High Court gave the go ahead for 10 pits to be closed and sold. So the women's pit camps will be needing more support, with perhaps more action ahead. Contact them at the addresses below:

**Rufford Colliery**, Rainworth, Mansfield Notts. (0623-490-080)

**Grimethorpe Colliery**, Barnsley, South Yorkshire Houghton Main Colliery, Little Houghton, Barnsley, South Yorkshire (0226-757718)

**Markham Main Colliery**, Armthorpe, Doncaster, South Yorkshire (0226-780-787)

### Left-wing Tories!

The women expressed some extremely cautious hope that all these attacks will inspire people to take action together, that more will wake up so we can "rid ourselves of the government". There wasn't a lot of agreement over how to do it, though. Linda still had some belief in Labour, but that was by no means unanimous.

"Labour, you're joking...they're just leftwing Tories!"

"Who'll run the country then, if Labour's no good."

"Nobody!"

"Us!"

Well, we didn't exactly work out any strategy for ridding ourselves of the government, world capitalism and male supremacy. Perhaps another time...and while we're trying to sort that one out, Rufford pit camp needs support: "We need women to help us cover the rota. A lot of us are starting to get tired and stressed...and sometimes we're just taking it out on each other. Having more people down will give us a break and help us keep it going! We know we won't pack in..."

Rozanne

**Trentham Colliery**, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire (0782-644-467)

**Parkside Colliery**: Winwick Rd., Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside (0925-291-799)

**Vane Tempest Colliery**, Seaham, Co. Durham (0860-328-568)

**Taff Myrth**, South Wales: phone the numbers below for info...

Also you can contact the **National Miners Support Network** (071-388-7961)

or **Women Against Pit Closures**, National Office, (0782-281-246)

NOT WITH A BARGEPOLE A rant!

If you haven't heard much recent news about the fight to keep pits open, its not because it isn't happening. When the occupation at Trentham pit took place, there were constant demonstrations, rallies, and other actions. The same has occurred in other areas - but little of it appears in the national media.

Here is just one example of media suppression. In May women set up a "mobile pit camp" outside Tory headquarters which moved on to Parliament Gardens. A BBC camera crew was called in and started filming, when suddenly...Beep! Beep! went the mobile phone. A few words on it and then they suddenly began packing up. "Sorry," one of them told the women, "we've been told not to touch this pit camp stuff with a barge-pole." And there plenty of other incidents where reporters were even covering an event, yet somehow the news never got past the editor's desk.

We're not ones to go about peddling conspiracy theories - if the realities of domination were that simple, we'd be finished with it by now. But something funny seems to be going on here...

At Rufford the women were concerned that lesspeople had been coming lately. It can't be blamed entirely on the fickleness and

opportunism of sectarian politicians, can it? Since the first big demonstrations in October, the struggle in mining communities suddenly dropped out of sight for a lot of people. Not much on the news, just the odd eensy-weensy little article stuck somewhere slightly accessible with a magnifying glass... Suppression in the media can keep efforts to fight back localised and isolated; demoralising people into thinking no one's interested - when in fact no one fucking knows what's going on!

The miners strike of 84/85 had a huge impact; many more people saw themselves in opposition to the state as a result, and large groups of women began seeing themselves differently as well. It meant links between some formerly "law-abiding" workers and the marginalised. The strike was defeated. But for a time stability was threatened, and obviously those in power would want to make sure there won't be the slightest chance of it happening again.

Yet another reason why its urgent for us to build our own information and news networks - because we won't be getting any joy from theirs! So... everyone send all your news and gossip to *Bad Attitude* or the European Counter-Network, both at 121 Railton Rd, London SE24.

# Well Sexy Women

**Is it a safer sex guide or a scurrilous excuse for a bit of videoed hanky-panky?** Well, myself, I'd say the former. *Well Sexy Women* is produced by Pride Videos with the help of the Terrence Higgins Trust and I think they're aiming to be a cross-over between a lesbian version of all those video sex manual things (is it porn or is it education? - yawn) and lesbian sexual health pamphlet.

Goddess knows, we dykes do need health guides that cater specifically to us. All the reports I've ever

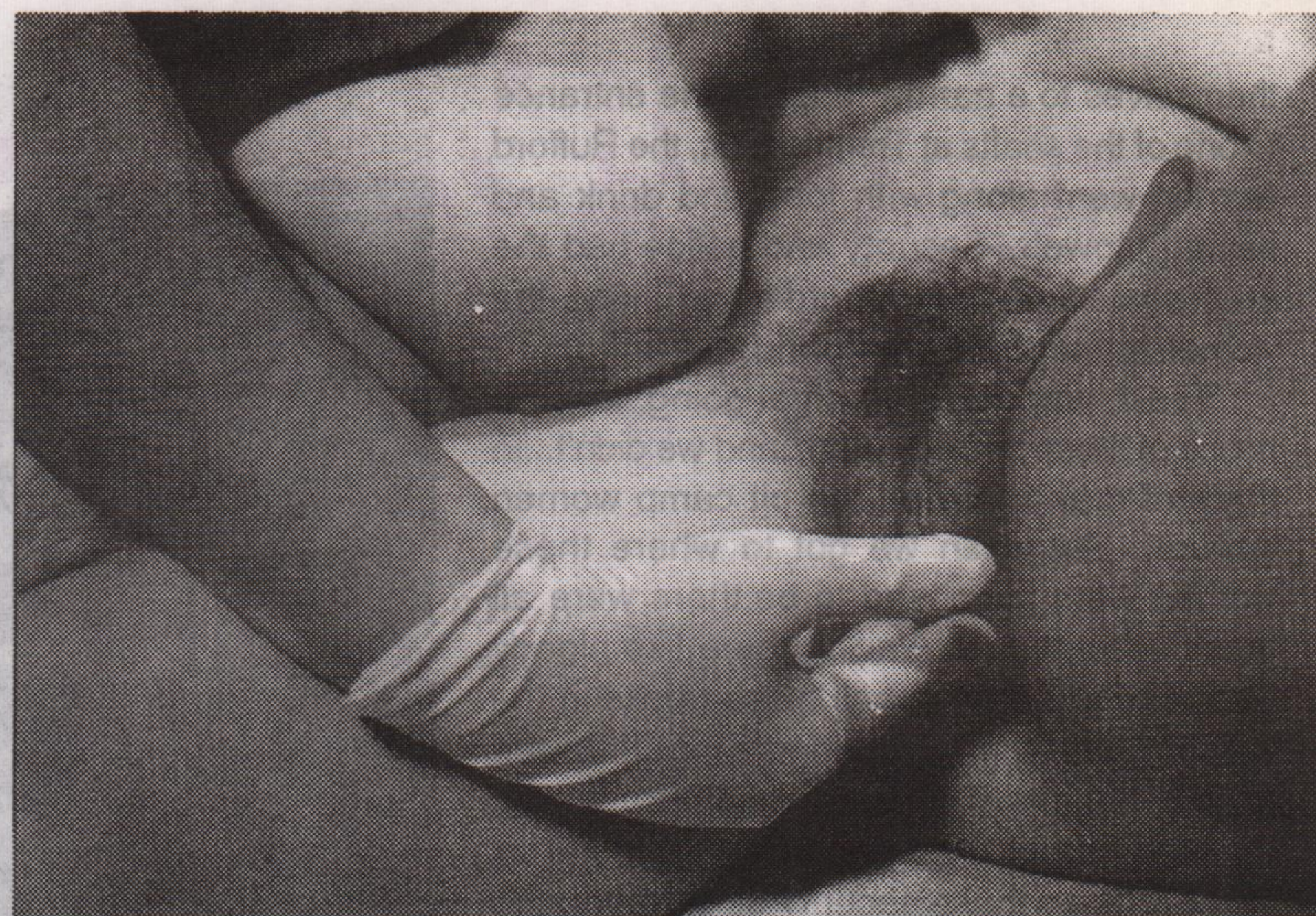
seen tell me that, as a lesbian, I am five million times more likely to have something nasty (gynaecological or other) go undetected than my straight sisters. And all because I don't get fitted up for contraception. Surely this says something about our health-care system?

Anyway, *Well Sexy Women* has been at number five in the Virgin video charts but for those of you who haven't seen it, here's a review. The format is as follows: group of quasi-celebrity dykes and AIDS mandarins sit around a table

laden with fruit, crystal, silver and china and discuss sexual health, STDs, Safer Sex and stuff. The chat is quite specific though a bit stilted. Many sexual practices are discussed in a non-judgmental way. However the method of one woman feigning innocence and another filling her in, though no doubt intended to reassure those of us who might not have contemplated these things even while drunk, left me feeling a bit lectured at and wildly incredulous as to the asker's sincerity.

Anyway, this talk is punctuated with women having a go at the practicalities of safer sex with a varying degree of raunchiness and visual excitement. I hate to be fatuous but I must warn readers that one of these features a terrifying and grotesquely-shaped and patterned tie.

If you're like me, you'll probably forward to these squelchy bits but that is naughty and not the sort of behaviour you should be aiming



And here's how you do it, girls! photo: Dana Schuerholz/Format/Impact visuals

for. As always, watching somebody else have sex, like reading someone's diary, brings both sniggers and a tinge of anxiety. Should I do that? No way!

And then it's back to the table. I've watched carefully, only a plum gets eaten - are they anorexic? The discussion continues, covering an exhaustive list of gyno infections dykes can pick up by way of sex (but in an upbeat way, girls!) and the whys, hows and whens of safer sex.

I was initially a bit sceptical of this video. Safer Sex has been the area of lesbian health, not traditionally glamorous, colonised by the trendy (and vacuous). I was pleased at the range of health issues covered and very happy to see flashed up at the end the statistics on breast cancer - currently a massive killer of women, particularly dykes.

*Well Sexy Women* is available from leading stockists near you now.

## Rita Lynch's back!



Rita Lynch's front!

**Good news for all Rita Lynch fans** - her phenomenally popular and profoundly unavailable LP is at last available. All of those whose organs wobbled as Rita warbled on the soundtrack of the film *Rosebud* can now rush out and purchase a vinyl or CD version of the object of their lust. Phew! Just in time, eh?

The LP has searing versions of 'Call Me Your Girlfriend' and 'Beautiful Eyes' and a powerful cover of 'Pale Blue Eyes'. It's all very emotional and rock and roll, if you see what I mean. It's a great present for the girl in your life (you!).

After an extremely long period of arriving in shops suddenly and then

disappearing without trace, *Call Me Your Girlfriend* is now being distributed by a band of dedicated and efficient women. They have rescued the records from the very heart of the record company and are on a mission to ensure that Rita ousts Bet as the most famous Lynch in the country.

They also want people interested in booking Rita for gigs to get in touch with them. So, to details: Cheques, IMOs, Visa etc made payable to: Julie Taylor. **Send to:** 37 Cornwallis Crescent, Clifton, Bristol BS8 4PH **Price:** Vinyl: £6.50; CD: £10 (4 extra tracks). Bookings: (0272) 240283.

## Did you know...?

★ Research on genes and human cell structure has identified one woman as being the original 'gene fount' for the whole of the human race. She lived in Africa about 300 years ago and her descendants later migrated out of Africa and spread across the world, giving rise to all the people living today. Scientists have named her Lucy... (very African name!)

★ The world's first woman gynaecologist, AGNODICE, lived in the fourth century BC. In an already all-male world of learning, she attended medical classes and practised gynaecology disguised as a man. She was so successful that other doctors, jealous of her, accused her of seducing her patients. In court she had to reveal her sex in order to save her life. She was charged instead with practising a profession restricted by law to men alone. She stood her ground and tried to convince the judges of her right to practice health care for women, and was (miraculously) acquitted!

★ A Manus proverb says, "Copulation is so revolting that the only husband you can bear is the one whose advances you can hardly feel"!!!

★ A woman called FABIOLA lived in Rome around 1600 years ago. She established a hospital where

she worked both as nurse and doctor, becoming the world's first known woman surgeon...

★ CLEOPATRA, 'the alchemist of Alexandria', was an early chemist and scholar and was the author of a classic text *Chrysopeia* (Gold-making), still in use in Europe in the middle Ages...

★ A Chinese woman, WEI FU-ZEN, is still honoured today as China's greatest calligrapher and founder of the whole school of the art of writing in 3AD...

★ One of the leading intellectuals of Alexandria in the fourth to fifth centuries AD was a strong woman called HYPATIA. She invented the astrolabe and the planisphere (an apparatus for distilling water) and a hydroscope (for measuring the specific gravity of liquids). She also taught philosophy, geometry, astronomy and algebra. Unable to deal with her success, CYRIL, the patriarch of Alexandria had her tortured and she was murdered in AD412.

★ A story told by the NAVAJO peoples of New Mexico goes like this... "First man taunted his wife with being interested in sex alone. His rebuke gave rise to a quarrel in which she said that women could get along without men. To prove the challenge, the men moved across the river and destroyed the

rafts that carried them. As years went by the women grew weaker: they needed the men's strength to produce food and they became maddened with desire [!!!!]. As a result of self-abuse they gave birth to monsters... the men too practised perversion, but from their excesses no evil survived. After many had died and great suffering had ensued, the women yielded and begged the men to take them back. They did so and all agreed henceforth the man should be the leader since he belonged to the stronger sex". So the moral of the story is...burn those bloody rafts!

★ JILIMI, or 'single women's camps' have existed in Australian Aboriginal communities for years. "Here live widows who have chosen not remarry, estranged wives of violent husbands, women who are ill or visiting from another country and all their dependent children. In fact any woman who wants to live free of the conflicts of heterosexual society may seek refuge in the jilimi. Married women living with their husbands congregate in the jilimi in the day to talk and plan visits, family affairs and ritual matters. The jilimi is taboo to all men, who must often travel long circuitous routes to avoid passing nearby..."

From: Rosalind Miles, *The Women's History of the World*, 1989, Paladin.



# We just thought we'd go out and try and change the law...

## Interview with Meena Patel from Southhall Black Sisters

In *BA3* we interviewed Kiranjit Ahluwalia where she talked about the successful campaign leading to her release. Here, in the second part of the interview, Meena Patel, a community worker for Southhall Black Sisters, talks about the background of the campaign, for which they received a civil liberties award. Dear Reader, I want you to pay special attention to the woman hours Meena so casually relates.

Throughout, MP = Meena Patel, BA = *Bad Attitude*.

**BA:** Has the campaign affected the position of women?

**MP:** It's made domestic violence an issue: Within the legal system and also at the ground level. Women who need help are now more aware that they can get help and about how to get it. It's also effected a change in attitude in the criminal justice system around domestic violence. They're beginning to take on board battered women.

### Striking back with a bed pan

For example, Sally Himes was recently given a suspended sentence after she killed her husband. She's seventy years old and she killed her husband with a bed pan after years of abuse. Why did they put this old woman, bedridden, on medication, absolutely no threat to society, in jail? She is now out with a suspended sentence. - It's a shift in attitude, the criminal justice system is looking at domestic violence.

But judges still have the discretion, the final say, in sentencing. Discrepancies arise. So Bisla Singh, was given a suspended sentence for murdering his wife, yet a woman was given five years for murdering her husband.

