

WOMEN'S ACTION

Belfast Women's
Collective



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WOMEN AT WORK



WOMEN IN CASTLE REACH



DONEGAL & CONFEXIM

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE.....

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and more!

STATEMENT OF AIMS

Today Irish women are among the most oppressed in Europe. This oppression is something which pervades all aspects of our life. Yet because it is a condition we have been accustomed to all our lives much of it is taken for granted. Indeed we are encouraged to believe that it is a 'natural' state of affairs --- that girls should be taught to be gentle and cautious while boys are encouraged to be aggressive and adventurous that a woman at work should receive lower wages that once we marry our place is in the home where we are held responsible for providing domestic services and caring for children that it is not for the woman to decide whether she wants to have children or how many. In other words we are taught to think that "nature" has made it a "mans world".

But the oppression of Irish women is not 'natural'. It is POLITICAL and it is only by seeing it as a POLITICAL condition related both to National and Class oppression that we can organise to change it. Within this struggle it is very important that women organise

themselves to ensure that their demands are heard.

The Belfast Womens Collective therefore has two functions. Firstly to publicise the reality of womens oppression and secondly to organise and agitate to change society

The struggle against womens oppression cannot be restricted to a parliamentary lobby for legal reforms. The Equal Pay Act and other pieces of legislation which have recently been introduced North and South have shown very clearly that formal legal equality is of little use to women as long as the overall political system is one based on inequality oppression and exploitation. At present the actual hardships of womens daily lives are being increased by mass unemployment by price rises by cuts in social services and by increased political repression.

The struggle for womens liberation in Ireland must therefore be seen within the perspective of a struggle to overthrow both National and Class oppression and establish a socialist society.

WE ARE FIGHTING FOR

- 1) THE RIGHT TO CONTROL OUR OWN BODIES....TO DETERMINE OUR OWN SEXUALITY AND TO CONTROL OUR OWN FERTILITY THROUGH ACCESS TO SAFE CONTRACEPTION AND ABORTION FACILITIES.
- 2) EQUALITY IN MARRIAGE AND IN FAMILY LIFE...THE RIGHT TO DIVORCE AND THE ABOLITION OF DOMESTIC DRUDGERY THROUGH THE SOCIALISATION OF HOUSEWORK.
- 3) SOCIALISATION OF CHILDCARE THROUGH THE PROVISION OF FREE COMMUNITY CHILDCARE FACILITIES.
- 4) EQUALITY IN EDUCATION AT ALL LEVELS AND THE REMOVAL OF ALL RELIGIOUS AND SEXIST INFLUENCES FROM SCHOOLS.
- 5) THE RIGHT TO WORK AND TO HAVE EQUAL ACCESS TO ALL JOBS AND TRAINING SCHEMES AND EQUAL PAY AND STATUS IN THE WORKPLACE.

CONTACTS

BELFAST WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE

Contact: 52 Broadway, Belfast 12

OPEN MEETINGS: Every other Tuesday at 8.30pm
JUST BOOKS, 7 Winetavern Street,
Belfast 1. Tel: 25426.

Next meeting August 29th.

WICCA: Irish Feminist Monthly Journal 15p
C/o Wendy Wells, 21 Corsthwaite Park
West, Dun Laoghaire.

WOMEN'S FESTIVAL: Innisfree Island 1st - 3rd
September.
Contact: Jenny James, Atlantis,
Innisfree Island, Co.Donegal.

ULSTER PREGNANCY ADVICE ASSOCIATION: Belfast 667345

WOMEN'S AID REFUGES: Belfast 662385 or 662348
Derry 69279 or 65967
Portstewart 2932/2685/3964

WOMEN IN MEDIA: C/o Belfast Women's Collective,
to hire video on nurseries.

JustBooks

7 Winetavern Street,
FOR FEMINIST LITERATURE



JOBS

SINGLE PARENT FAMILY SURVEY

It has been estimated that almost 10% of all families in Northern Ireland are headed by a single parent and that nearly 70% of those families are living below the official poverty line.

Plans are being made to conduct a survey beginning in October, to determine the exact nature of the social, economic and legal problems faced by single parent families.

The organisers of the survey would like to make contact with women in the Derry and Mid Ulster area who would be interested in working as part time interviewers on the project. Phone: E.Evason, Portstewart (026583) 3964, or Coleraine (0265) 4141 ext. 621.

NORTHERN IRELAND WOMEN'S AID FEDERATION
REQUIRE

REGIONAL CO-ORDINATOR
(Based in Derry)

Experience in Women's Aid or related fields essential. Application form and job description available from-

24, Pump Street
DERRY

(Closing date for applications 1st September)



Women in Donegal



Killybegs depends for its existence on the fishing industry. Traditionally fishing has never included local women. Even in the days before refrigeration groups of women came over from Scotland to gut and pack fish. Today there are no more than a couple of women in fish processing. The main employment for women is the carpet factory which makes hand knitted carpets for embassies, palaces and the homes of the wealthy. It employs twenty women - six of whom are apprentices, the remainder are highly skilled workers many having come back to the factory after their families had grown up. They work on a piece work system and according to the women themselves they could earn around £30 in a good week. However there are frequent difficulties in obtaining materials and designs which result in women losing their bonus

Another factory is housed in the same building as the carpets, it is involved in various net making and employs three women on the work of tying and knitting the huge trawling nets.

