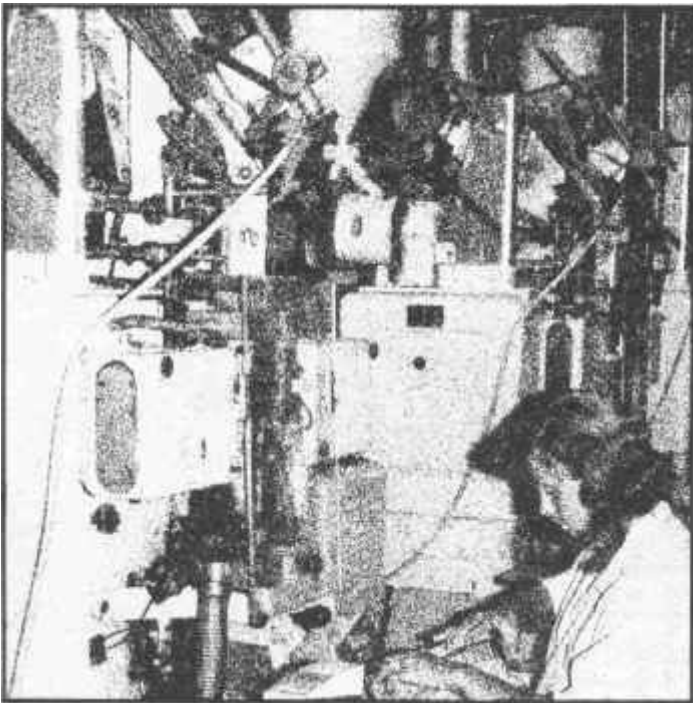


Jean Coussins

EQUALITY FOR WOMEN

Have the laws worked?



Introduction

This article tries to put the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts into perspective, by examining the political and economic circumstances which gave rise to them, their impact and the role of legislation in the struggle for women's equality.

It argues that although the Equal Pay Act (passed in 1970) has had significant progressive results, its effect is now minimal and that, alone, it is of no further positive use in raising the general level of women's earnings. The Sex Discrimination Act 1975, on the other hand, though in need of strengthening, contains untapped and untested potential which could assist in breaking down the barrier of rigid sex-segregation which stands between women and equal opportunities at work. Without progress on this front, the Equal Pay Act will outlive its usefulness altogether.

Legislation in any case plays only a limited role in the struggle for sex equality. This article also looks at other forces involved as they relate to the legislation: the women's movement, trade union organisation, collective bargaining, individual consciousness. Finally, the practical and ideological attacks of the present Thatcher

government on women's rights and sex equality must be taken into account when assessing the likely effects of the legislation — and the campaigning priorities of its supporters — over the next few years.

General Background to the Legislation

The political atmosphere of the late 1960s and early 1970s provided the backdrop to the emerging legislation. The 1964 Labour government wanted to encourage more women, especially married women, to enter the workforce to plug the projected 'manpower gap'. This new approach to female labour, based on purely economic considerations, was not matched by any fundamental challenge at an ideological level to the status of women; the 'welfare state' continued to be administered, as Beveridge had decreed, on the basis that women were men's dependants and that a married woman's attitude to paid employment is not *and should not* be the same as a single woman's. But there was another dynamic already at work which affected the rapidly changing ratio of men to women in the workforce and which continued to be an influence irrespective of the economic outlook of the Government. This was women's increasing control over their fertility by the mass availability of the most reliable and effective birth control method to date: the Pill. Freed from the burdens and risks of successive pregnancies over many years, and assisted to some degree by new labour-saving devices coming into the home, married women questioned their traditional role and began to seek paid employment in sufficient numbers to change permanently the composition of the workforce¹.

This new self-assertion by women was reflected in a series of important social reforms beginning in the late 1960s with the Abortion Act 1967 and the Divorce Reform Act 1969, and continuing into the period of Conservative government from 1970-1974 with further new laws giving women increased rights over property after divorce, equal guardianship rights over their children, and so on. The same period saw sustained pressure on the Parliamentary front for equal pay and anti-discrimination laws. Between 1967 and 1969, three Private Member's Bills on equal pay were introduced; and between 1968 and 1972 at least seven attempts were made to introduce anti-discrimination legislation. Before analysing the Acts which did finally become law, we will look first at the female workforce they were designed to influence.