**BA:** Did you realise the campaign was going to have the massive effect that it did?

**MP:** When we heard first about Kiranjit it made us address the issue of women who kill—in the past we had mainly worked around women who had been killed. It made us think how we would take it from here; what are the arguments around it?, what is the fault in the law? Does the law take into account the specific differences when women kill their partners? We researched on America and Canada. What are the laws there and to what extent can women use domestic violence as an argument.

### No second chances to get it right

We had to sort out our political stance on the issue before we could even think in terms of a campaign. We ourselves had many discussions. We had to be very precise in our demands. We couldn't afford to make mistakes or to say 'well these are our demands, we'll come back with better demands later'.

**BA:** So what were the demands?

**MP:** An immediate release of Kiranjit, Sara Thornton and all the other women. An immediate reform of the Law of Provocation and a thorough review of the Homicide Act and the Criminal Justice System and more resources for women leaving violent relationships. We were initially worried that that we would get a bit of a backlash.—news stories about women on the rampage, killing their husbands. We didn't but we still had to be very careful about what we were demanding of the government.

We didn't want to follow the American example of 'battered woman's syndrome'. We

had to think what it was we wanted, we started examining the laws that exist. We called a public meeting, in Crawley, which drew a huge public response.

### Linking up nationally

We didn't think about how big it would get, with all our campaigns we just go out and do it and we've always had quite wide support. We just thought we'd go out and make people aware and change the law around women who kill. We didn't think of a national campaign at first. Then we started linking up with other groups like Justice for Women, who campaign around women in prison, these groups were all around the country. Then we started thinking about making it a national campaign.

**BA:** You always wanted a change in the law of provocation?

**MP:** Yes

**BA:** But with Kiranjit's appeal two pleas were possible, provocation or diminished responsibility...?

**MP:** Yes. The judge wouldn't accept the plea of provocation, he went for diminished, though we entered both. Politically, it would have been best for Kiranjit to have been released on the plea of provocation, case law would have been established and women could have used that plea in the future. As it is, she was released on the grounds that she was temporarily mad and that's a bit close to the American example of battered women's syndrome. And there are cases where this has failed women. It medicalises women, it draws up symptoms for 'cases' and women may fall outside these boundaries.

### Disappointed...but happy

We were disappointed that she wasn't out on provocation but we were happy that she was out. And we had made that shift. And that's what's brilliant, it did that and it has made judges change their attitudes around domestic violence.

**BA:** How do you think it looks for a change in the law of provocation?

**MP:** Hmm. Well it still needs a lot of campaigning, research and proving that the law is failing women. Men are able to use the defences more successfully than women. That's a flaw.

### An army of killer women

We have to combat this fear that it will be opening the floodgates to allow women to kill. Women don't do that. As a rule it's when they come to a breaking point after years of abuse. In New Zealand there have been positive changes in the law and in Canada a number of women, in prison for murdering their abusive partners, have been released.

In this country we're going backwards unless women are getting up and fighting. To be honest without the support outside, from the public and women's groups, from sympa-

thetic media, it would have been a lot harder for Kiranjit to have been released.

**BA:** Have you had more referrals since the Kiranjit case?

**MP:** Yes, we have. I think it has empowered more women to seek help. But then, we've always had a lot of referrals and we've been facing a lot of cuts in Southall, so women who might once have gone elsewhere are now filtering in here. It's hard to say if the increased number of women coming to us is because of Kiranjit, though I would guess yes.

**BA:** The campaign was organised quickly.

**MP:** Yes, we had to. While that was happening, there was lots of other stuff going on so we had to split up. We were able to mobilise a large group of volunteers to do leafletting and to organise petitions. But we made sure that there was one person in the courts every day to take notes. Kiranjit's solicitors at that time would not talk to us. We'd done research in the evenings and we offered to give evidence about Asian women and why an Asian woman wouldn't leave home and would remain in a violent situation. The specific cultural and religious problems. But they wouldn't listen to us.

So one night we wrote a report all this. Hanana used to meet [Kiranjit's] solicitor on the train on the way to court in the morning and she thrust these pieces of paper at him and said 'look at this, read it!'. We were trying to get him to call us as witnesses to talk about this. But in the end he just used a minute amount of this letter in his summing up. He didn't like us, he didn't like her talking to us. It was only really when Kiranjit was found guilty and sentenced to life that the case began to roll.

### The case began to roll

But it was hard. We were dealing with other cases, not just Kiranjit's. That's always the case. At the moment it's the changes in immigration law and also what's been happening in India, with the storming of the Hindu temple. We manage by working nights and weekends. But there was one point in the Kiranjit case where I thought if I didn't take some time off I'd go crazy.

(We talk a bit about cutbacks in the area of welfare and the need for organisations like SBS.)

**MP:** You need somewhere you can go, tell someone what's been happening and get advice. Many women come here saying they've been beaten up for ten/fifteen years and ask what they can do about it.

### The real meaning of support

They'll listen to our solicitor and often they'll take away our advice and give their husband one more chance. But they know they can come back to us if they decide to go ahead with an injunction or a divorce.

We accompany all women to court, whether or not they speak English. We accompany them to the solicitors to the DSS, to the Council so that they're supported whatever they decide to do. Quite often the police will say there's no point in arresting these men because at the end of the day these women will drop the charges. We try and encourage

them to go ahead.

But it is very hard. Court cases can be expensive and time consuming, even if you have legal aid. Then, you might get the case to court, get a 'guilty' verdict and yet have the costs awarded against you. That happened to us recently. And then you have the hurdle of the Crown Prosecution Service who might decide to reduce the charge or throw it out completely. The police might decide to charge a man, then CPS drop the case.

And getting an injunction. What women don't always know is that you can have an injunction but the only way police will come and arrest your partner is with a power of arrest attached to that injunction, otherwise you've just got to go back to court again. They won't even charge him with assault.

### Obstacle course

**BA:** It's like the law is an obstacle between women and justice, even with proper representation. And yet, most women don't even get that.

**MP:** Many lawyers and solicitors are only there to make money. When initially arrested, you are offered a solicitor. Many women keep these solicitors because they don't know enough about the system, how to go about getting a solicitor genuinely interested in winning your case. Often, these solicitors really don't care about their clients at all. They just churn the cases out and are there to collect the money at the end.

All of which is indisputable, really. So you can only really feel relieved that a group of women are doing something that really does challenge the way the law consistently chews women up. And suspect they're probably not being paid half of what they deserve!

Anyway, if you're interested in learning more about Southhall Black Sisters, they have a book about them and their history, *Against the Grain*, available from **Southhall Black Sisters**, 52 Norwood Road, Southall, Middlesex. And they are about to publish a new book about the police's response to domestic violence. \*

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# CONFESSIONS OF A FLEXIDYKE



## WOMEN AND BISEXUALITY by SUE GEORGE SCARLET PRESS

I've got to admit I approached this book with a certain amount of wariness. Though I'm a dyke who has accepted the fact I have lustful feelings for members of the opposite sex, I can't stand wishy-washy stuff like: I am attracted to *people*, man (much to the relief of any pets in the vicinity!), I'm not into *categories*, man. Isn't it terrible that you have to be one thing or the other, oh why can't we just love everyone? etc etc. Unfortunately, I've come across a lot of that in connection with bisexuality.

In *Women and Bisexuality*, Sue George begins to go beyond such liberalism. She argues that being bisexual is not just sitting on the fence, but offers the possibility of tearing down the fucking fence altogether. In a society where most adults must be organised into stable heterosexual couples, homosexuality (for both sexes) is seen as something which just 'happens'. Likewise, "there is simply no place for bisexuality as a conscious practice within mainstream British and Western society as it is presently organised." Bisexuality can be "deeply threatening" to the social/het order because it blurs the boundaries between the deviant gay and the normal straight.

For Susan George bisexuality is not just 'swinging both ways' - where sexuality is just seen in relation to the present partner(s) - but

to 'always consciously feel some desire for one sex when loving the other.' No one lover can fulfil a bisexual woman's needs, therefore she has a "built-in potential for autonomy".

Some of these points did make me question some of my views of bisexuality. For one I'd thought before that it was just the lesbian side of bisexuality that gave it any punch, and the straight side was simply *straight*. But when a lesbian in the book talked about how her "bisexual" relationships with men can be very different than "heterosexual" relationships with men, it put it in a different light. In my own experience I found that was true, maybe because my involvement with women put me in a much stronger position.

Occasionally liberalism rears its bland little head, especially when she talks history. For example she writes on splits in the women's movement in the 80's: "These debates signalled the beginnings of a split between two types of feminism - put simplistically - anti-pornography and anti-censorship..." But were there only *two* types of feminism? What of feminists who were anti-pornography and anti-censorship and pro-sex? There she accepts some false categories herself!

The way she writes about history reflects in how she writes about recent trends in queer politics (or should we call it queer *marketing*??) SG thinks "queer" is good because it allows more openness about bisexuality. But is that reason enough to be so uncritical? And how 'open' is the scene anyway? Years ago I got fed up with censorious and rigid lesbian feminist orthodoxy, and welcomed a radical challenge to it. But now that rigidity has been replaced by new

norms of how dykes should behave/look/think. The old shit of political correctness has been replaced by the new shit of 'coolness'.

So silly categories such as 'lesbian boys' multiply by the hour, accompanied by pictures about as erotic as old socks. Cliches and yawn-provoking reactionary shite are presented as being 'radical' and just oh-so-very outrageous...but really the only outrage going on is the growth of certain bank accounts! SG gives a glowing account of this pretentious paraphernalia as the ultimate in subversion. But somehow I strongly doubt that the ruling classes will be losing any sleep when the next *She-Bang* or *Quim\** appears.

At the same time she does put queer (and bisexual?) culture in a useful context. She cites a rebellion against the conformity that grew under repressive economic and political developments. In recent years there's been less belief in collectives, alternatives, or long-term non-monogamy. This isn't limited to the straight world, for among lesbians and gays there's been a tendency to couple up and settle down, encouraged but not entirely due to lack of housing. Queer politics developed in opposition to these conditions. Unfortunately there's been more style than substance to this "opposition"...but perhaps some starting points have been identified in developing a real one.

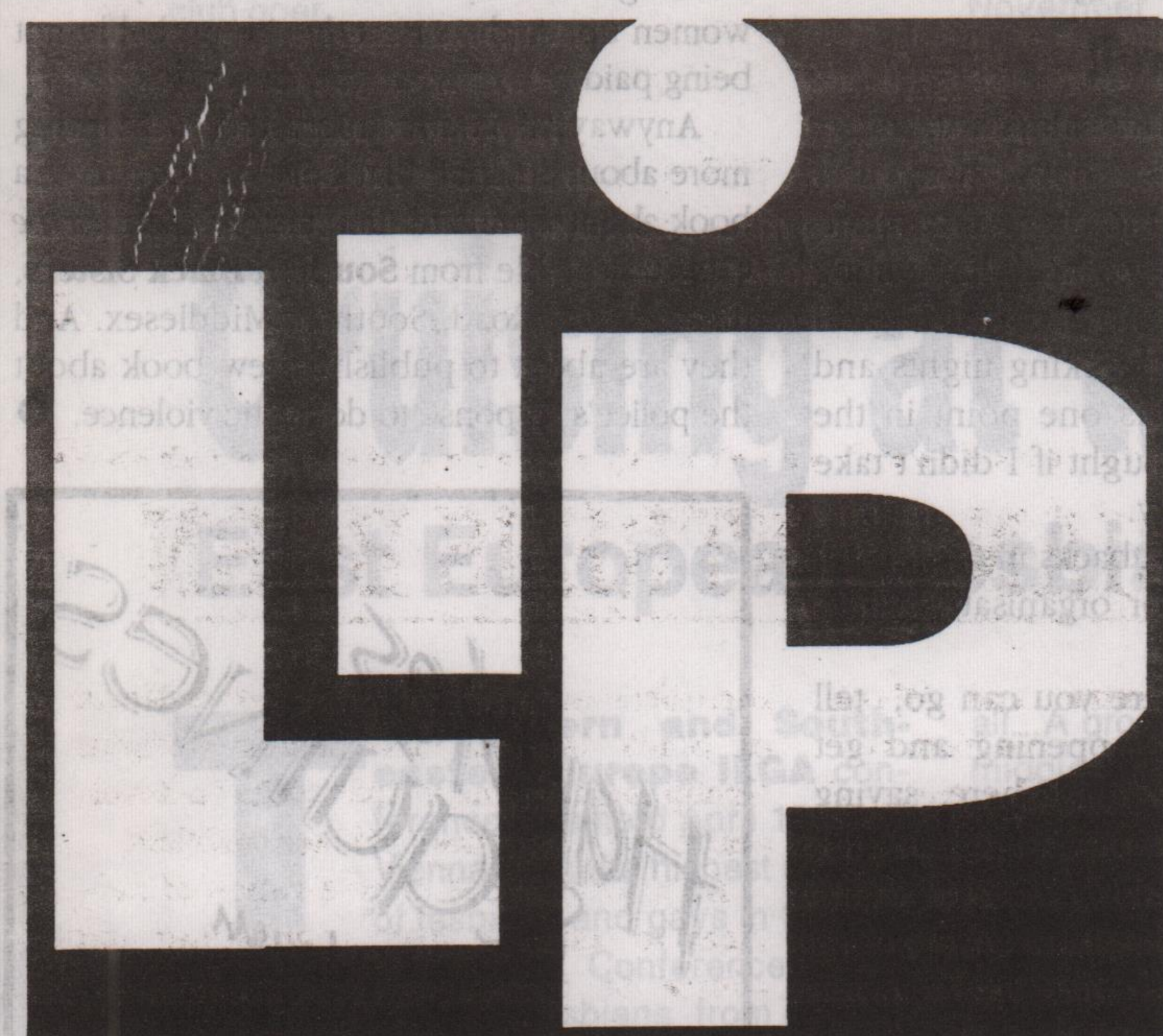
Well, whatever my arguments with it *Women and Bisexuality* is worth reading. It contains clearly written discussions of bisexual identity and politics, and personal

accounts. She does draw a lot on a survey of bisexual women she conducted. Surveys are usually dry reading and I skipped bits here and there, but it didn't get too much in the way. I also found the author's political commitment to non-monogamy refreshing and nicely out of step with both current conservatism and the "if-dykes-went-cottaging-the-state-will-crumble" lark which is only its B-side.

In the end though I wasn't convinced - "bisexual" is just too broad a category, ranging from a married women who might just fantasize about sex with women, to a dyke who has one or two flings with men. OK, maybe I fancy guys sometimes but to me that doesn't make the basis of a personal and political identity. Tacking on the word "bisexual" to lesbian/gay groups and events just seems to be watering the message down - that the *institution* of heterosexuality must be destroyed and it is lesbian and gay sexuality which is suppressed by it. Some of the favoured modifications going around such as "lesbians who sleep with men", or "lesbian-identified bisexual" are just too long and unwieldy. I prefer to call myself a flexi-dyke, not to be confused with the bits of plastic enclosed in fanzines!