The only other employment open to women in this area is in shops, bars, and hotels. The girls working in the hotel overlooking the harbour, lived in the premises. They appeared to work without supervision and were responsible for the day to day running of the hotel, restaurant, and bar. For this they received £14 per week. There was no union, and little hope of alternative employment in the area.

FAMILY TIES

Most of the girls wanted to be near their family and homes. One had left factory work in England to come back home and work, while another woman has worked at the same job for 25 years. The low wages paid to all these women are a reflection of the wages paid in the catering trade generally, but in rural Ireland the wages paid to the women are even below the poorly paid average.

While talking to a group of girl students at the local secondary school it was apparent that none of them saw Killybegs as offering potential career opportunities. The majority, saw their future in Dublin or England, whether as college students or factory workers.



WOMAN CARPET MAKER

For the majority of **married women**, work outside the home is not a viable proposition, not only due to lack of job opportunities but also to the attitudes of the men towards working wives. Of the many people interviewed about women working all said that, the opposition of the man to his wife working was an important factor. In practical terms also it is difficult for women with children to work outside the home as there are no child care facilities, so even if a woman does get a job, the care of her children has to be transferred to some female relative. Most of the men who work in the fishing industry may be away from home for days or even weeks so it leaves the full responsibility for child-care with the woman and makes it difficult for the men who would like to take an equal share of child rearing, to do so.

KNITTERS

Many women supplement the family income by knitting traditional aran sweaters, for sale to the local shops. One store employs 30 knitters and supplies them with wool and pays 30p for every ounce knitted. As it takes a fortnight to finish a sweater, and as the woman only get around £8 for all their work, it is obvious that this is just not enough - it is only a supplement to another income.

In other areas of Donegal, the knitters have organised themselves into co-ops. They get paid more money for their work and they feel far less isolated because they are now working together. However, even here, it is often the men who take over the organisational and financial responsibility. Other traditional crafts such as embroidery and lace making, are also done by the women, on commission for tourist shops and for export. However, this is less common than the knitting and it is often only the older women who have these skills

UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment in the rural areas of Ireland is difficult to calculate, due partly to the employment of family members on farms or small businesses and part time work such as harvesting, road maintenance and seasonal catering. The unemployment figures are further distorted by the fact that the majority of women are not registered as unemployed. Work for women has always been scarce in rural Ireland and big businesses have capitalised on this scarcity by being offered the incentive of cheap female labour and little likelihood of industrial labour problems for a number of reasons such as the low unionisation typical of women workers.

Killybegs is a fairly typical example of the job opportunities open to women in an Irish fishing community. Working outside the home is the exception and even when women do work, they are generally isolated and non-unionised. Strict moral attitudes prevail - that women should remain at home and not mix freely in the community - and this means that women remain financially dependent on men. However, there are signs that the women of Donegal are no longer content to work for a pittance,



CLADYKNITS DISPUTE

At the beginning of August, women from the Cladyknit factory in Gweedore won an important victory. Cladyknit receives government grants because it is a Gaeltacht industry, yet the highest wage was £34 a week, while those under 19 received only £23. Overtime was compulsory and the women had to produce a minimum number of garments every day - no matter how long this took. In May, the 23 women workers decided they had had enough and they joined the ITGWU. The 2 women who became shop stewards were promptly sacked and the women came out on strike, organising a strike committee. They were supported in their action by the other workers in Gweedore, who helped on the picket line. The ITGWU pressed for the rights of the women to join a union and for no victimisation. After 8 weeks, their claims were met.

However, this has so far been a very partial victory, as on the 18th August, 7 of the women were laid off. The company claims this is due to the world-wide recession in the textile industry, a statement that the ITGWU firmly rejects. Victimisation because they have joined the union seems to be a far more likely explanation. At the present time, we have no more information on the situation. The ITGWU is seeking a meeting with the Federated Union of Employers to discuss the crisis.

WOMEN'S ACTION will be reporting further developments in this fight by the women of Donegal for a living wage.

CONFEXIM

One of the biggest victories the Irish trade union movement has witnessed in recent years has been that of the women workers of Confexim, who after a 5 week occupation of their factory succeeded in forcing the Irish Development Authority, (IDA) to pay them their wages - £6000.

Their employer, Mr Alfred Bonte, owner of Confexim had persuaded the women to work without pay while they got out a consignment of skirts for a German order. Bonte promised to pay them as soon as he had received the money for this work - but instead he simply disappeared. The bank had frozen his assets, the IDA didn't want to know about the women's plight (although they had set aside money as a grant for Bonte) and to make matters worse, the women then discovered that Bonte had paid no income tax or insurance for them - although he had been deducting the amount from their wage packets!:

The 25 women were left with no alternative but to occupy the factory - on May 25th, 2 of the women sealed a ten foot wall and the occupation began. Their union, the National Union of Tailor and Garment Workers (NUTGW) condemned this action, stating that the women should fight for their money through "the proper legal channels" - but they would never have received the money were it not for the occupation! The IDA wanted the women out of the factory so that they could bring a new employer in, and the only way the women would leave was if they got paid. Finally, after much embarrassing publicity - the women received support from the women's movement north and south, from the Trade Union movement Against Repression and other left groups - the IDA handed over the money they had earmarked for Bonte. This is the only time the IDA has ever compensated workers.

The women have won much more than their wages - they have a guarantee that they will not be victimized because of their action, and assurances have been given that they will receive preference for jobs when the factory opens again.

This is a tremendous victory - but what the workers of Confexim are now asking is - how many other workers may be in a similar situation. For as long as the southern government allows employers to set up business simply in order to make quick cash gains, employ a few workers for a short while - and then move on - workers are going to continue to be exploited. And it is obvious from the scandalous attitude of the NUTGW that the trade union movement will not fight - unless they are forced into action.

Dear Womens Action,

Sorry for not writing sooner and thank you for the money you sent. The week we got your letter we had been up to our eyes, what with pickets on the IDA and meetings. Well we won our case and got paid all our wages on Friday 28th July and the receivers for MORCO on behalf of Allied Irish Banks repossessed the building. The IDA paid our wages and we had a letter from Mr O'Malley this morning stating that the IDA was looking for an alternative company to take over the building and give us all jobs. Thank you for the support of the Belfast Womens Collective.

Anne Smith (Spokeswoman)
Confexim Strike Committee.

DIVORCE - N.I. STYLE



From January 1979 a new divorce law will operate in Northern Ireland, the aim of which is to make divorce easier. Under the old law - the 1939 Matrimonial Causes Act, the courts would only accept a petition for divorce on the grounds of "marital offences". These were adultery, desertion for at least 3 years, or the cruelty or unsound mind of one of the partners - in effect one of the partners had to be proved "guilty" of one of these offences, the "innocent" partner initiating the proceedings. Common agreement was not recognised as sufficient grounds for a divorce.

The new law does away with this, making "irretrievable breakdown" as the basis for a divorce petition.

A marriage is considered irretrievably broken down on one of the following grounds:

- (a) either spouse has committed adultery.
- (b) either spouse is behaving in such a way as the other cannot be expected to live with him/her (eg. drunkenness, cruelty etc)
- (c) desertion for at least 2 years.
- (d) both partners have lived apart for 2 years and agree to a divorce.
- (e) both partners have lived apart for 5 years.

A legal separation may be obtained on one of the above grounds, but irretrievable breakdown does not need to be proven.

A couple must be married for a total of *three years* before a divorce will be granted, which is a long time, especially for those who discover they are "wrong for each other" shortly after marriage. The court makes the decision both on maintenance and on the disposal of property. With the new law, custody of the children takes on a new significance - now a "suitably qualified person" - generally a social worker, is required to make a report on the partners to sort out the arrangements for the children of the marriage.

Although this new law is very like the one operating in England at the present, certain aspects are missing. There will be no postal divorces here, so people are still required to appear in court and, unlike England and Wales, divorce proceedings must be taken to the High Court and not the County Court, so making divorce an expensive business over here!



This is how our M.Ps voted on the divorce legislation when it came up in the House of Commons. As abstaining is really the same as voting against, we can see how women's issues unite reactionaries from both sides of the religious divide.

AGAINST

Ian Paisley	(North Antrim)
Rev. Robert Bradford	(South Belfast)
Enoch Powell	(South Down)
William Ross	(Derry)
John Carson	(North Belfast)
John Dunlop	(Mid Ulster)

FOR

William Craig	(East Belfast)
Harold McCusker	(Armagh)
James Molyneaux	(South Antrim)
James Kilfedder	(North Down)

ABSTENTIONS

Gerry Fitt	(West Belfast)
Frank Maguire	(Fermanagh&S.Tyrone)

CRECHES - a political issue

Despite the fact that women have been involved in mass political activity on the streets for 10 years, it is only recently that the question of providing creches and other child care facilities for political meetings and marches has been raised.

Women have formed the majority on most of the marches against internment and against the removal of political status.

It is important to remember that:

- * Many of the women have total responsibility for their children because their husbands are in jail.
- * Many do not have relatives living nearby who could look after the children.

The need for child care facilities is particularly relevant on occasions such as the Coalisland march but it is also important on a day to day basis when women are involved in local demonstrations and meetings.

- * In every area there is at least one hall or club that could be used as a child care centre.
- * A rota could be set up in each area with people (men as well as women) taking turns to look after the children.
- * Child care should be a positive, well organised affair - with games, films, singsongs etc - so that the children benefit from it too.

Several women in the Belfast Women's Collective have children of their own, or experience of working with children and we are willing to help organise childcare in local areas.

Contact us C/O 52 Broadway, Belfast.

WHO KILLED ROSIE NOLAN ?

FOR ROSIE NOLAN, THE FLAT IN NOR-GLEN PARADE, TURF LODGE WAS IN EFFECT A DEATH CELL.

WHEN THE HOUSING EXECUTIVE MOVED HER AND HER TWO CHILDREN INTO IT THEY DID NOT EVEN COME OUT TO INSPECT IT. THERE WAS NO FIRE PLACE, NO GLASS IN THE WINDOWS AND DAMPNESS HAD REDUCED THE WALLS TO PULP.

Caught in the vicious poverty trap of supplementary benefits and rent arrears, Rosie could not afford to make the flat habitable. Despite her many requests no help was forthcoming from her landlords, the Housing Executive who are responsible for maintaining the flats.

Rosie's only wish was to move out but she had no chance of getting another place as long as she had rent arrears - and eventually she decided that the only escape was death.

Rosie Nolan, aged 41 hanged herself in July.