Rozanne

\*trendy dyke publications



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eye on dykes

or send cheque for £2 to lamp P.O.

box 3007 brixton london SW9 7SR

## THE STORY OF QIU JU

DIRECTOR: ZHANG YIMOU

This is undoubtedly Zhang Yimou's best film to date. Taking a refreshingly different turn, *The Story of Qiu Ju* portrays the raw and colourful village life in contemporary China. This film is of very great importance to the perception and representation of China and Chinese women, particularly in the light of Zhang's earlier films.

Qiu Ju (Gong Li) is a young woman seeking legal justice for her husband who was wronged by the village head. What we watch is Qiu Ju's unrelenting conviction through the physical journeys she makes between her home and several official sites. Qiu Ju grapples with bureaucracy often with humorous results, as country peasant is baffled with each higher authority she turns to. We are left sharing her irony when the story takes an unexpected turn...

The film does not tell this simple story alone. Every visual and aural element contributes to the rich, heavy tapestry that is the picture of rural/urban China. The feast

of cinematography and music of Zhang's trademark style departs from the stylised order of *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou*, and *Raise the Red Lantern*. Instead, it is transferred into the wealth imbued within the vivid, real colours of China.

The cast consists of 90% 'candid' locals and farmers from the region, and many scenes were taken with hidden cameras in order to capture as much realism as possible. It is also a relief to see Gong Li out of her 'beautiful suffering woman' role, showing a true talent.

Through Zhang's colour and noise, we smell and taste a culture that permeates political structures, via the simplest things, like the way people eat their noodles, or the idioms in their language. This indeed creates the story of a People around which the film beautifully weaves a picture. I am definitely going back for seconds - you can't miss this one.

Cherilene Chen

**CLARE RAMSARAN RECENTLY MET WITH TERESA SALAZAR HOPE, ADVICE AND INFORMATION WORKER AT CAMDEN LESBIAN CENTRE. THEY TALKED ABOUT CLC'S WORK AND ABOUT THE 'LESBIAN AND GAY COMMUNITY'. CLC IS THE ONLY LESBIAN-ONLY SPACE IN LONDON - AND, TO THEIR KNOWLEDGE, IN BRITAIN.**

# From a ghetto to a community?

**CR** Does CLC have objectives beyond providing welfare advice and counselling for lesbians? Does it have political aims - to change the status of lesbians in society, to change attitudes towards sexuality, or is it just about providing a 'home' for lesbians?

**TSH** Certainly, the first objective of the centre is to provide a safe space for lesbians to be lesbians and however simple and humble that may be, it's actually very valuable. To have a space solely for lesbians is, in itself, a political statement.

Also because of this stagnation is lesbian thinking, there isn't a debate going on, about what our demands (as lesbians) are from the government.

As an adviser, I could tell you what the needs are and what the issues are, but certainly we haven't got a collective view, or platform, whereby we say this is what we want.

**CR** Does CLC act as a springboard, or does it become a 'ghetto' - where people just go in and stay in?

**TSH** Ideally, obviously it should have a more active role. We're not a community centre as we would like to be, ie for any lesbian to drop by and find out about things that are going on, volunteer in the centre, to have an input into developing resources for other lesbians or whatever. No, it isn't that, and that's a shame. I think it's because the women who come into the centre are ones who are just coming out, or who have been having a hard existence, usually isolated; lesbians who have family problems - homelessness and so on.

**CR** So you see people more in crisis, rather than as a whole community?

## Regular groups meeting at the centre

- **Lesbian Line Social**  
1st Sat of the month, 4-7pm
- **30s/40s Group**  
1st & 3rd Tues of the month, 7.30-9.30pm
- **Gemma**  
for lesbians with/without disabilities  
2nd Sun of month, 2-5pm
- **Camden Lesbian Workers**  
for all lesbians working in Camden  
1st Mon of the month, 12.30-2pm
- **Zamimass**  
a radical Black Lesbian Group committed to social change  
4th Weds of the month, 7-9pm
- **Deaf & Hearing Lesbian Group**  
last Fri of the month, 7-9pm

**TSH** Ninety per cent of the time, yes, and in that sense it's wearing... it's a bit like social services, I suppose, but a lesbian version of it.

**CR** What are the main problems that people come in with?

**TSH** The predominant number of them come in for housing advice - because they have been threatened with eviction because they are not priority homeless. The fact that single women are not considered priority is outrageous! Also, relationship breakdowns; in heterosexual set-ups the council would put up the parting partner, whereas they wouldn't in a lesbian relationship. And, although we are in the 90s, young lesbians are still getting chucked out of their homes because they are lesbians, and I'm talking about very young women - 17 year olds.

**CR** Do you think any of the campaigning that has gone on in the last ten or twenty years has actually changed the situation for some young lesbians? Does it make it easier for them to come out?

**TSH** I think it does, but it depends on the circles that you're in and also what community you come from. I think it differs from what it was twenty years ago. Obviously there are more places where lesbians can go and be lesbians and meet and see each other.

I think people who have been involved in gay politics in general are a bit short-sighted, because they measure the advancement of people's mentality only by those around the block where they live or work. But actually all the changes that we have seen, especially in London, wouldn't be the same for a dyke in Suffolk or Yorkshire or a village in Cornwall. There's no comparison in that sense.

**CR** Does it give them hope that there's a lesbian and gay 'community' in London - does that make it a bit easier for them to cope, say in a village in Cornwall?

**TSH** I think it does, but on the other hand there's the tragedy that people think that because in London there are so many dykes, and that we are so accepted (which is true to some extent), they leave home in the hope that they'll come and live in this lovely community, but when they get here it's horrendous. On the scene there are very few things geared towards improving the quality of life for lesbians, eg housing coops. The scene can be very fascistic - I can imagine what it must be like for a young twenty year old coming to London for the first time.

**CR** Do you think lesbians and gay men on the scene in London are 'Thatcher's children' -

that we aren't a lesbian and gay community, as such, just a large group of lesbian and gay individuals?

**TSH** It depends what you mean by community. If you are talking about a group of people with common ideals and common resources, then no, we haven't got one. We don't have a close-knit community where we all share a vision for the future. On the other hand, there are groups where you find similarities and support, but then we're talking about isolated pockets within this larger existence of lesbians and gay men.

**CR** I suppose, in a way, for a lesbian and gay community to exist, you actually have to construct it; because it's not like a black community that would spring up because people lived in the same area, or a working class community where it just happens through the family etc. If you're going to have a lesbian and gay community, you have to engineer it so you live in the same area, and you work together and you know each other - you're not born into it.

**TSH** I don't know that you have to be in the same area; because having a ghetto doesn't mean you have a community, not at all!

The most important thing is finding an ideological frame of reference for that group of people to identify with and then we would be talking about a community. It doesn't matter where they live, so long as they unite on that and they're doing the same thing with the same value reference in all those different places.



Teresa (looking windswept!)

**CR** But it's hard to do that if you haven't got much contact, you know - if people live in different areas - when do they form this common base, or how do they enact it? You have to be in daily contact with people to have some sort of group identity.

**TSH** Well, by political organising! There are loads of issues that lesbians could organise around, being part of a community. We should be demanding our rights!

## A LESBIAN CENTRE IS BORN

Camden Lesbian Centre and Black Lesbian Group originally came from two separate groups. In June 1982 a group of lesbians started to meet socially in Camden. As the group grew, funding was sought from Camden council. In 1984 Camden Black Lesbian Group was formed as a support for black lesbians in Camden who felt isolated on account of culture and sexuality. Eventually these two groups merged and in 1987 Camden Lesbian Centre and Black Lesbian Group came into being.

Because of their roots (and this is shown in the constitution) they are committed to providing space for black lesbians only, ie events, groups, activities, and also 50% of management committee

members must fall within their criteria of black lesbian. The Black Lesbian Group is autonomous and works in developing more facilities for black lesbians.

As a whole, they offer a range of services to lesbians, from counselling and advice to providing resources. Many groups use the space to meet; they also offer workshops, courses and events. The centre is accessible to lesbians with disabilities. (Please phone for access details.)

This year, for the third year running, they have had their funding cut, and this is something they see as likely to continue. So please show your support for the centre, in whatever way you can, because only in this way can it survive and grow!

# TRAIN CRASH? NO, IT'S A RAIL DISASTER

**O**n 14th May railway workers voted to accept British Rail's proposals and not pursue industrial action. The vote of members of the RMT (Rail, Maritime & Transport) union was very close, almost 50/50. This is pretty much a defeat for rail workers, who after two one-day strikes have now voted to take what BR is offering.

And BR's offer is weak, to say the least. A vague promise of no compulsory redundancies for general staff for the next two years, and for workshop staff for one year. Also an



equally vague promise of no major extension in the use of private contractors for track maintenance in the next couple of years.

This isn't likely to be much help. The next 'voluntary severance' scheme starts in August (ie voluntary redundancy) and with 20,000 jobs to go in the next two years, if not enough people choose redundancy more will be laid off with no choice. Likewise, the use of contractors has been increasing over the past few years: as non-union, no security labour with poor safety,

this is clearly the cheaper option for BR in the long run and so is likely to be the stuff of the future as long as privatisation goes through.

The majority of women in BR are employed in clerical work, though also in other areas, including train driving. As a nationalised, unionised industry, BR has taken on women in manual trades where private firms tend to do so less. When these jobs go, women are likely to find it harder to get taken on elsewhere.

Basically, the railways are being prepared for privatisation (planned for April '94). This will be a complete and utter disaster, both for workers and for anyone in need of a transport system. Obsessed with the idea of trying to run the railways as a business rather than a necessary service (such as the Health Service), the British government has for years been making more and more cuts. Thousands of jobs have already been lost. Train services to anywhere which isn't a profitable commuter route have been decimated. And steep (ie mountainous) price rises have meant that many people can no longer afford to go by train anyway.

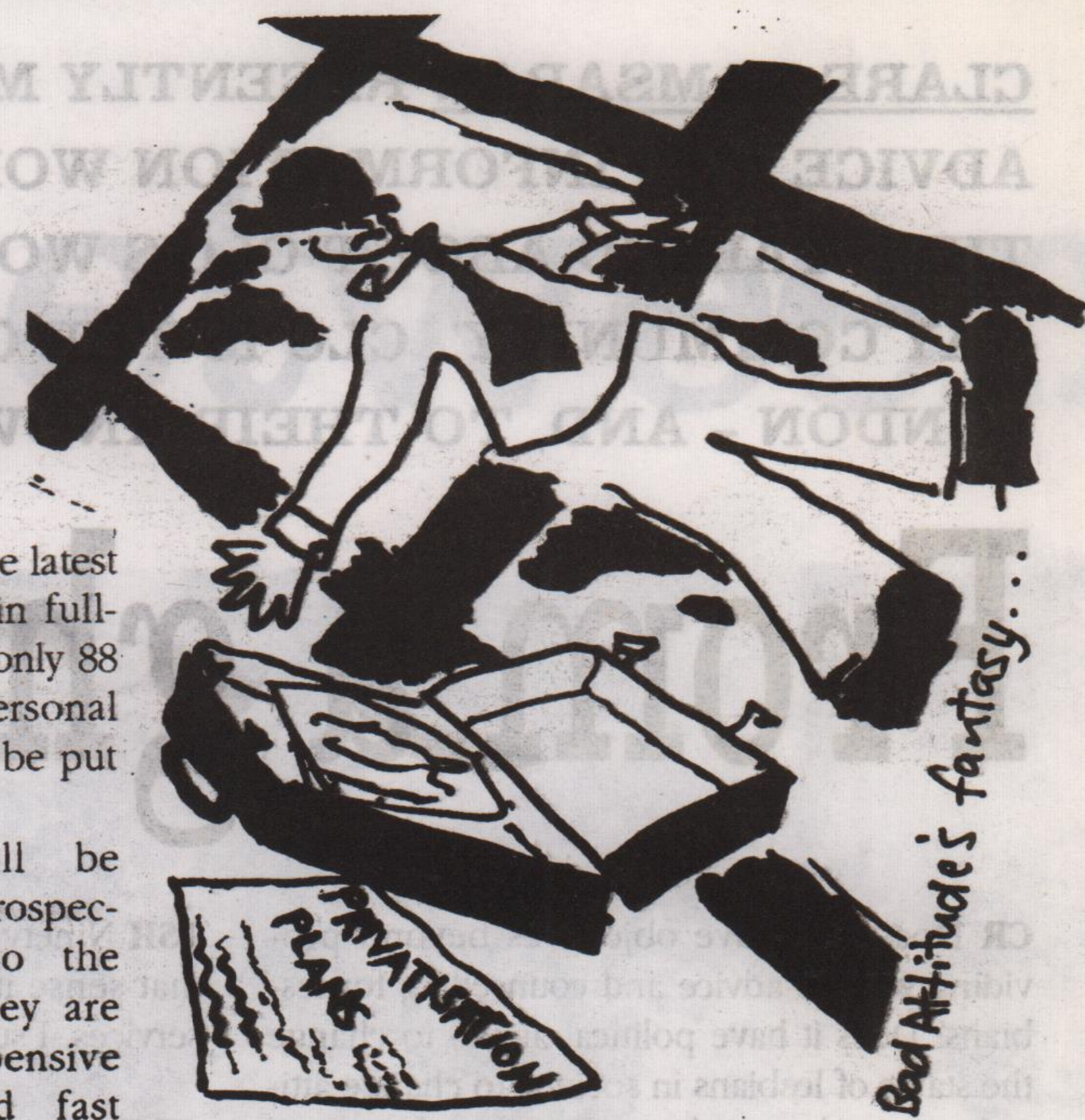
To get a bit of perspective here, capitalist states don't all take the same view: France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Switzerland all subsidise their railways to a much higher level than Britain. Even in their own terms, the Tories have no sensible long-term plan whatsoever. Whilst some might say that a decent transport network is necessary to support a thriving economy (leaving aside for now what that might amount to), all the Tories can come up with is making a quick buck by selling off everything the state owns

to their business pals, getting nice little jobs as chair of the new company, and then...oops, shit, we don't really know what next.

The basic plan of privatisation is to turn BR into something called Railtrack and sell it off to a number of private companies. Workers will then be subject to MacDonalds style working practices: silly uniforms, smile at the customers, paid dirt. For passengers it will obviously be a complete nightmare: instead of one national network, to get anywhere you will now have to negotiate a dog's dinner of little companies. Fares will become (even more) extortionate, more stations will be closed, safety will deteriorate

and with the latest plan to maintain full-time staffing at only 88 stations, personal safety will also be put at risk.

Stations will be profitable for prospective buyers to the degree that they are filled with expensive boutiques and fast food counters. So although they'll be a great place to get an 80p doughnut or a silk tie, getting a train you can afford to somewhere you want to go will be more difficult. And using small stations, especially for women, will really



not be funny.

So, in short, if privatisation isn't stopped there's going to be a right horrible mess. But how this should be done, I don't know. I wanted to be positive, but...

Katy

## PENSIONERS, GET YOUR KALASHNIKOV

**T**he latest Govt scam to cut back on public spending and give themselves pay rises (gosh, I sound like an SWP member) is their new idea to make the pension age for women in line with that of men - 65. This will affect any woman under 45.