No formal inquest has yet taken place but her neighbours are in no doubt about where the blame lies; many of them are living in conditions almost as bad and have experienced similar feelings of despair. Now they are organising to fight the system that killed Rosie, to ensure that no one else dies and to demand that the flats be demolished.

At the end of July a group of women formed the Turf Lodge Flats and Maisonettes Action Committee. Determined to highlight the shocking conditions they have organised road blocking protests and occupied the offices of the N.I. Housing Executive in the centre of Belfast.



The Action Committee have also carried out a survey of the 311 flats and maisonettes in the Turf Lodge complex.

Mrs Kathleen Thibodeau, a founder member of the Committee told us:

"We went round making a list of all the major repairs that were needed in each flat. Over the past few years the situation has got much worse. It's no longer a question of small repairs, the whole place is really falling apart. Walls and ceilings are caving in. One woman has a huge hole in her living room wall you can look at into the street through. The sewage pipes are all cracked and water and sewage is flooding into people's homes. When we did the survey we only found one flat that did not need major repairs and that was because the tenant had spent a lot of money fixing it up herself. Most people round here are unemployed and can't afford to do that."

When we asked how the flats and maisonettes had got into such a bad condition, Mrs Thibodeau told us that there were several reasons:

"The flats were badly designed and badly built in the first place. The Housing Executive admits that now, but they have contributed to the problem by not doing repairs so things have gone from bad to worse. The kids have done some damage - they have nowhere to play here so they are climbing all over the place but the army are worse. They have cracked the sewage pipes by driving their saracens up on the footpaths and they think nothing of smashing in doors and windows and pulling up paving stones during their "searches".

After the occupation of the Housing Executive offices, the Action Committee had a meeting with the Executive on August 7th at which they were told that a greater effort would be made to do repairs - but they have seen little evidence of this so far.

Mr Crawley, of the Housing Executive, announced that Jaggarts, a firm of architects were being commissioned to do a survey of the flats and maisonettes to see whether they could be rehabilitated. The women are very sceptical about

this idea as they feel it is an attempt on the part of the Housing Executive to fob them off with proposals similar to those being made about Divis flats.

(The Housing Executive have announced a £5 million "facelift" for Divis - approximately £14,000 per flat - despite the fact that the residents want the flats demolished.)

Sadie Leatham, another member of the Action Committee said:

"We want major repairs done right away but this idea of rehabilitating the flats - giving people private entrances and so on, is not on. It is throwing good money after bad when they could be using it to build new houses for us. We want the flats pulled down!"

The survey which starts this week will take about 6 weeks to complete. Meanwhile the Action Committee is to meet Ray Carter in September and are keeping up the pressure on the Housing Executive to do urgent repairs.

HOMES NOT DEATH CELLS
THE FLATS MUST GO!!!

In the last issue of WOMEN'S ACTION we reported the case of Philomena Grant, an art teacher at St Columbs who took a case before a tribunal alleging that the college had discriminated against her by not allowing her access to an opportunity for promotion. The result of the tribunal was unanimous and her case was dismissed.

This outcome, if predictable, was very disappointing. It was obvious to anyone who sat through the hearings that Ms Grant was the victim of discrimination. One member of the 3 man tribunal wished it to be recorded that he considered Ms Grant did not get an adequate opportunity to seek the senior position in the Art dept. - though not on the grounds of her sex. On what other grounds was it therefore?

Although this case was lost, there is still a chance of appealing against the decision. The cases that have been won in England have usually only been won at appeal level. The outcome of this case mustn't deter other women from taking action - but the problems of proving this form of discrimination need to be borne in mind.

SPECIAL POWERS

The counter-insurgency campaign conducted by the British Army and the R.U.C. involves the arrest and interrogation of large numbers of people without any evidence of their involvement in specific offences.

In the six counties anyone can be arrested without warrant under the following Acts which have succeeded the Northern Ireland (Special Powers) Act of 1922.

1. The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1973.

Under section 10 of this Act the police may arrest, without warrant, and detain a person for a period of up to 72 hours (3 days)

Under section 12 of this Act the army may arrest without warrant and detain a person for up to four hours.

2. The Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1976.

Under section 12 of this act the police may arrest without warrant and detain a person for up to 48 hours.

With the permission of the Secretary of State (Roy Mason at the moment) the period of detention may then be extended for another five days, making a total of seven days altogether.

It is almost impossible to estimate the number of people who have at some time been detained under the powers conferred on the army and police by these Acts, since only a small percentage are ever charged with any offence. Although the majority of those arrested are men and boys, many hundreds of women and girls have also been involved. They include girls as young as ten, women just recovering from miscarriages and women with heart, lung and other serious medical conditions

Many of these women and girls, have made statements about their experiences to the Association for Legal Justice. And some of their case histories were studied by the Amnesty International team which visited the North in Nov/Dec. 1977 to investigate allegations of brutality and misconduct in RUC interrogations. The Amnesty team concluded that in 78 cases they studied during their stay

" there is a high degree of consistency among testimonials from numerous individuals belonging to different sections of the community as to the methods used in alleged maltreatment."

Furthermore:

" in the majority of cases in which medical evidence was available to the mission, there was a consistency between the signs and symptoms noted in that evidence and the allegations of maltreatment."

The following account is intended to outline the general picture which emerges from many women's accounts of their treatment, particularly by the RUC Special Branch officers who conduct the interrogation sessions at Castlereagh, the main detention centre in Belfast.