Apparently the Govt's main reason for this (although we all know otherwise) is that age equalisation is in line with European legal requirements. Actually these sex equality requirements don't apply to state pensions but occupational ones and equalisation at 65 rather than 60 is a breach of EC rules. The EC says that where there is

inequality there should be a leveling up of the worse to the better positions. What a surprise that the Govt isn't doing that.

This is all a bit wierd though and as usual I can't really understand the Govt's reasoning behind this apart from generally pissing everyone off. You see, they claim to be saving £3 billion by making women's pension age 65, but this money will only be gained over a few decades and so not likely to be of benefit to this Govt anyway. Even more wierdly, the Govt has spent £9.3 billion from 1988-93 on contributions to personal pensions (the new scheme where you have

to make personal savins all your life for your own pension - but hang on, what are you paying National Insurance contributions for if you have to supply your own pension - Hmmmmm) The estimated savings on equalisation at 65 is only £3.4 billion so there is a discrepancy between them of £5.9 billion.

So the Govt could easily afford to keep womens retirement age at 60, or even equalise at 60 but for some reason they'd rather spend an extra £5.9 billion on promoting personal pensions, so they're not really saving any money at all. Very curious.

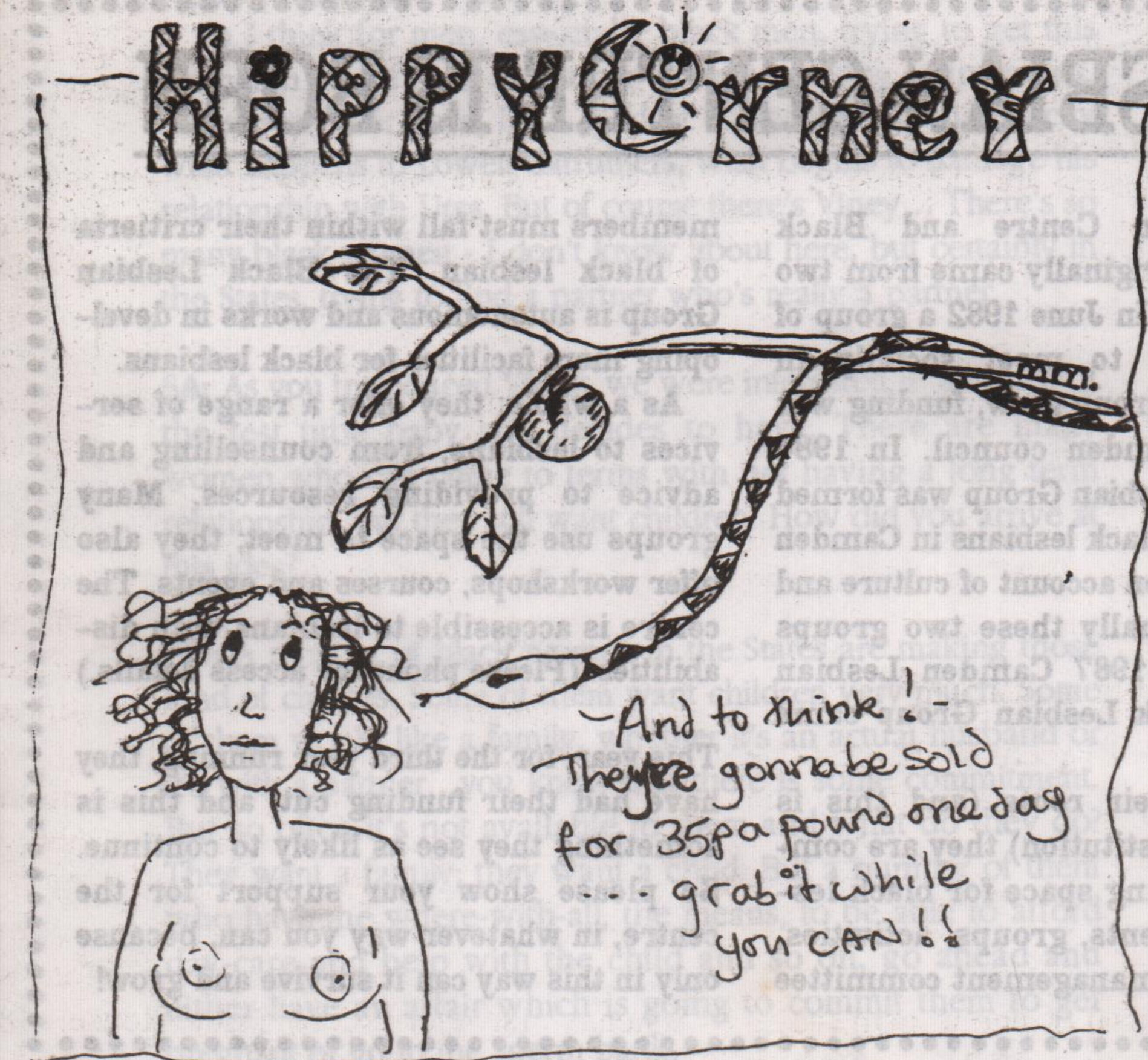
## PAY: HOW LOW CAN YOU GO?

**T**he Govt has a nice little sideline to raising the pension age of women - the abolition of the Wages Councils. My goodness don't they hate women. Not only are they content to let women slog it out in crap low paid jobs and make 'em work five extra years at it but they are effectively reducing their wages and pushing them into dodgier and dodgier work situations. This means they have a poverty line working life and not enough savings or National Insurance stamps for a pension in retirement. Oooh, marry a rich man, girls, and lace his tea with arsenic -

you know it makes sense.

Women, of course, still earn 23% less than men on average and make up the majority of the low paid. Wages Councils exist to protect a legal minimum rate of pay, which is roughly £2.50-£3.10 per hour, for jobs in the lowest paid sector. Of the 2.7 million workers covered by the Wages Councils, two million of them are women. The Govt reckons that abolition of the Wages Councils will invigorate the economy (economy? what economy?) by benefiting employers and boosting output. But this is likely to backfire depressing the overall level of demand in the

economy. (No money? then you don't buy anything, therefore you are not stimulating the economy. There a bit of Keynes economics for ya.) The National Institute of economic and social research estimated that 25,000 jobs, probably women's will be lost due to the fall in spending power resulting from wage cuts. Even many employers recognise this and oppose the abolition of Wages Councils. So those two million women threatened by the loss of the Wages Councils face lower living standards, poor housing and poverty in old age. Nothing changes really, does it?



# THE CRIME OF BEING POOR

**'Third World' women convicted of carrying drugs into Britain get vicious sentences and suffer countless forms of racist discrimination, but they are about as close to being drug barons as a check-out worker is to being Mr Sainsbury. Last year a group of Latin American women in Styal prison went on hunger strike in protest against this scapegoating, winning publicity and the beginning of improvements.**

**H**ow many people could say they have never broken the law in their life? A minority of the population, I'm sure. As you've probably noticed, the first aim of the law in this country is the protection of property and the status quo in general, with the protection of people coming a very reluctant second. If you're poor, working class, it's virtually impossible to match survival with perfect legality. Even if it's only working on the side while signing on, or not paying a TV licence, it's hard to avoid doing it at some time.

As a result, British prisons are disproportionately filled with working class and black people, whilst those with privilege go free. And the overwhelming majority are inside for economic crimes: debt, theft, fraud.

Likewise, as we've seen with recent cases of women imprisoned for murdering partners after years of domestic violence, the law exists not so much to protect everyone equally, but to protect those who already hold some power in our society. When women defend themselves with force, breaking the stereotype of passive womanhood, they are seen as monstrous, exceptionally evil. The law of provocation, which ought to offer a defence, applies only to men's situations. The result for women is guilty verdicts and long sentences, where men are let off leniently. And for black people, the racism which sees them as criminal by their very nature ensures the very harshest treatment under the law.

Yet, even knowing this, it still seems incredible that a full one fifth of the women prisoners in the UK are foreign nationals convicted of carrying drugs. The largest number of these are Nigerian, followed by other West Africans, Caribbeans and Latin Americans. Above all, these prisoners are not big-time drug barons. They are very poor 'Third World' women, usually with families to support, usually in debt, who in many cases have been deceived: either told that the only penalty for carrying drugs would be deportation, or not even aware that they had drugs on them.

It is also a dangerous and deadly kind of work. In October '92 two Nigerian women died after packages of cocaine burst in their stomachs.

## **Evil & alien**

Encountering the British legal system, these women are hit by a devastating racism. First and foremost, the desperation of their circumstances and the powerless position of such couriers within the drugs trade is swept aside for the image of the evil and alien drug smuggler, exploiting and corrupting Western society. Whereas a white person might be treated with some understanding, a person of colour, especially from the 'Third World', meets the whole brunt of dehumanising racism and paranoia about the 'Third World' threat in the shape of the drugs trade.

Never mind that these couriers are completely dispensable to anyone with power in the drugs trade. The whole ethos of criminality means that the people who get punished will always be those at the bottom of the heap, the ones most likely to get caught breaking the rules, whilst those higher up remain more able to protect themselves. The following examples are fairly typical situations.

One Nigerian woman, a single mother of three, was offered £400 to carry drugs by swallowing them. She didn't know the packages contained drugs and it was made out to be nothing serious, just a 'favour'. She was arrested, X-rayed, found to be carrying heroin and given four years in prison.

Another African woman has described how she was invited by a (so-called) friend on a trip to England and at customs was left with her friend's bags, which turned out to contain cannabis. She was sentenced to two years.

Others, for instance Latin American women, have described being in debt and receiving threats from creditors to their children and families. They were told the only way they'd be let off the debt was if they carried drugs abroad. Or women were desperate for money because their children needed operations. The dead-end situations which force women into this work are numerous.

## **CIA drug dealers**

And it is also worth considering why the drugs trade is so strong. Partly, of course, it's just money to be made. But beyond that, with the decimation of 'Third World' economies by world capitalism and the rigging of international trade and banking systems, the only commodities produced by 'Third World' countries with any consistent value are drug crops. Nor should we forget the involvement of Western governments in the drugs trade, for instance the CIA in Latin America.

Once within British Law, the points of discrimination against these women seem almost endless. One major problem is the lack of pre-sentencing reports. These describe personal circumstances, which may then be taken into account to get reduced sentences. This could be extremely important given the circumstances of such couriers, yet for 'Third World' women reports are hardly ever available. This is partly due to the practical problems of getting the information from so far away. But as Barbara Kastelein of Grupo Amiga, an organisation supporting Latin American women prisoners, says, "If you can't treat them equally, then you shouldn't imprison them. People should be sent back, at least for their first offence".

## **Punishing stereotypes**

Another great problem is that 'Third World' women get longer sentences than British people committing the same crime, due to the evil-and-alien images which racism puts onto

them. Columbians suffer particularly here, due to stereotypes about cocaine. Added to this, Britain has higher penalties for drug trafficking than any other European country.

A third area of discrimination is in parole, which before the Styal hunger strike was hardly ever granted to foreign prisoners. This added around a third more time to already extreme sentences and was therefore a major focus for the hunger strike.

The list could go on and on. For instance, although translations of information on legal rights exist, the Home Office never seems to provide them. And whilst the above problems theoretically apply to all foreigners, in practice they affect Europeans or North Americans far less. Moreover, in many ways these prisoners are hit so hard simply because they can be: their isolation in a foreign country leaves them vulnerable to the worst abuses of the legal system.

## **Isolation**

Time inside is also double the punishment for foreign prisoners. There are no visits from friends and family and news from home can be badly lacking, leaving prisoners with terrible anxieties about children and other dependents: usually the reason why they

are in prison in the first place and now often left with no one to look after them. Adding to these miseries is their isolation, for instance in terms of language, and the racism they face in prison. Health problems and depression are therefore widespread.

If women have children with them, the children are in effect punished too. There is now a mother and baby unit in Holloway prison, but women can only keep their children up to the age of nine months. Any children older than this are compulsorily fostered, usually leaving them divided from their mother's culture and likely to have difficulty adapting to life back home once their mother is released.

## **Striking women!**

However, although a recent TV programme about women drug couriers used the title 'Mules', this passive image does not fit the reality - as shown by the hunger strike by nine Latin American women prisoners in Styal prison, in Cheshire, last April. The strike was sparked by the refusal of one woman's third parole application, after she had served six years of a ten year sentence. A group of

women then decided to take action, protesting not just about individual cases, but against the whole system of their being denied parole (whilst still being obliged to apply for it) and their scapegoat status relative to the drugs trade.

Grupo Amiga supported their grievances, though not the method of a hunger strike, which was viewed as very dangerous. But in



**This Colombian woman was sentenced to nine years when heavily pregnant. The prison authorities took her to have an abortion, although she didn't want one and as a Catholic objected to abortion. She was extremely upset, but had a healthy baby, which was fostered (after many problems) with Colombian foster parents - though this cultural match-up is unusual.**

fact it brought successes: whilst the Home Office tried to deny the existence of any hunger strike and has never admitted to making concessions as a result of it, there have been some improvements in sentencing and parole. And a number of the hunger strikers have since been granted their parole and are now back in Columbia!

There are also organisations supporting these prisoners from the outside. Grupo Amiga is a voluntary group offering contact and support for Latin American women prisoners from Spanish/Portuguese speaking women. The Female Prisoners Welfare Project has set up an office in Nigeria, from which personal circumstances reports can be made to try to get reduced sentences for Nigerian women drug couriers.

Both can be contacted c/o Women in Prison, 3B Aberdeen Studios, 22-24 Highbury Grove, London N5 2EA, tel: 071 226 7727. Another contact is: Maendeleo ya Wanawakee (Advancement of Women) African Prisoners Scheme, 1st Floor, The Print House, 18 Ashwin St, London E8 3DL.

Katy

# NEWS SHORTS



## New Abortion Law News

While the recent abortion laws in Poland have severely reduced women's access to abortion, recent laws in Dominica, in scope similar to those in Poland, have increased access to abortion. Prior to this, no legal abortion of any sort was allowed. Now, as in Poland, abortion is permitted if there is a threat to the mother's physical or mental health or a possibility of disability in the foetus. However, there is no exception for rape or incest.

Why bearing the child of a rapist or your father is not considered a threat to women's mental health is an interesting reflection on the government and the domineering Catholic Church in Dominica.

Dominican women have created an outcry over this recent legislation, protesting that women have had very little say in the drafting of the law. A petition pointing out that as it's women who have children and are usually responsible for them, then it's women who should be consulted in decisions concerning procreation - not the churches.

## Did you know...?

That it's legal to fire a woman 'cos she's a woman? Yup! The Supreme Court of Alabama, USA, rules this is so. A female radio DJ complained that she was fired because of her sex and the court said - so what? The state law says that employers have the power when it comes down to 'personal matters' - which can mean anything.

## Swaziland: two women marriage legal

It's official, two women can legally marry in the state of Swaziland, South Africa. A two women marriage is valid as long as the parents of both consent. One woman can delegate a man to be the father of their children on her behalf.

This all came to light during a recent court case where a woman accused a man of stealing the four cows which were to be used as a brideprice for her intended. The judge confirmed the legality of this traditional practise.

## Super Sperm?

A clinic offering married couples the chance to choose the sex of their baby in January. This is a very frightening thought. Statistics show a global, greater preference is felt for boys and the future could hold even more power-crazy patriarchs than ever before. Ug. This particular sex-selection procedure the filtering of sperm into 'male' and 'female' which - surprise, surprise - is unproven. Blimey, can you imagine it, all these little male sperms going 'C'mon guys, let's dooooo it' while all the female ones hold back demurely. I thought that behaviour was learnt after birth, not before it. Anyway, anyone fool enough to fall for this has to shell out £650 a go - serves 'em right.

I know how you feel. I've got a restart on Wednesday and I can't find anyone to cover my shift for me. You sound like an expert. Do you have any advice for me?

Dear Auntie Attitude,

My lover has been telling me that our sex life needs spicing up and we need to experiment. I agreed and she suggested toe sucking. Well, I thought we were off to a bad start when I started undoing my boots. By the time I was only on to my second boot my partner had smoked a fag, gone to the kitchen, made a sandwich, watched Brookside and returned. "What, still not ready?" Even with assistance we'd both got out of the mood by the time I was ready.

Then when she got started I didn't feel a thing! Wearing DMs has resulted in some great big callouses. My partner was very disappointed and told me I'd have to change my footwear. So do I have to choose between my footwear or my lover? To give up wearing DMs would be like giving up life itself and I don't like trainers, especially trendy ones with the laces undone.

**Toe sucking can be fun, but unfortunately wearing DMs can result in painful foot sores. If she could spend her time giving you half hour foot massages instead of watching Brookside**

**your callouses could in time heal and then you'd be able to start spicing up your sex life. Make her help you get out of your boots as part of fore-play. Let her appreciate that DMs are sexy. Why not try wearing sexy lacy tights. You can get them on any high street and they add glamour and style and are definitely much more of a turn-on than grotty holey socks that haven't been changed for days.**

Dear Auntie Attitude,

I have always had an unbearable urge to rearrange fruit bowls whenever I see them. This has become worse over the years and I can lose hours a day in this occupation. People who catch me doing it say it's obsessive behaviour. Do you know of any group I could join to get help?

**Yes, try the FBAA (Fruit Bowl Arrangers Anonymous). You'd be surprised how common this has become. Many people have been cured of this through fruit therapy.**

Dear Auntie Attitude,

I am also an agony aunt and have great problems reading many of the letters sent to me due to their bad handwriting. This upsets me because I know these people have genuine traumas which I am unable to help with. What can I do? Yours sincerely, Another Auntie.

**I'm sorry, I couldn't read your writing... Next.**

**If you have any problems (very unlikely, I know - I certainly haven't) then please send them in and our very own Auntie Attitude will answer them with sensitivity and practicality.**

# Auntie Attitude says 'What's your problem?'



answer? I've been signing on for fifty million years. I've had two hundred and eighty four restart interviews. Is there no end to it? What do you advise?

Lots of love, A. Dolee, south London.  
PS I'm being particularly harassed at the moment. I went to sign on very promptly one day only three hours late and the evil woman said... Oh God forget it, it's not worth it, goodbye.



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PS I'm being particularly harassed at the moment. I went to sign on very promptly one day only three hours late and the evil woman said... Oh God forget it, it's not worth it, goodbye.

to. Also, they were all complete liars.

Then at the end of doing something really nasty to another pig they would give her or him a balloon saying 'I've met the Met', even though no one knew what this meant.

Of course this was a dreadful way to carry on and the whole planet was always fighting and always hurt and bruised.

But then the pigs discovered space flight and a particularly aggressive power-crazy group set off to explore and colonise other planets. They landed on a place called Earth, where they found that instead of tormenting each other all the time they could do it to someone else.

And this is how all the trouble started.

- Reprinted from *Shocking Pink*, no 13 (unlucky for some? yes, it was the last one), either because the story's so good (?) or because we couldn't get any other fiction to put in... so get writing, y'all! Incidentally, a small number of collector's item *Shocking Pinks* are still available from BA. Send £1 and say which issue you want (1-13).



Dear Auntie,

My lover has just got a computer which she has become obsessed by. She keeps it by the bed, switched on, and the damn thing keeps me awake at night with its meowing. Then when she gets inspired she'll sit up and start tapping away, talking to the computer as well.

As if this wasn't bad enough I think she's seeing another woman. Several times I've heard her muttering in her sleep about some floozy called Helvetica Bold.

Our sex life is in ruins and if this carries on my life will be too.

What am I to do? Please help.

**You've got to get into hardware too. The times are changing and if you don't watch out the Helvetica Bolds of this world will totally wipe you off the programme. You've got to write your own menu or alternatively find yourself a luddite.**

**Of course if all this fails try turning the damn thing off at night.**

I've got a bit of a problem. I've heard that the economic climate being what it is, ie not too good, many small businesses are going bust. Well, sure enough this is just what has happened to me! Although I try to be as enterprising as possible, I have now found myself completely bankrupt.

Dear Auntie, what can I do? What is the

## Bedtime reading from Bad Attitude

# Planet of the Pigs

Once upon a time there was a planet where the pigs lived. They were not pink pigs like the kind of pigs with curly tails. Instead they all wore dark blue outfits with shiny silver show-off buttons and a strange hat on their heads representing the breast of the great blue hundred-breasted mother pig.

In reality, the great blue hundred-breasted mother pig had left the planet many centuries before in disgust at the horrible behaviour of her offspring. But the pigs didn't like to admit this, so in their legends they said she had risen into the sky and gone on holiday.

The behaviour of the pigs really was horrible. They spent all their time picking on each other. One lot of pigs would jump on a single pig in the street, then bundle them into a van and beat them up and sometimes kill them. They constantly insulted each other and interfered in each other's business. One pig would stop another pig who was driving a car and ask them who the car really belonged

# Baby drugs continued: THE TETANUS VACCINATION

I was extremely pleased about receiving comments to my first article about vaccinations. In this article I will write about tetanus, information on which was requested in some letters.

Like these readers, I find the vaccination for tetanus or 'lockjaw' as it used to be called the most problematic of all vaccinations. The reason for this is that tetanus is a different disease from the others. It is not passed from person to person and a perfectly healthy person can catch it according to all the information I have managed to get so far. The bacteria causing tetanus is an anaerobic (= capable of living without free oxygen) organism and can grow only in dead tissue which has no blood supply. It is present in soil and the intestinal tracts of farm animals. It can be caught through open wounds (especially deep puncture wounds) and burns. So old machinery, garden implements or nails with dirt on them can cause tetanus if a person gets cut by them. So can an animal bite.

The incubation period for tetanus can be anything from two days to some months. The first symptoms

of tetanus usually appear in the jaw and neck. In 24 to 48 hours muscle rigidity may be fully developed. The neck and back are stiff and arched and the abdomen boardlike. Noise, touch or even light can cause painful spasms. The spasms of the respiratory muscles can cause suffocation and death.

## Rare but possible

I have not found exact information of the incidence of tetanus in Britain. Leaflets from the Health Education Authority say that it is rare but a possibility of catching it still exists. My other sources state the incidence as 2.2 per 100,000 people in a year in the whole world, 0.2 in Europe, less than 0.1 in the USA and less than 9 in Ghana with 20% (= 1.8 per 100,000) dying there. In the USA there were no deaths among people under 30 in 1982-84. In Asia about 8% of children born die from neonatal tetanus. This is about 2.9 million babies a year. The very low incidence in Europe and the USA is claimed to have been caused by the high intake of the vaccination. And the extremely low death rate from the availability of treatment. I

have found nothing to contradict these claims.

Treatment for tetanus is easily available in the developed world. It involves muscle relaxants, sedatives, antibiotics, immune globulin and antitoxins in a low-stimulus environment. A stomach tube for feeding and an artificial airway may be required.

## Allergic reactions

The case for the tetanus vaccination seems stronger than for any other. It appears to be effective in preventing the disease, but it is not without side effects. A reaction incidence for it is said to be 3% to 13%. Swelling and abscesses at the injection site are some side effects. Allergic reactions after repeated injections are also possible. Fever, abdominal pain, joint pain, weakness and debility can also occur. And as I mentioned in the previous article the immune system of older children was shown to be compromised with tetanus boosters. One more side effect which is never mentioned anywhere is the emotional trauma caused to a young baby by this kind of painful physical attack.

It is interesting to note that in Japan the side effects of the DPT (Diphtheria, Pertussis = Whooping Cough, Tetanus) vaccine were reduced dramatically when the vaccination was started at the age of two instead of the previous age of three to five months. The claims paid were reduced from 57 permanent severe vaccine reactions and 37 deaths in 1970-74 to eight severe reactions and three deaths in 1975-80. This and the fact that a young baby is not likely to catch tetanus point to the age of two as the starting age for this vaccination if it is given to a child at all.

## Other options

An alternative to a vaccination is an injection of a human immune globulin within a few days of a serious wound or a deep puncture. This contains tetanus antibodies which will attack tetanus bacteria. The multiplication of bacteria and developing infection is thus prevented. It will not produce a lasting immunity to tetanus but its record in the prevention of death from tetanus is extremely good. It is also good at preventing the disease. Its advantage over the vaccination is that it has not been associated with reactions.

The most important preventative measure, however, is the effective cleansing of wounds. All foreign bodies and dead tissue should be removed. The *Family Guide to Homeopathy* recommends cleaning any kind of wound with a solution of Hypericum and Calendula. It also recommends seeing a doctor if a wound becomes more painful within the next 24 hours. It states that a sure sign of trapped infection is

pus oozing from the wound or red streaking of the skin around it.

Vaccinating or not vaccinating against tetanus is a very difficult decision to make. Some of the considerations are the emotional trauma of the vaccination, the short term and the unknown long term effects of the vaccine, the possibility of a person catching the disease, general health and well being of a person and the availability of effective treatment if a person was to have a serious wound or a deep puncture.

Any homeopathic remedies can be obtained from the licensed manufacturers:

A Nelson & Co., 5 Endeavour Way, London SW19 9UH, tel. 946 8527  
Weleda (UK) Ltd, Heanor Road, Ilkeston, Derbyshire DE7 8DR, tel. 0602 303151

I found Weleda's Calendula nappy changing cream extremely good. There is also an Arnica cream which can be used for bruises and a Calendula cream for small cuts. I have found both very useful.

I-S.

# Kill the poor!

## (A NEW VARIATION ON AN OLD THEME)

Well, here's some lovely news on the never-ending list of tools used for the control of women and their bodies. It's a contraceptive and it's called Norplant.

Norplant involves rods the size of matchsticks containing levonorgestrel (urg? - typist), a manufactured hormone which releases slowly into the body. They are implanted - wait for it - on the inside of the upper arm, which I personally think is a conspiracy to cause as much pain as possible in such a tender spot. These are supposed to work like the pill, but you don't have to remember to take on everyday: instead Norplant is supposed to last up to five years (although it hasn't been on the market for that long).

In the US in 1991 a woman con-

victed of beating her child was ordered by the judge to have Norplant implanted in her arm for three years as part of her sentence. For a start, Norplant requires medical screening and not every woman should be prescribed it, and certainly no bloody judge should order a woman to use it. Secondly, Norplant is to prevent pregnancy, not abusive behaviour, so how can the judge justify ruling that she use Norplant? It has nothing to do with what she was convicted of.

Not surprisingly, the woman in question was African American and working class, which leads very nicely onto a new scheme in the US to stop having working class women having children at all. It all started with a newspaper editorial suggesting that readers seriously

think about requiring women on welfare to use Norplant. Can you believe it?

As a result, the Kansas legislature is considering bribing women to use Norplant by paying them \$500 plus an extra \$50 per year. Sounds disgusting, doesn't it? Apparently it is to "encourage people to engage in a certain type of behaviour", ie poor women can't choose what to do with their bodies. For a certain class of women, the state would prefer that they don't have children.

Again, the same legislature is proposing to enforce women convicted of trafficking or possessing cocaine or heroin to receive Norplant as a condition of probation. Is it only the fact that all the legislature are men that's stopping them castrating poor men?

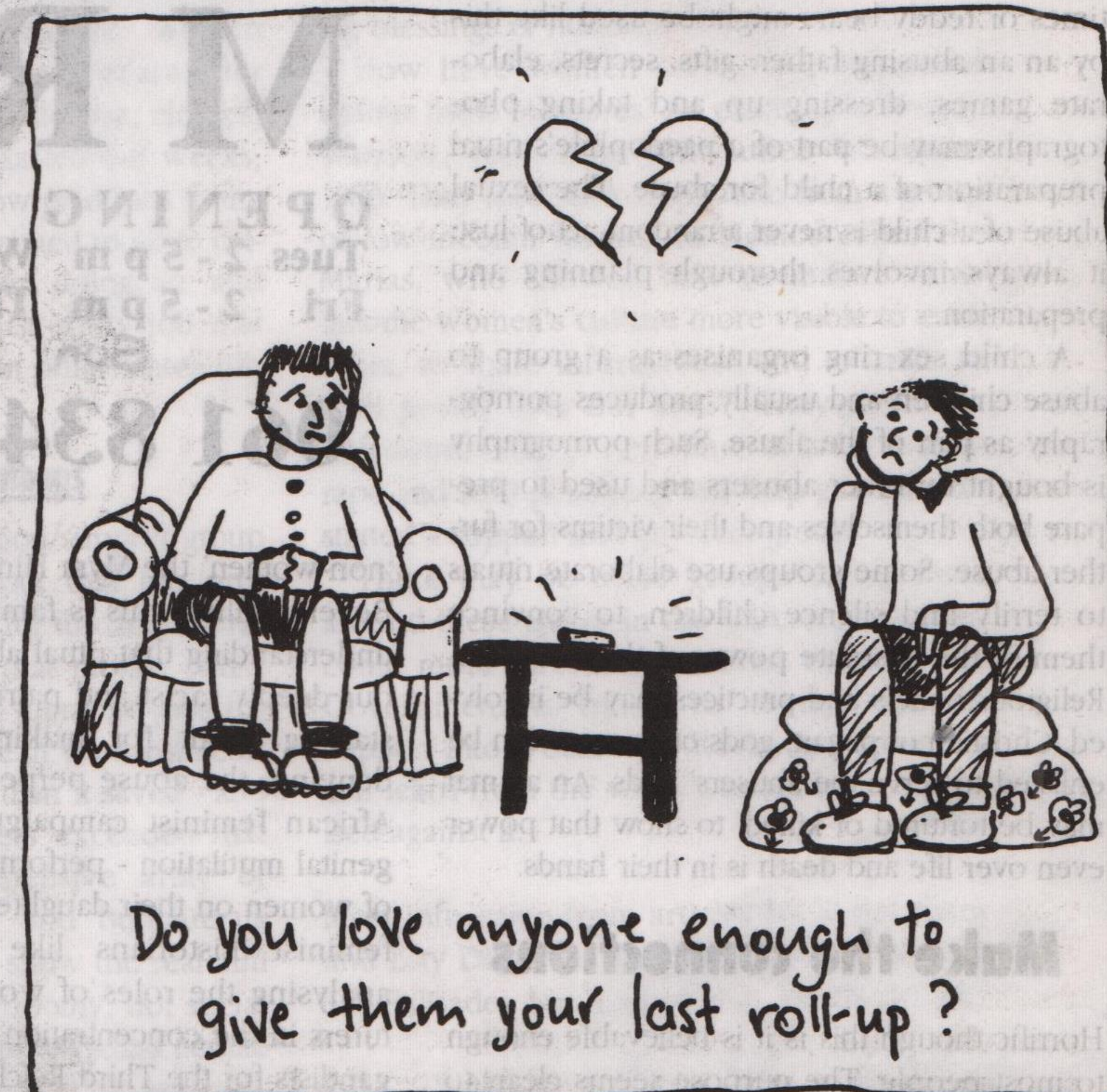
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# RITUAL ABUSE

## “If ritual abuse exists, where's the evidence?”

**F**or feminists in Britain the 'evidence' is in the testimony of survivors who are approaching our organisations for support. The last few years have seen survivors approaching Rape Crisis centres, Women's Aid refuges, and incest survivors projects across the country. Fifteen years ago few of us could have believed that the sexual abuse of children was a daily reality in millions of homes. Survivors provided us with the evidence - not through producing forensic photographs and successful prosecutions but by talking and writing about the reality of their childhoods. Ritual abuse survivors are beginning to do the same.