ARREST

Some women were arrested and taken from their homes while they had small children in their care. In some cases the children were taken with them to the interrogation centre. If they could not quickly find a friend or relative to look after the children, they were told the children would be taken from them and put in a welfare home. Other women were arrested in the street, sometimes just being grabbed and dragged away during the general commotion surrounding an army raid on the area. On being arrested the women were taken to a local army camp or straight to a police interrogation centre.

"I was going to the youth club. There was a crowd outside Fort Monagh and I was asked what was going on. They said 'Young... was lifted'. I knew this little girl and I knew she was only 10. The soldiers, about 30 of them in riot gear, came up the grassy bank at the back of the school. They were shouting, 'Get the Fenian B...s'. Someone shouted 'Run.' So I ran up the road. I was knocked to the ground by two soldiers who hit me with a baton on the head. I had a bracelet on. They squeezed my arm so hard that it cut into my arm. They trailed me along towards Fort Monagh. There was a bump on my head."

Girl, 14 years old. Held in custody for four hours and charged with riotous behaviour.



INTERROGATION AND DETENTION

" In Common Law a person need not even give his/her name and address to a police officer. But this right has been abolished here. A person, if he/she fails to answer questions as to his/her movements, or to answer questions to the best of his/her ability on incidents such as "recent" bombings or other "incidents" can be imprisoned for up to six months and/or fined £400. Thus, the fundamental right to silence no longer exists in Northern Ireland."

1. Before interrogation fingerprints and photographs were taken, often several times. Sometimes the women were made to undress down to their underwear for photographs and body searches.
2. During interrogation most women were subjected to a barrage of allegations about their supposed involvement in paramilitary activities.
3. Interrogation methods alternated between a "hard" and "soft" approach. Sometimes the interrogators appeared as friendly and offered to give the women money, or not to press charges, if they cooperated in supplying information about their friends and neighbours.

This approach would be suddenly interrupted by bursts of aggressive behaviour from other police officers who would shout and scream in the women's faces, push, kick and hit them, and threaten them with 20 years in Armagh prison.

STEE IGH



4. Sexual abuse (mainly verbal) and innuendo were used to undermine the women's confidence and make them feel degraded and humiliated. They were called "whores", "dirty sluts", etc. and sometimes threatened with rape. Women who had their menstrual period while in detention were subjected to obscene remarks about this and refused sanitary towels.
5. Some women were released after a few hours, others were detained for several days and subjected to lengthy periods of interrogation. When not being questioned they were held in solitary confinement. Many were unable to sleep because they were so upset by the treatment, or were kept awake by sounds of banging, screaming and moaning which seemed to come from the interrogations going on in nearby rooms. Over a period of a few days in these conditions women became disorientated and unable to concentrate on what was being said to them and their replies during interrogation.

"I was accused of having 'set up' a person to be killed which I strongly denied. I was shown a photograph of a dead man and this caused me to go into hysterics. I was then shown more photographs, this time of victims of bomb explosions. This caused me to have further fits of screaming and crying. I became violently ill and asked to go to the toilet. I was given two minutes. During this time the female soldier was laughing at my misery."

School girl, aged 16. Interrogated in Army camp.

MEDICAL EXAMINATION

On arrival and on leaving the interrogation centres the women were supposed to be examined by police doctors. In most cases their own G.P.'s were not permitted entry to the centres, so many of the women either refused the police examination or refused to sign the document stating that they had been examined in case they were tricked into signing some other document hidden underneath. Newman, the Chief Constable of the RUC, has claimed that all injuries sustained in police custody are self-inflicted wounds designed to discredit the police, but the women strongly deny this, and medical evidence from G.P.s indicates this is most unlikely. In 1977 there were some cases in which women deliberately tried to cut themselves with the plastic cutlery provided for meals. They claimed they did this because after several days the strain of interrogation became too intolerable and they hoped to be hospitalised to escape from it.

"I was interrogated for about 2½ hours by several detectives. They told me constantly that I had been identified in places that had been bombed, but I told them I had been working on the occasions they mentioned. This they refused to believe and threatened to beat the truth out of me. I was taken out twice again that day, once in the afternoon and once again in the evening, both lasting for similar periods of 2½ - 3½ hours. They threatened me continuously with prison and about losing my child. They were also very obscene and threatened to take off my underclothes. I was crying continuously throughout the interrogation."

Woman, held at Castlereagh for 72 hours.

CASTLEREAGH CONFESSIONS

While detention and interrogation powers are widely used as a form of intimidation and screening, and the majority of people arrested are later released without charges being brought against them, the police also use interrogation methods to extract "confessions" or statements of involvement in paramilitary activities, from people against who they have no actual evidence.



During detention under the emergency legislation the police deny access to solicitors, despite the fact that this contravenes the Judge's Rules of 1964, according to which they are supposed to operate. In the no-jury Diplock courts which deal with "Scheduled" (that is, political) offences, a Castlereagh Confession" is enough to secure a conviction.

Queen's University Law Department estimates that 90% of the convictions obtained in the Diplock Courts are obtained wholly on confessions extracted from the prisoners or are based largely on such confessions

In their eagerness to obtain a high rate of convictions the police are even liable to contradict existing evidence. One such example is that of Brenda Murray (aged 18) who was pressurised into signing a "confession" stating that she had planted a bomb in a boutique. She was sentenced to 15 years, but released 13 months later after an appeal and retrial when it became obvious that the confession had been concocted by the police and contradicted eyewitness accounts by the boutique staff and others that the girl who planted the bomb looked nothing like Brenda Murray.

AFTER EFFECTS

While the immediate effects of interrogation and maltreatment are evident in bruising, stiffness and nervous disorders recorded by medical examination after release the longer term effects are harder to calculate. Months or years afterwards women find themselves depending on tranquillisers and are still suffering from chronic anxiety, depression or agoraphobia.

Close
Castlereagh now!

BATTERING IS NOT ENTERTAINMENT

The B.W.C. participated in the picket on the New Vic cinema in Belfast during the showing last month of the film "BRUTE".

The picket was organised by the Campaign against Violence against Women in support of the action taken by the National Federation of Women's Aid in England.

"Brute", supposedly about the plight of battered women, is a soft pornographic film totally divorced from the everyday experiences in the real situation of a battered woman. The people who made this film are obviously cashing in on the interest being shown on the whole subject of battering at the moment - an interest which has been aroused as a result of the campaigns launched by Women's Aid.



We began tentatively on Monday evening by asking people to consider why they were going in to see the film, but by the end of the week we were confident enough to turn people away and in this we were very successful - one couple demanded their money back from the New Vic management after they had read our leaflet! This film is just an extreme example of how the media see women in general - that men have the right to take from women by force what isn't given willingly and that women secretly enjoy this use of force and in fact provoke it.

The CAVAW grew out of the Noreen Winchester campaign and consists mostly of women's groups. This is the first joint action organised by the CAVAW and we intend to do more joint action in the future, on such areas as rape, abortion and women and the law.

Socialist Labour Party Conference

At its first major policy making conference in May, the Socialist Labour Party debated the problem of women's oppression and voted to support and encourage the building of a working class women's movement north and south.

The S.L.P. was formed towards the end of 1977 when a breakaway section of the Irish Labour Party, disillusioned with the role labour had played in the Coalition Government, was joined by several smaller left-wing revolutionary groups, including Movement for a Socialist Republic (MSR), Socialist Workers Movement (SWM), League for a Workers Republic (LWR) and the Irish Workers Group (IWG).

It was mainly from these left groups and from women who had been active in women's liberation groups in the south, that the pressure came for a positive policy on women....and they were successful in carrying resolutions on a wide range of women's issues, including the most controversial one - in favour of abortion.

In the debate on abortion the conference was no doubt influenced by the fact that

Dr Noel Browne who is regarded as a leader of the S.L.P. spoke in favour of the general concept of abortion being made available in this country.

Dr Browne's speech however revealed certain attitudes to the political implications of the abortion demand which indicates that his position is closer to that of the Liberal David Steel (who was responsible for the private members bill in Westminster in 1967 which resulted in the reform of the abortion law in England) - than to the position taken by feminists and revolutionary socialists. Like Steele, Browne envisages abortion being made available but strongly controlled, and he believes it is a necessary thing because of a belief that unwanted children tend to become juvenile delinquents and criminals.

Rather than seeing the provision of abortion as a fundamental element in a woman's right to control her own fertility, Browne's argument presents abortion as a therapeutic measure designed to lessen the states problems!!

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

CONFERENCE AT GREYSTONES



In May, a conference organised by the Poverty Action Project, (EEC financed) which funds Dublin Women's Aid, was held in a plush hotel in Greystones, Co. Wicklow - heart of the old Ascendency - the tennis playing, yachting fraternity - a pretty unreal kind of place to discuss violence against women. Two members of the Belfast Women's Collective were invited to provide a bookstall for the conference. Participants included Belfast and Derry Women's Aid, women from Rape Crisis in Dublin, social workers, nuns, and several men, including the Director of the Poverty Project

The presence of the men, particularly those men who were in positions of authority over some of the women made the opening session an extremely frustrating experience. Jalna Hanmer from Bradford University and Bradford Women's Aid read an excellent paper on Marital Violence - and then was criticised by the Director of the Poverty Project for failing to discuss "the problems of battered husbands". Ms Hanmer pointed out that as statistically they composed less than 1% of subjects of familial violence, she didn't see how they were such a great problem! Several nuns present obviously felt the general feeling to be too anti-marriage and they spoke on what the joys of marriage could be like! All this meant that many women - those who have been battered and those who worked for women's aid under the Director of the Poverty Project - felt totally unable to say what they felt. It was an eyeopener for those of us from the north - all those so non-sexist men, sitting there and telling us what we should think, and how unliberated we were because we resented the presence of men. We talked to the women from Dublin Women's Aid on how they hate having the men in the refuge, but how they can't do anything about it because their finance comes from the EEC and if they tried to set up an alternative refuge they would be condemned by the Church and the women forbidden to go. We hope that this will change - that eventually Dublin feminists will gain the support and strength needed to break away from the oppressive social worker structure and form a true women's aid refuge.

After talking late into the night, the plan of action for the next day was agreed upon. The feminists present decided to get together in the same workshop in order to formulate concrete proposals which would be put to the conference. After heated discussion during the report back, the major proposal from this workshop was agreed: that an all-Ireland Woman's Centre was an immediate priority.

A steering collective for a woman's centre has now been formed and is in the process of putting forward proposals on the function of such a centre, so that all groups will have their say on what they themselves would like. It is hoped that the Dublin centre will provide information and assistance to local groups throughout Ireland so that eventually centres will be established all over the country. It will coordinate information and requests for help so that women in struggle will receive immediate support. A newsletter is also proposed, so that groups will be able to communicate with each other more effectively - as is done in Britain through WIRES.