If Freud had been around today, he would have probably invented a 'Hecate complex' to explain the widespread 'fantasies' of clients that they had been satanically abused. Fear and denial surrounds ritual abuse amongst social workers, police officers and therapists. I used to shake every time I told someone that I was supporting a survivor of ritual abuse. More than anything I was afraid of disbelief, secondly of rejection by friends and political allies and thirdly of their possible disgust, distress and panic. A dilute dose of the terror that must beset survivors who dare to tell. And yet it is not so hard for feminists to believe ritual abuse exists. Years of work around sexual violence, the pornography industry and the part religions play in the oppression of women prepare us for understanding ritual abuse.

### Ritual, religion & power

Most sexual abuse of children is ritualised in some way. Abusers use repetition, routine and ritual to coerce children into the patterns of behaviour they require, to instil fear and ensure silence. Nursery rhymes, prayers, bath-times or teddy bears might be used like this by an abusing father: gifts, secrets, elaborate games, dressing up and taking photographs may be part of a paedophile's ritual preparation of a child for abuse. The sexual abuse of a child is never a random act of lust: it always involves thorough planning and preparation.

A child sex ring organises as a group to abuse children and usually produces pornography as part of the abuse. Such pornography is bought by other abusers and used to prepare both themselves and their victims for further abuse. Some groups use elaborate rituals to terrify and silence children, to convince them of the absolute power of their abusers. Religious beliefs and practices may be involved, Christian or pagan, gods or demons can be enlisted to serve the abusers' ends. An animal may be tortured or killed, to show that power even over life and death is in their hands.

### Make the connections

Horrible though this is it is believable enough to most people. The purpose seems clear: to gain and maintain access to children in order

to exploit them sexually. To most people, it seems a long way from the 'unbelievable' stories of children taken nightly to covens where they are ritually tortured, subjected to multiple rape and forced to watch or participate in ritual murder. Where the purpose is *apparently* worship of devils and demons. Where generations of the same families may have practised such atrocities as a religion, as a way of life. Yet these two systems of abuse are not so very far apart either practically or ideologically.

At the level of international crime, the trade in pornography, drug trafficking and arms deals are closely interwoven. (Ask Interpol, ask Linda Lovelace). And no power structure consists of a dozen clever, wicked men sitting atop a huge pile of money. The supporting structure consists of layer upon layer of corruption and coercion, in the sex industry, in the military, in quasi-religious secret organisations and in families. The Klan, the Mafia and organised Satanism have a lot in common - including ritual murder. Seen in this context, a child porn ring is no more 'just a bunch of perverts' than a Klan group is 'just a bunch of racists'.

The abuse by women which ritual abuse survivors report has been difficult for people to accept, while for others it has been 'proof' that a feminist analysis of sexual violence is outmoded. For feminists who have constantly struggled with our society's tendencies to 'naturalise' nurturance and non-violence as essential female qualities and then to demonise as

politics of ritual abuse. Elizabeth Rose, a ritual abuse survivor writing in *Ms* magazine described her experience as follows:

*"In rhetoric, women seemed to be held in high esteem - but the reality was far different. Women were maligned, humiliated and abused. A woman's value in the cult was based solely on her sexuality: either her ability to have intercourse or to be fertile and bear children."*

There is considerable debate in the literature from North America about whether all ritual abuse is 'Satanic' and whether the belief system survivors report being indoctrinated with is only a 'front' for child abuse and organised crime or a 'real religion'. I don't pretend to know the answer to this, but nor does it appear to be the key issue for survivors. More important is our ability to accept the abuses which survivors are reporting.

### Programme of torture

Ritual abuse survivors commonly report that their abuse began at birth, that their parents and grandparents were cult members. They report physical, emotional and sexual abuse on a daily basis: abuse which intensified around the periods running up to important rituals (their birthdays, Easter and the solstices, for example). The tortures they have endured include being deprived of food and sleep, being held under water, given electric shocks, being forced to eat vomit and excrement and being burned and beaten. Such tortures and the terror they induce are intended to reduce resistance to cult indoctrination and develop the child's endurance and dissociative abilities.

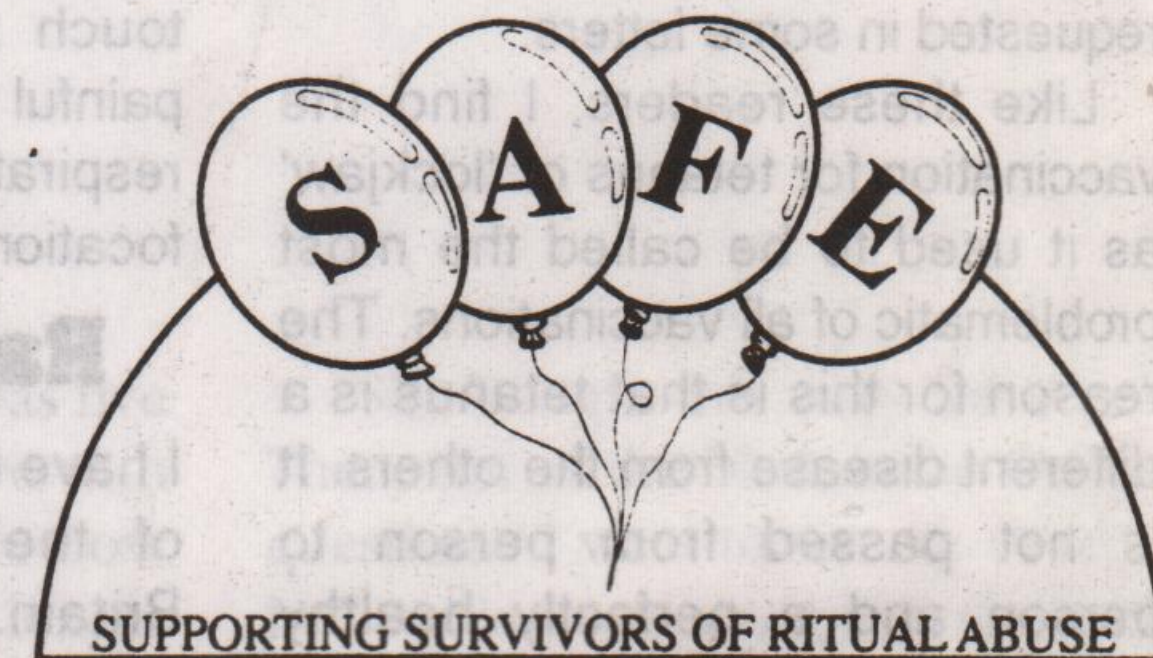
Ritual abuse survivors report sexual abuse from family members and strangers, men, women and other children; at home, in rituals and for the purposes of pornography and prostitution. They also report having to hurt others from early childhood.

Emotional abuse includes being deprived of any affection or care they could trust and of being encouraged to love something, an animal or child, for example, only to be forced to later kill or abuse it. In order to survive, many children developed the capacity to 'split' and develop other personalities to contain some of the pain. Others learned to suppress all knowledge of abuse from their conscious minds.

### Organising support

It is not easy for survivors of ritual abuse to find the support they deserve. Some seek help when they are trying to break away from the cult and yet may be terrified that no one will believe what they have experienced and that no one is 'safe' enough to tell. They may need safe housing, regular counselling or therapy, a network of friends and supporters who can help them stay safe, and contact with other survivors. At present there are few people in

this country with much experience of supporting such survivors. (There is a network of therapists, foster carers and social workers called RAINS with about 140 members, see end of article for details). Some survivors are seeking help from feminist support services



such as Rape Crisis and Women's Aid, but this raises particular issues for these organisations. Some of the issues we need to begin to discuss are:

- ★ Are we able to provide the on-going, intensive support such survivors need?
- ★ If not, then how are we going to change? Or how do we develop new links and services to meet the need elsewhere?
- ★ How are feminist organisations going to use the knowledge we are gaining publicly without losing both credibility and funding?

Sara Scott

Sara Scott has been a counsellor and trainer with Manchester Rape Crisis for the past eight years.

One specialist, survivor-led organisation exists to support ritual abuse survivors. **SAFE** provides a helpline open 6-9pm Wednesday to Sunday and training and consultancy to workers. So far this vital work is entirely unfunded. Even the smallest of donations help and a regular standing order of a few pounds a month would be invaluable. Contact: SAFE, 3 Lumley Walk, Amesbury, Wilts SP1 7SB. Tel: 0980 625990.

If you are currently supporting a survivor of ritual abuse you can contact the **Ritual Abuse Information Network and Support** (RAINS) via Jeff Hopkins on 0782 62111.

### Further Reading

- *Out of Darkness: Exploring Satanism and Ritual Abuse*, David Sakheim and Susan Devine. Lexington Books, 1992
- *The Courage to Heal: A handbook for adult survivors of sexual abuse*, Ellen Bass and Laura David. Harper & Rowe, 1988
- *Blasphemous Rumours*, Andrew Boyd. Prism Press, UK 1991
- *United We Stand: A Book for People with Multiple Personalities*, Eliana Gill. Launch Press, USA 1990
- *Satan's Children*, Robert Mayer. Putnam, USA 1991

### Manchester Rape Crisis Line

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'non-women' the Myra Hindleys or the nurse Beverly Allitts, this is familiar territory. Our understanding that ritual abuse occurs within our deeply racist and patriarchal society is a starting point for making sense of, not denying, the abuse perpetrated by women. African feminist campaigns against female genital mutilation - performed by generations of women on their daughters - or the work of feminist historians like Claudia Koonz, analysing the roles of women Nazis as torturers in the concentration camps and propagandists for the Third Reich, provide plentiful starting points for understanding the sexual



# CONSISTENT RESISTANCE

Greenham Common, those long-gone days of women's protest...or so you might think if all you read were the malestream papers. But in fact the peace camps at Greenham Common haven't gone anywhere, their philosophy being that as long as there are nuclear weapons, they'll fight against them. The following report comes from Yellow Gate, one of several women's camps at Greenham which continue to offer resistance to Britain's war industry.

**Y**ou've probably heard of the peace camp on Greenham Common and if you're well-informed you'll know that Cruise missiles have gone, but the peace camp struggles on. If the state's white-wash hasn't stuck then you'll also know that 512 Trident nuclear warheads are being manufactured at nearby atomic weapons establishments, Aldermaston and Burghfield. Now, if you follow the well-established formula involving nuclear atrocities and women experienced in taking non-violent direction, then the only possible outcome is continued and consistent resistance.

## Spot the missile

Women at Yellow Gate recognise that Britain plan to possess more than 400 more nuclear missiles than were lodged in the siloes on Greenham Common at the height of the cold war. Experienced logical thinkers, we reckon this is a con and amounts to little more than disastrous nuclear proliferation. Practised activists, we're going to put a stop to such escalation.

Six convoys of completed warheads have been transported to Faslane, Scotland, where the nuclear submarines are based. They have not gone undisrupted. Convoys leave from Burghfield every month, and every month women from Yellow Gate oppose the convoy non-violently. This means, for instance, that women go into Burghfield to breach the security protecting the missiles and convey their disrespect for the nuclear state. This may not sound like very much, but I can assure you that people in high and murderous places get very worried indeed about it. Whilst in custody, after taking non-violent direct action, a woman heard one of the police involved in her arrest say that Special Branch had rung him up to ask what happened. We certainly make our voices heard!

On the way to Scotland, the convoy stops overnight at RAF Wittering, and guess what? It doesn't stay uninterrupted. Women follow the missiles to Wittering, which is between Northampton and Leicester. There are no bye-laws on this base, so trespass is not an arrestable offence. Last month, women from the Yellow Gate peace camp set up a peace camp outside the base, as well as taking action inside, and we would like to be able to do this on a monthly basis.

## Bastard with a gun

Whilst three women were entering the base last month a soldier who has seen them approaching the outer security threatened

twice to shoot them. The women shouted back at him to keep calm but he kept his gun trained on them, despite the fact that they posed absolutely no threat to him and were nowhere near the missiles. It took some time for the MoD police, who are the only ones with powers to remove women from the base, to arrive. Women instructed the police to tell the soldier to put his gun down, and it took several attempts by the police before he would do it.

We were obviously very disturbed and shocked by this incident, which happened on April 16th 1993. There are so few people speaking out and taking action against Trident (although I did hear that last month's convoy got painted after it left Albermarle, its last stop before Scotland) that we are placed



Greenham Common women's peace camp in '82 photo: Brenda Prince/Format

in the position of dissidents, somewhere below and outside the protection of respectable society and its politics.

## Killing whitewashed

From experience, we know that it's very difficult even to get information out. Nearly four years ago, a woman who lived at the peace camp. Helen Thomas, was killed by a police horse-box as she waited to cross the road. The inquest and subsequent judicial review completely exonerated the driver and the press was only too happy to print the police's lies, which blamed Helen for her own death. No one was willing to believe that it was the driver who was going too fast, the driver who had time to see Helen, the driver who didn't slow down, the driver who came too close



Greenham's history: arrests as women blockade gates in support of women being tried at Newbury Court, where 38 were jailed. Feb'83 photo: Brenda Prince/Format

and the driver who killed Helen; the driver who was a policeman.

I never ever want to go through a situation like that again and I never want the army to get away with shooting unarmed civilians. We have to do what we can to protect ourselves, but we can't do it alone. It's up to everyone who cares about the future to stop the increasing militarisation of society in its tracks. There's no turning back from the murder of unarmed civilians by a state

- If you'd like a copy of our newsletter, which includes inspiring details of how Katrina Hawse fought and won a libel case against *The Sun* without legal aid or representation, send an SAE and £2 to the above address.

- If you want the chance of a lifetime to participate in the work of an internationally renowned women-only peace camp and gain invaluable experience of post-cold war dissidence, any woman is welcome to stay for as little or as long as she likes. You get there by: 1) taking a bus from the Colonnades (round the corner from Victoria) to Newbury bus station, 2) taking the number 302 bus from Newbury bus station to Yellow Gate, Greenham Common.

- If you're nearer to Wittering and want to be involved in the monthly peace camp, when Trident's in the base, write to the camp for details of how and when to get to Wittering.