At the moment, the Collective is calling for groups to be set up around the various areas of activity proposed - acquiring premises, building up the Central Resources Unit (including a library, bookshop, information, printing), organising women's cultural events, self-help and skill sharing. All those groups will have representation on the steering collective which will act as co-ordinator between each group.

Those interested in working for a woman's centre, write to:

STEERING COLLECTIVE FOR A WOMAN'S CENTRE
C/O 99 Tritonville Road,
Dublin 4.

A meeting to discuss the centre will be held on 16th September at 3pm ATGWU Hall,
Marlborough St.
Dublin.

GINGERBREAD



Gingerbread (NI), the association for single parent families was officially launched at a public meeting on 18 March. It is completely independent from the British organisation while retaining close links. As over 3% of NI families are headed by a single parent and a staggering 70% of these live on or below the poverty line, the need for such an organisation is obvious. It is hoped that the local groups will help single

parents to overcome problems of isolation, share practical information on benefits and help in providing activities for the children. Gingerbread will also act as a pressure group, campaigning around the key issues of a guaranteed maintenance allowance and child-care for children.

A central office has been established to provide information and to enable people both to join a local group and to start off new groups. There are already more than 30 groups around the province. If you want information about the groups, or help in setting one up (a small seeding grant is available from the Social Services) contact GINGERBREAD at:

291 Ormeau Road, Belfast 7.
Tel: 692960

The first issue of GINGERBREAD NEWS is now available. Price 5p.

NO CRECHE AT NURSERY CONFERENCE

In June, the E.O.C. and the Northern Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions jointly organised a one-day conference on childcare for the under-fives at Transport House in Belfast.

For some time now, the Belfast Women's Collective has been agitating on the issue of daycare for children (see back issues of WOMEN'S ACTION) and we decided to picket the conference to demonstrate our frustration with the situation as the Conference would be attended by delegates from various government bodies with responsibility for providing daycare facilities. When we received the programme, we noticed that there was no mention of a creche being provided, but we of course presumed that this was simply a printing error!

Several members of the BWC attended the conference, which was opened by the chairman, John Freeman, from the Northern Committee of the ICTU. The first speaker was Miss Pinkerton, the nursery advisor to the Belfast and Education Library Board. She spoke of nursery facilities in a very patronising way, in terms of "improving child-rearing practices" and "advising and educating" all the "inadequate mothers". Miss Pinkerton was also clearly opposed to mothers working outside the home or leaving their children in nurseries because it might lead to maternal deprivation. She also made it clear that the 'mother' was secondary and that the welfare of the child was of paramount importance and everything was to be sacrificed to that end.

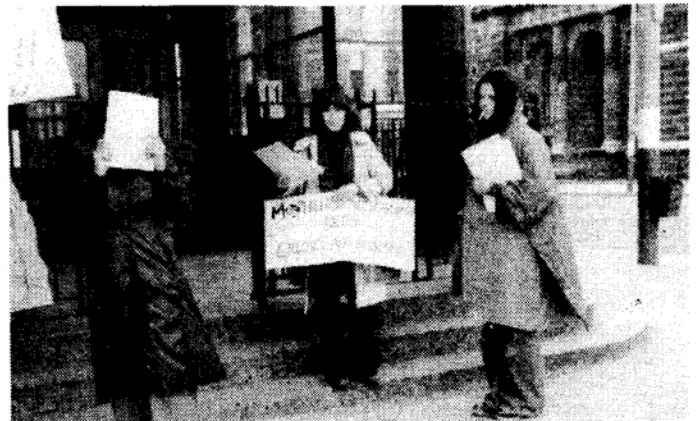
Meanwhile, at the back of the hall, women from the Collective and others had discovered that the absence of a creche was not a printing error - that there was, in fact, no creche. A considerable number of women had arrived with their children, and a woman from the ICTU made last minute efforts to accommodate the children, but all that could be offered was an empty room and the use of the men's toilets!

As there were no childminders, the mothers themselves would have to leave the conference to look after the children, with no facilities or equipment. By this time the children were getting extremely

restless and were making it impossible for people at the back of the hall to hear what was going on - so some of the delegates had to leave with their children.

The lack of creche facilities was condemned by the BWC to the speaker; Miss Pinkerton replied that she would rather see the children in the conference, even if they did make a noise (and presumably even if they were bored and restless) rather than hand them over to the care of "strangers"! This attitude we found astonishing, particularly as Miss Pinkerton is the Nursery Advisor to the Education and Library Board. Perhaps this explains the lack of nursery provision in the Belfast area.

Miss Pinkerton's speech aroused a strong reaction from the floor of the conference and many speakers challenged her attitudes towards women working outside the home when they had young children. After this opening speech, the conference could only improve - and it did.



Liz McShane, lecturer from the N.I. Polytechnic, pointed out the appalling lack of pre-school facilities, particularly in the form of full day care in a situation where large numbers of women are working outside the home.

In the afternoon session, which was chaired by Margot Neill of the E.O.C. two speakers from the British T.U.C. made a number of good points. They pointed out that a woman has a right to free time even if she isn't in full-time employment she has young children, so that if she isn't in full time employment a woman may wish to use nursery facilities.

Peter Moss (TUC) called for paternity leave and more flexible hours for parents so that men could play a more equal role in childcaring.

In his closing address, John Coultard (ICTU) gave an undertaking that the Northern Committee would press for increased provision of day care and that they would provide creches at all future meetings. The conference passed the following resolution:

"This conference recommends that the N.I. Committee of the ICTU and the EOC put pressure on the government to make money available for pre-school provision and that there be a crash programme over the next two years to bring N. Ireland's pre-school programme up to the level of that in England."

However, Margot Neill of the EOC was reticent about committing the EOC to any demands for increased daycare facilities.

There is to be another conference later in the year - this time with a creche, when there will be more talking.



WHERE'S THE CRECHE

WE WANT TO KNOW WHERE THE ACTION IS.

CARNSORE



NOT ACTIVE TODAY - RADIOACTIVE TOMORROW !

On the 18th-20th August last, about 7000 men, women, and children, gathered together in a field in Wexford to protest about the proposed building of a nuclear power plant at Carnsore Point. This is Ireland's first anti-nuclear power protest, and it was a peaceful, happy, if sometimes very wet three days of music and discussion.

Nuclear power and its dangers is a subject which should concern everyone, because everyone is affected by it. We are not only talking about the threat of nuclear explosions and world holocaust, but also and perhaps more importantly, about the potential polluting effects of atomic radiation. This pollution is not confined merely to within the site, or to the immediate area, atomic radiation is notable in the way that it spreads out in ever expanding circles. At the moment, although there is no operating nuclear power plant in Ireland, the Irish Sea is the most nuclear polluted sea in the world, due to waste dumped from nuclear plants in England and Scotland! Last year, just outside Seattle in the USA, it was found that a nuclear plant had caused water contamination for a radius of over 100 miles! The result was the evacuation of the immediate area, and the importing of pure water into the town, for the foreseeable future. These are not isolated examples; there have been literally millions of smaller and larger examples of this kind since the discovery of atomic power in the 1950's. Atomic power involves several problems. The first is the fact that it needs to be shielded to an incredible degree in the form of concrete and lead walls because contact with nuclear radiation even in minute amounts causes cancer, the most notable kind being leukaemia. The second is that it produces waste which is itself radioactive and so the problem of dumping arises, because this radioactivity never breaks down. Radioactive waste has been the cause of many accidents - it seeps into the ground, then into the water supply and so to the sea, affecting everything around it.

Power and energy are an important facet of the State, and the control of that energy is vital to any government trying to maintain power. Here in N.Ireland we know how the power workers can affect the political situation, as they did during the UWC strike in 1974 and again in 1977. It was the power workers who also held the balance in bringing the Heath Government down in 1973. Nuclear power plants are run by technicians using mostly computers in their work. They need few workers once they are built - they therefore place energy in vast quantities in a centralised area, managed by a handful of workers, so minimising industrial problems. In both these ways they are attractive to the state. Ireland does not need the quantities of energy which the proposed plant would produce, not now nor in the future, given the industrial growth forecast for Ireland. It is not enough to explain the building of the plant in terms of a prestige exercise, that only hides the real truth about nuclear power and its relation to state control.

Nuclear power affects us all, yet Governments all over the world try to conceal the risks involved.

Only a month ago at England's top secret atomic weapons research establishment at Aldermaston 12 people (3 women and 9 men) were found to have plutonium in their bodies at unacceptably high levels, and these were supposed to be protected workers! Production at Aldermaston has stopped completely now, but there are 4,500 workers at this site of whom only 80 were screened, 12 of whom were found to have the high levels of plutonium in them.

One of the women had not worked in an area regarded as 'radioactive' for 10 years.

Nuclear power is no longer an issue about "banning the bomb", it is an issue about the quality of our life and that of generations to come. The energy we need to live could be supplied by other sources, and anyway the case has yet to be proved that the existing reactors do produce the quantities of power that was expected of them. Most of the reactors in the world today are not producing the massive outputs predicted and many are subject to closures for technical and safety reasons. At the moment Denmark is the only country investigating the use of alternative sources of power - water, wind and solar power - on a large scale.

Carnsore was fun but the next meetings there may not be so peaceful. We must be prepared, like the people of France and Germany to occupy the site and sit down in front of the bulldozers if necessary. If not then we deserve radioactive poisoning

NEVER ON A SUNDAY

You can march on a Sunday. You can protest, be arrested, interrogated, imprisoned! But if you are a woman you cannot enter the Martyn Forsythe drinking club in Turf Lodge on a Sunday afternoon.

The ALL MALE COMMITTEE (Woman are not allowed to be members either) believe that they know what is best for women.

When the Women Against Imperialism group and some members of the Belfast Women's Collective staged a picket outside the Club on Sunday 6th August the committee reacted by barring the gates and informed us we should "go home and make the dinner" and "stay at home and look after the children". Who's dinner, who's children? Equality begins at home. If men expect to eat and father children they must be prepared to share the work involved not to treat women as domestic slaves.

Later the same day when some women who had been on the picket went to the club to see a film on the Palestinians which was being introduced by Vanessa Redgrave they were informed by the committee that they were barred from the club.

When another picket was staged on Sunday 20th August the committee remained intransigent although they had still not thought of any good reason for keeping women out - other than the fact that they might "get drunk" "spend the family's food money" or "neglect the children" - in other words all the things they seem to think is all right for men to do!