- If you can afford it, send a donation to enable us to persist in our resistance.

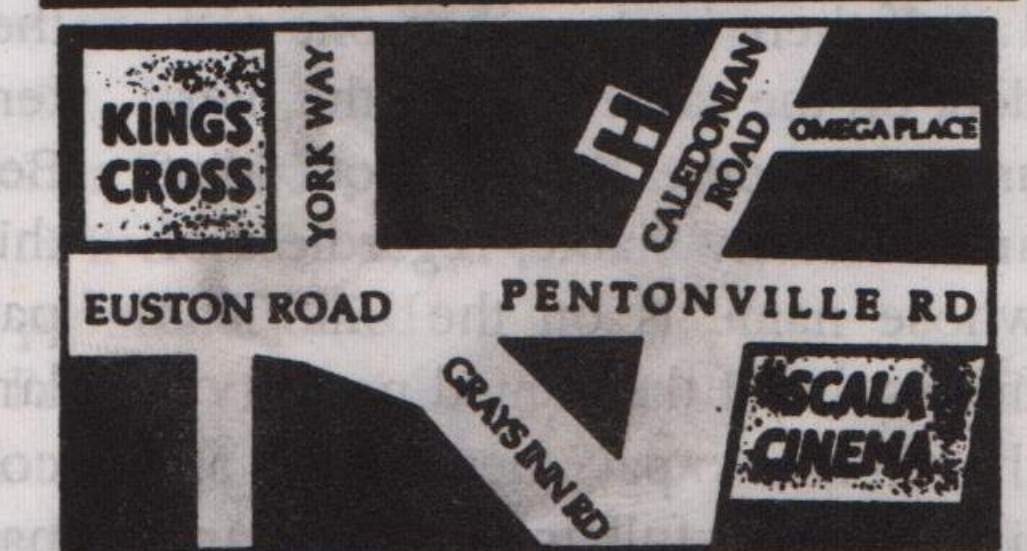
Rosy Bremer

- There's also a women's peace camp at Blue Gate, which can be contacted at the above address, and sometimes also at Green Gate. All the camps welcome women visitors! (By the way, BA has tried to articles from other gates at Greenham, but with no success - so if you want coverage, get writing, girls!)

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On April 1st 1993 the hated Poll Tax was replaced by the Council Tax: a peculiar mixture of Poll Tax and property tax. After a sustained campaign of non-payment and active resistance to the Poll Tax the new tax still seems as grossly unfair as the last, perpetuating the system of the poor subsidising the rich in a growing climate of poverty and cuts in local services.

The one vital difference between the Poll Tax and Council Tax is that instead of one charge per person, there is now one tax per property: this tax being based on the value of the property.

Properties have all been placed in one of eight bands on a charging scale depending on the market value of the property in April 1991. It would seem like the cheapest estate agents in the area had a quick look and placed all properties in the area into one of the eight bands.

### I don't wanna go to Chelsea

Here comes the catch: all properties were included and banded. This means that people face a charge based not on their ability to pay, but on the value of the property they happen to be living in, regardless of whether they are owner-occupiers, council tenants or squatters etc. I have known people living in small one-bedroomed Housing Association properties receiving bills for £1,500 because they were 'unlucky' enough to be allocated a flat in the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

To confuse the issue further, there is a hierarchy of liability; that is, which people in a household have the legal duty to foot the bill. The 'liable person' is whichever resident falls into the highest category on this list: freeholder, leaseholder, tenant, licensee and then any other resident, eg squatters etc. If you rent from someone who lives with you and they own the property then they are liable to pay, not you. If you're squatting then you are liable because no one on the hierarchy (listed above) is resident. If a place is empty then the landlord or freeholder will have to pay. Bizarrely, for an owner with an empty property, it will actually benefit them to have the place squatted, thus avoiding having to pay tax on it!

### Son of Poll Tax

It is this personal liability element of the Tax that is similar to the Poll Tax. If there is more than one resident on the same rung of the hierarchy as another they are both 'joint and severally' liable, regardless of whose name is on the bill. This means that if the named person on the bill fails to pay, then the rest are liable for the full amount plus any arrears. As councils have no power to write off debts, even if the other

Take a deep breath: it's scary, it's complicated, it's the...

# COUNCIL TAX

person dies and the joint liable tax payer has had no income. This could mean that women, for instance, whose partners have left could be liable for bills that they thought had been paid.

There are a few exceptions to the residents liability to pay. For instance, if you live in a student hall of residence or somewhere where all the residents are students then the property is exempt from the tax. Also, where a house is in multiple occupation - 'HMO' (the jargon for a bedsit, shared house, hostel or B+B) the landlord is liable not the tenants. For people living in hostels this is all fairly clear cut. However, for those in privately rented or even squatted properties, trying to persuade mindless council officials that

tackling your landlord.

Tenants in HMOs who moved in before 15/1/89 and have their rent registered with the Rent Officer can't have their rent increased under any circumstances.

### The Benefits

There are a series of complicated discounts and benefits for those who are on low incomes or who live alone which, like our existing benefits systems, are conveniently tailored to befuddle and preclude people from claiming their rights. There is a melee of 'invisible people discounts', benefits and transitional relief.

Working through them as simply as possible, the scheme will work



you live in an HMO, and therefore are not liable to pay, will no doubt be a nightmare. Think about it - you may well be living in an HMO. Court cases have established the definitions of HMOs, so anyone living in a shared house should argue this. Organisations like Shelter or Campaign for Bedsit Rights may be able to provide info on this issue.

To compensate landlords for this, the government has issued new powers for landlords of certain kinds of tenancies to raise the rents (ostensibly to cover cost of the new tax), where previously they could not. The only time when landlords can't do this is when you have a 'fixed term contract'. However, as soon as the fixed term runs out then I am sure the rent for the next term will rise. If you get Housing Benefit you will be able to claim for this sort of rent increase. Before paying any additional rent to your landlord, check first with the council to find out how much he pays to see if you're paying your correct share. If you're not a very secure tenant, get advice before

as follows, but do seek advice from a Citizens' Advice Bureau or free advice centre if you need any help.

### Discounts

Council Tax is based on the assumption of two adults (how cosy!!) living in each property. If you live alone your bill will be reduced by 25%. If there are more than two, your bill stays the same. However, certain members of your household are considered to be invisible and are ignored when calculating the bill. These are people like full time students, student nurses, apprentices and trainees, people in prison, hospitals, live-in care workers and members of religious communities. If everyone in the house, including you, falls into these groups then the bill is reduced by 50%. If all but one are 'invisible' then there is a 25% reduction.

### Benefits

#### People with disabilities

Only people with disabilities who have had their homes adapted can have their properties moved down

a band and their bills reduced. So if you are having to cope in a home without special facilities you will be penalised by having to pay full tax, unless you qualify for ordinary benefit!

### Main Council Tax Benefit

People who receive Income Support will no longer have to make a 20% contribution - they will get a **100% rebate**. The council may deduct this automatically if you were already on the Poll Tax register. If you weren't on it, claim Council Tax benefit from the council as soon as possible as it is difficult to get claims backdated.

All others on low incomes who are jointly liable for bills can also claim Council Tax rebate, but this scheme is less generous than the Poll Tax benefit scheme. For every pound that is earned above the income support levels you will be expected to contribute more than before. There will of course be deductions from your benefit for non dependants living with you.

### Second Adult Rebate

This is an alternative Council Tax benefit. It can be paid instead of, but not as well as, main Council Tax benefit. If you are entitled to both you will get whichever is the higher.

Basically, it enables you to reduce your bill if there are others living with you, who do not have liability for the bill but who are on low incomes. Your bill can be reduced by up to 25%. This is to compensate you for not getting the 25% off for living alone.

### Transitional Relief

This is supposed to protect people from huge hikes in their bills from the Poll Tax, but those who will benefit are the wealthy. It is based on what the government estimates that you paid. People in the bottom band (A) should not have to pay more than £91 more than the total of all the residents' combined Poll Tax bills from last year. However, people in the highest band (G), although their properties are eight times more expensive than those in band A, will not have to pay more than £182 more. Here we see the same unfairness of the poor paying proportionately more than the rich being imported from the Poll Tax.

You do have the right to appeal against either your designated band, being designated as the liable person, the level of benefit awarded and/or having been included when

you should have been ignored.

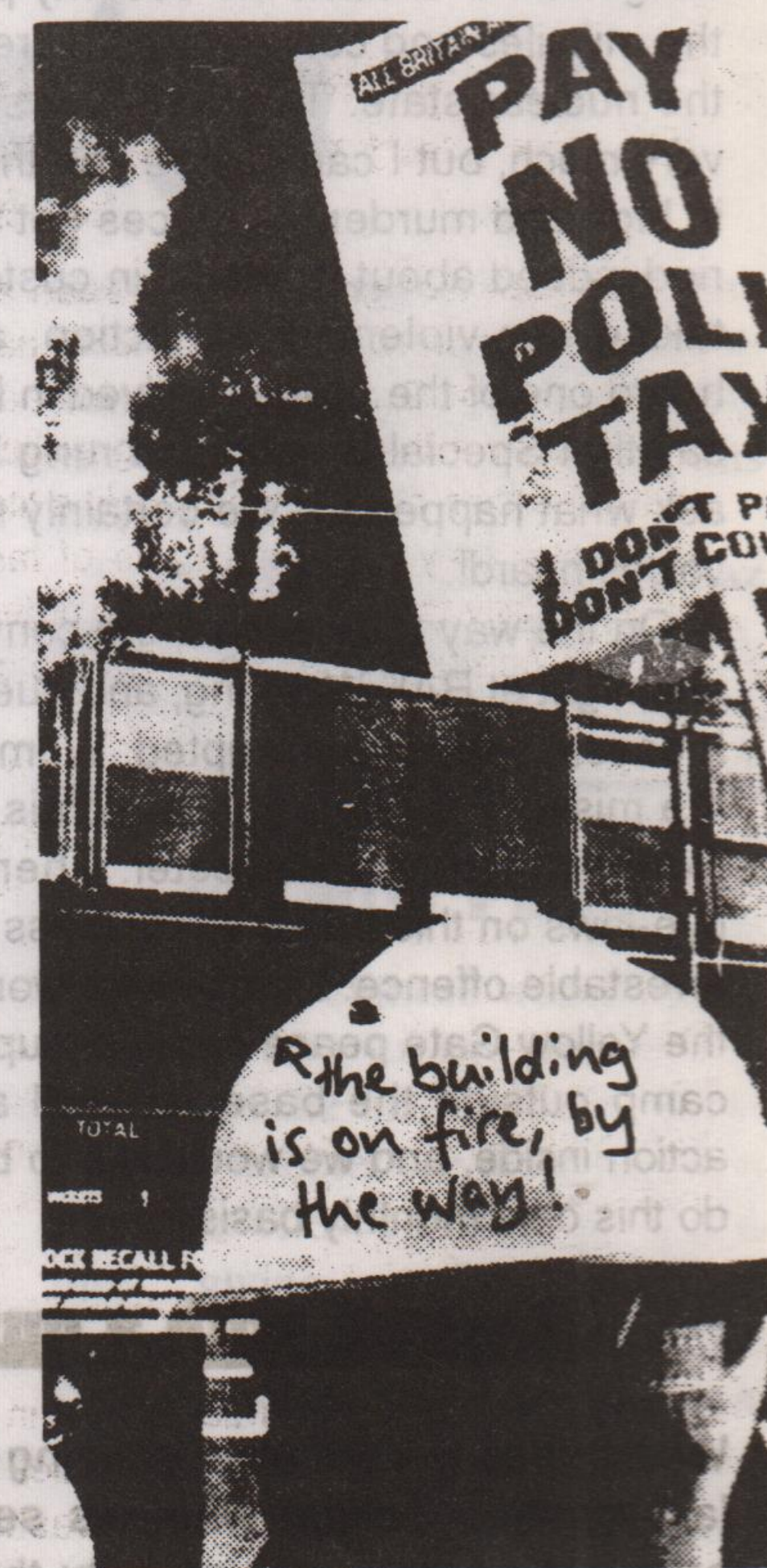
As with the Poll Tax, councils are still making major blunders which cost thousands of pounds - like Kensington and Chelsea, who it is rumoured have sent out 3,000 full bills and payment books to those already getting 100% rebate, causing those who received them confusion and stress. On the other hand, many have still not been billed at all.

With a tax that is still shrouded in deliberate complexity, it seems unlikely that we will see the gratifying community resistance against it as with the Poll Tax - although people can still be imprisoned for not being able to pay. This tax will hit those on low and middling incomes, those in social housing, those in newly gentrified areas and low income home owners. There will also be certain ethnic groups, who are on low incomes but due to cultural reasons prefer to owner occupy, who will face enormous bills, few reductions and simply will not be able to pay. There will also be the silent mass of people whose rent increases to foot their landlord's bills who will not be able to afford to renew their tenancies and those with disabilities penalised for living in unadapted homes.

### Once bitten...

Unfortunately the groups hit hardest are disparate and isolated: they are not groups that will ally themselves with each other easily. We have been divided. The Tories have been bitten by a dog called solidarity once before and I am sure that it is no accident that the system works as it does to divide. The only answer is to organise ourselves again, and even if we no longer have a liability to pay we should support those who do in the face of this still unfair tax.

Nellie Goosekeeper



# HIV/AIDS ORGANISATIONS

part 1: part 2 follows next issue!

\* **The Ace Project** (AIDS Care Education Project) Provides local support, advice, training, education and information in the boroughs of Croydon, Sutton and Merton. The ACE Centre, Queens Hospital, Queens Rd, Croydon CR9 2PS Tel: 081 665 5000

\* **ACT UP** (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) Direct-action group campaigning to improve support for HIV/AIDS research & people with HIV/AIDS. c/o 12-14 Thornton St, London SW9 0BL.

\* **AIDS Ahead** Counselling and support services for deaf people. 144 London Rd, Northwich, Cheshire CW9 5HH Tel: 0606 47047/0606 330472 (minicom) London: 081 348 9195/081 342 8791 (minicom)

\* **The AIDS Education And Research Trust** (AVERT) Medical research projects and education programmes. 11 Denne Parade, Horsham, West Sussex RH12 1JD Tel: 0403 210202

\* **AKIRAH** Care, counselling and info on issues of HIV/AIDS for African, Caribbean and Asian people. Riverhouse, Furnival Gdns, off Rutland Grove, London W6 Tel: 081 741 4772 (noon-5pm Thursday)

\* **Black HIV/AIDS Network** (BHAN) Counselling in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Swahili, Urdu and on arrangement in Arabic, Amharic, Cantonese, Punjabi, Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese dialects. 111 Davenport Rd, London W12 8PB Tel: 081 749 2828

\* **Blackliners** HIV/AIDS advice and support for African, Caribbean and Asian people. PO Box 1274, London SW8 Tel: 071 738 5274

\* **Body Positive** Support, counselling and advice for people who are HIV+. Keeps up-to-date info on nationwide services and of Body Positive groups. 51b Philbeach Gdns, London SW5 9EB Tel: 071 8351045 (office hours)/071 373 9124 (7pm-10pm daily)

\* **Body Positive Women's Core Group** National group that meets monthly at the Body Positive Centre to provide mutual support and to plan women's responses to HIV/AIDS. 51b Philbeach Gdns, London SW5 9EB Tel: 071 8351045

\* **The Food Chain** London-wide organization providing hot meals to housebound people with HIV/AIDS and carers. Tel: 071 2501391 (currently weekends only)

\* **Hackney HIV Resource Centre** Collection of books, magazines and leaflets on HIV/AIDS and related issues based at Stoke Newington Library, London. Details from the Health Promotion Unit on

081 533 0297

\* **Haemophilia Society** Information, advice and support for anyone who has haemophilia. Plus special representation of people infected with HIV through using Factor 8. 123 Westminster Bridge Rd, London SE1 7HR Tel: 071 928 2020

\* **Immune Development Trust** Registered charity providing holistic treatments for people with HIV/AIDS, cancer and other immune-related illnesses. The Basement, Gatestone, Cromer St, London WC1H 8EA Tel: 071 837 2151

\* **Immunity's Legal Centre** Free full-time specialist legal centre for anyone with legal problems connected to HIV/AIDS or related conditions. 206a Kilburn Lane, London W10 4BA Tel: 081 968 8909 (1 Oam-5pm weekdays)

\* **The Landmark Day** centre for people with HIV/AIDS. Holds open women-only evenings each Weds. 47 Tulse Hill, London SW2 Tel: 081 671 7611 Referrals: 081 678 6687 Admin: 081 678 6686

\* **London Lighthouse** Centre for all people facing the challenge of AIDS. Counselling, drop-in facility, play group, creative-writing classes, residential care, training. Support groups include one for women with HIV/AIDS each Monday (7pm-9.30pm) and a mixed group on Tues (starting at 7pm) for people who have just found out they are HIV+. 111-117 Lancaster Rd London W11 1QT Tel: 071 792 1200

\* **Lothian Health Board HIV/AIDS Team** 11 Drumsheugh Gdns, Edinburgh E3 7QQ Tel: 031 225 1341 x2298

\* **Mainliners** Support groups and advice for people with HIV/AIDS who are, or have, been drug users. 205 Stockwell Rd, London SW9 9SL Tel: 071 737 3141

\* **Meditation Group** For people with HIV/AIDS at the London Buddhist Centre, 51 Roman Rd, E2. Info on 081 981 0091

\* **Mildmay Hospital Mission** Convalescence, respite and terminal care provided by an independent Christian charity. Plus day care and 24-hour call-out home-care service, covering City and East London. Mother-and-baby rooms available. Hackney Rd, London E2 7NA Tel: 071 729 2331 or 071 739 9351

\* **Names Project** British arm of the worldwide quilt memorial to individuals who have lost their lives to AIDS. 86 Constitution St, Edinburgh EH6 6RP Tel: 031 555 3446 Quilt-making sessions at London Lighthouse (see above) each Thurs

# HELP!

Bored? Exxtremist? Split up with your loved one(s)? Bad Attitude needs you!

Yes, it's hard to imagine, but behind the dynamic, chortle-packed, hard-hitting Bad Attitude, lurks an exhausted collective, ready to explode (or is it implode? we're not quite sure) with hard-workedness. In fact, if we don't get some committed new Baddies urgently, this paper could soon be no more. (sniffle)

So don't be shy. Bad Attitude can cater for all levels of spare time and all levels of skill (none at all is no problem). Pick up your pens/telephones/feet and get in touch. We'll send you the relevant application forms...no, only kidding - just pleeeeeease come and help!

love, the Baddies.

## EVENTS & LISTIES

\* **Older Feminists Network's** latest newsletter is out now! Subscribe: £5 for 6 issues or £3 concs, cheques payable to Older Feminists Network and sent to: Astra, 54 Gordon Rd, London N3 1EP, tel: 081 346 1900. Their meetings are second Sat of the month 11am-5pm at Millman St Community Centre, 34-36 Alleyway, Millman St, London WC1. Bring lunch to share. All older women welcome!

\* We've just been sent the first ever **Fat News** - celebrating fat women! A bargain £1 for 4 issues from: **Fat Women's Group**, Wesley Hse, Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU. They meet at Wesley House on the 1st Weds of every month. Meetings fully accessible & creche can be organised, & they are a fat-women only space. It's still a new group so go & get involved!

\* **Children's Party:** face painting, jumble sale, entertainers, live African music, conscious rap, mask making, cakes, fruit juices. Sat July 3rd, 12-6pm, at Ground Floor, Unit 9, Warwick House, Angel Town Estate, Overton Rd, Brixton SW9. Admission: a donation. Organised by the **Orville Blackwood Community Campaign** - come & support them!

\* **Work It:** The women have taken over Heaven! Yes, phenomenally succesful the last time, the club is back. The date to mark in your diaries is Monday July 19. From 10 til 3, under the arches, Villiers St., Charing Cross. £4/£5 - women only.

\* **Women's Health Information Day** Thurs 24th June, 11am-4pm, to provide info about alternative health therapies. At: The Thomas Carlton Centre, Alpha St, Peckham, SE15. Particular workshops for disabled women, ethnic minority women, women with learning difficulties, older women & women who have/had mental health problems. For info contact: Julie Lomax: 071 252 3010.

\* **LAGER = Lesbian & Gay Employment Rights.** Challenges all forms of discrimination faced by lesbians at work or looking for work. Offers practical help, support & advice. Black lesbians can have their problem dealt with by the black lesbian worker. Minicom now installed: 081 983 0696. St Margaret's Hse, 21 Old Ford Rd, London E2 9PL, tel: 081 983 0694 (lesbians only) or 081 983 0696 (general).

\* **The Feminist Archive** houses national & international feminist material: all kinds of things: photos, books, records, badges etc. They need volunteers & funds! Become a Friend of the

Feminist Archive & get their newsletter, only £5 from Feminist Archive, Trinity Rd Library, Trinity Rd, St Philips, Bristol BS2 0NW, tel: 0272 350025. Phone for opening times!

\* **Lesbian survivors of incest group:** new group for lesbians who have been emotionally, sexually or physically abused in a lesbian relationship. Meets at West Hampstead Women's Centre, 55 Hemstal Rd, NW6 2AD, 6.30-8pm, phone Jean Cross for details: 071 328 7389.

\* **Microsystem** is a feminist collective providing computer consultancy, training & support to women's groups & women in the voluntary sector in London! They're looking for new voluntary collective members. Contact at Wesley Hse, Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU, tel: 071 430 0655.

\* **Women's Housing Advice in London** Ever had housing trouble? I'd like to meet the woman who hasn't... Contact: Women's Link, 57 Great Russell St, London WC1B 3BD, tel: 071 430 1524.

\* **Lesbian Response** is a group of lesbians/zamies, black & white & from different cultural & class backgrounds, who are challenging violence against women, by men or women, including S/M, emotional & physical abuse & intimidation. They believe that S/M in the lesbian community, whether publicly displayed or kept behind closed doors *does* have a political consequence on all lesbians' lives. Contact c/o Sisterwrite, 190 Upper St, London N1.



## Everything you need to know to be a Riot Grrrrrl

(OK you don't really need to know anything, except that boys are a bit silly, but here's some info anyway)

♥ **Get your riot grrrl fanzine seen all over the place!** A bunch of grrrls in the USA have decided to set up **Riot Grrrl Press**. So instead of lots of girlies all over the place making brilliant fanzines and these then being seen by only a titchy number of people, they will reprint lots of fanzines and other riot girly types will be able to order them from this one central place. So networks can be built and rioterrrs won't be isolated!

What you'll have to do if you want them to print your fanzine: send them a 'flat copy' of every fanzine you've every made - not just current issues, but old ones too. Apparently a flat copy is an exact copy of your original before it's been folded or cut. (If your fanzine is in colour or an unusual size or otherwise hard to copy, they say they might need to buy printed copies from you instead of printing them themselves.) And they also want a description of each fanzine so that they don't have to make up inaccurate descriptions of them for you.

Anyway if this is confusing, get in touch and they'll be able to make it all clear: Riot Grrrl Press, c/o Riot Grrrl, PO Box 11002, Washington, DC

20008-0202, USA.

♥ **A new riot grrrl fanzine!** called Violet. (There's a picture of Violet on the front, she looks very sad, maybe you should find out why). Send £1 and a large SAE to Harpies & Quines, Box 7/3, PO Box 543, Glasgow G4 9LY, Scotland.

♥ **Some Riot Grrrl contacts** which we forgot to put in last time: Riot Grrrl Leeds/Bradford, Box 14, 52 Call Lane, Leeds LS1 6DT; Riot Grrrl London, c/o Box XX, Ceased to Exist, 83 Clerkenwell Rd, London EC1 (ask them to link you up with other grrrls in your area); Riot Grrrl (WA), PO Box 782, Olympia, WA 98507, USA.

♥ **Slug & Lettuce** is a fanzine produced by a girl called Christine in New York. Not really riot grrl, but I'm putting it here anyway. Loads of reviews of fanzines & punk bands, mostly USA but some other stuff, a few people's thoughts (I liked Christine's ramble the best) and one useful tip for cat owners, though this is the only mention I could find of furry critters. Available free from Active Distribution, BM Active, London WC1N 3XX, if you send them a large SASE.

**Women Only B&B 'The Retreat' close to sea #12/15 per woman per night. Herne Bay, Kent. Tel: 0227 363740**

Electricians 071/274 3876  
Carpenters 071/738 7559



**Tradecraft**  
Tradeswomen

# STRIKING WOMEN!

## Sitting on a time bomb

On 4 June Timex workers rejected an offer which would cut pay by 30%, with a wage freeze, cuts in bonuses and company contributions, sick pay, scrapping canteen subsidies. The company wanted to pick and choose workers to re-hire - subject to a "skill assessment" test. Sacked workers, mainly women who'd worked there for years, would be given the kiss-off with a grand £500 redundancy payment. Union leaders had led the company to believe that the offer would be accepted. But the workers' mass meeting knocked the "offer" in the head after only 35 minutes.

Since 343 workers were sacked and replaced by scabs in a dispute over redundancies and pay cuts 15 February, the struggle at Timex has grown, generating lots of solidarity and awful puns (OK we're guilty too, we just couldn't help it though we tried to watch ourselves! see BA issue 3). Defying both the law and the union brass the Timex strikers held mass pickets, bringing supporters from all over Scotland and beyond. On 17 May 3000 came, with 11,000 supporters marching through Dundee afterwards. The scabs were brought in one and a half hours earlier at 6:30am, but by 7am the picket had grown so big the place was blockaded until noon.

When police tried getting in supervisors and admin, the crowd started pushing and prevented them from entering. 38 people got nicked. A couple days after the picket two more were arrested and charged with incitement to riot. Police raided their houses and took away documents.. A defense campaign has been formed to support them and others arrested at Timex pickets.

The determination and militance of the strike has had a positive impact on other Dundee workplaces where similar disputes have been simmering. At ABB Nitran, the company had intended to make 60 people redundant - but backed off at opposition because they didn't want another Timex on their hands!

Workers at local firms have held half or one-day strikes in support. Postal workers refuse to deliver mail to Timex, except to the picket line. Supporters have picketed a hotel in Dundee which put up scabs, boycotted the taxi firm that was bringing them in. The Dundee Timex Support group has been leafletting benefit offices urging claimants not to accept jobs at Timex. Jewellers who sell Timex watches have been picketed. In response to pressure a few firms have pulled



out of Timex contracts.

Strikers George and Lorna emphasized at a meeting in Edinburgh (3 June) "We're not just fighting for ourselves, when we win, you all win." As others take up this struggle in their own workplaces and communities, the strike starts to go beyond the boundaries of one industrial dispute between 343 workers and Timex Corporation, to all out class confrontation (well... maybe...). And women workers are at the centre of it - historically used in electronics and micro-assembly because they are thought to be passive, so suitable for repetitive and detailed work. But the bastards were sitting on top of a time bomb...

The union leaders have little interest in explosions of working class rebellion, surprise! surprise! The AEEU has threatened workers with expulsion and loss of strike pay if they step out of line, and that's typical. It was stressed that the workers themselves and the strike committee run this dispute, and they'll carry on even if the union backs off. "If the union stopped our strike pay we'd still survive and carry on... We don't need a union, we'd rather be a union ourselves. If we went with the AEEU we'd only be standing with six pickets, obeying the law and getting nowhere."

Strikers and supporters intend to pressure suppliers and retailers in Germany, Denmark, and the USA. "There's a Ratner's and Samuel's in every town, so there should be pickets in every town and a support committee." They will try to force councils not to renew contracts with IBM, which use Timex circuitry. Danish workers have been boycotting the use of Timex products at Olsen Hi-Fi. There's been a picket of Fred Olsen's offices in Norway, and plans to picket world headquarters in Connecticut, USA.

There'll be demonstration 19 June, which is expected to be the biggest yet in Dundee. On 11 June there will be a women's and children's carnival held at the company gates, with music and stalls.

For more information contact: **Timex Strike Committee**, c/o AEEU, 2 Union St, Dundee (0382-22406/22710) and **Timex Strikers' Picket**, Harrison Rd, Dundee. Mass pickets every Monday from 7am.

## One year on: support the Burnsall strikers!

Since 15 June, 19 Black workers, most of them Asian women, at Burnsall Ltd, a metal finishing company in Smethwick, West Midlands have been on strike for union recognition, equal pay and basic health and safety at work. Like many other black workers across the country, workers at Burnsall's were facing working conditions which damaged their health, low wages, arbitrary demands for overtime and constant harassment from the management. One year later, the workers are determined to continue the struggle till their demands are met.

On Tuesday 25 May, the strikers were attacked by three white scab workers from the factory. One of them, wielding a knife, stabbed striker Kuldip Dhaliwal in the hand, seriously injuring him. As a result of this attack he is likely to lose the use of his thumb and index finger. The attack was clearly pre-planned - one of the attackers had only started work in the factory that same day, and had been threatening the workers throughout the day. Despite this the police have charged one of the strikers, who was trying to prevent a member of the support group from being assaulted with a weapon, with wounding and affray under section 18 of the Public Order Act. This is an extremely serious charge which can carry a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. The

police have also arrested two of the scabs, but it is not yet known what they will be charged with. Once again the police are trying to criminalise black people when they defend themselves against attack. The seriousness of the charge against the striker also shows the extent to which the police are cooperating with the factory's owners in trying to destroy the strike.

On June 15 there will be a mass presence on the picket line at Burnsall's to mark the anniversary of the strike. With speakers, music, poetry... From 1pm onwards.

On 3rd July there will be a national demonstration in Birmingham to mark the fact the strike has been going on for a year. In this political climate where unions are constantly under attack, when anti-union legislation has made it difficult to organise within the union, it is only with everyone's support that this strike can be won. This is the only strike of black workers at the moment. This struggle being fought at the lowest (paid?) level of industry, where Asian women are at the forefront is crucial for everyone. No only is it a resistance to the daily work conditions faced by black workers, it is also a struggle challenging the economic system's desperate attempts to continue to make profits under the current recession. Details **Burnsall Strikers Support Committee** (071 713 7907 or 071 916 1646)

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