Women's Place in the Workforce

Although women are approaching numerical equality with men in the workforce — they are at present over 40% of the total — they occupy a position characterised by three main factors which combine to make them grossly disadvantaged. Firstly, more than half of all employed women are concentrated in three sectors of industry: *miscellaneous services* (including catering, hairdressing and cleaning); *professional and scientific services* (including education, social work and banking) and *the distributive trades*. Further, within the manufacturing sector, women are similarly concentrated into particular sections, such as food, textile and clothing. There is no comparable concentration of male workers in any industry or sector.

Over the whole period in which the number of employed women has increased, their concentration into specific areas of work has remained a constant feature. In other words, their growing numbers mean that certain sectors have expanded, not that women have been in any way moving into 'men's' jobs. Neither is there any evidence that the demarcation lines between 'men's' and 'women's' work are even beginning seriously to shift. To give one example: in 1977, 93%¹ Between 1951 and 1971 the labour force grew by 2.5 million people, of whom 2.3 million were women. By 1971, women were 38.7% of the workforce. The current figure is over 40%.

of the girls beginning an apprenticeship were training to be hairdressers.

Secondly, in the kinds of employment where women *are* found, they are further and overwhelmingly concentrated into the lowest-paid, low status jobs, with few if any opportunities for training or promotion. A woman is far more likely to be a nurse than a doctor, a shop assistant than a manager, a primary school teacher than a school head. In addition, many of the sectors occupied chiefly by women have been notorious for being difficult to unionise, eg catering and office workers, (the reasons for which cannot, of course, be put down crudely and solely to some inherent reactionary resistance by women to trade unions), and this contributes to their overall weak bargaining position and general low pay.

Thirdly, women's hours of work are different from men's. The vast majority of part-time workers are women. Of all employed women, 40.1% work part-time, compared to only 4.4% of all men. Apart from the limited range of jobs which are available on a part-time basis in the first place, this very distinct feature of women's employment is one important factor in the low level of average female earnings relative to average male earnings.

Most women who do part-time work do so in order to combine paid employment with childcare and domestic responsibilities. But even when they work full-time, the need to play their dual role, (from which they have not yet been freed by a corresponding shift in men's lifestyles), means that women, even those doing comparable work to men, are not always able to adopt the same work pattern as full-time men. The way their earnings are made up show that women do not boost their basic rate by overtime payments, shift premiums, bonus scheme payments, and so on, to nearly the same extent as men do.

Average Earnings and Hours worked in 1978

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Average weekly earnings	£80.7	£49.4	£100.7	£59.1
of which O/T payments	£11.6	£1.7	£3.0	£0.6
PBR payments	£7.2	£4.8	£3.0	£0.6
Shift premium	£2.4	£0.9	£0.6	£0.3
Average weekly hours	46.0	39.6	38.0	26.7
of which O/T hours	6.1	1.1	1.4	0.4

Source: *New Earnings Survey 1978*

To summarise, the concentration of women in certain sectors, the fact that those sectors in general and the particular jobs that women hold within them tend to be the lowest-paid, the predominance of part-time work by women and, finally, the greater reliance of women than of men on their basic rate only, as opposed to other elements of their earnings, are all characteristics of female employment to be borne in mind when assessing the extent to which the Equal Pay Act and Sex Discrimination Act were intended to challenge the status quo and the nature of their impact in practice.

In addition, the lobbies for equal pay and anti-discrimination laws, respectively, had different histories and were subject to different influences, which have contributed to their practical effect.

Equal Pay

Equal pay has been a demand of women workers ever since they have been organised. The TUC passed its first resolution in favour of equal pay in 1888, but unfortunately this did not represent any real political or militant commitment to the achievement of equality for women at work. On the contrary, the thinking was that if an employer had to pay a man and a woman the same rate for the job, then a man would be taken on any time, and women would no longer be able to be used as cheap labour to undercut male rates.

A woman is far more likely to be a nurse than a doctor, a shop assistant than a manager, a primary school teacher than a school head.

The Royal Commission on equal pay from 1944 to 1946, which reported to the post-war Labour government, came out in favour of equal pay in the public sector, but not the private. This no doubt reflected the pressure for equal pay and other rights for women which had been built up by the public sector unions together with women's organisations; the marriage bar on women in the Civil Service was also lifted in 1946. The first significant achievement of equal pay was in 1952, by women doing the same jobs as men at the London County Council. Other public sector employers followed suit over the next ten years.

Extra-impetus for this series of equal pay achievements may well have come from the ILO Convention No 100 in 1951, which confirmed its long-standing principle of 'equal pay for work of equal value'. Ratification of a Convention by a Member State imposes a legal duty to bring domestic legislation into line; the UK did not ratify until 1970 when the Equal Pay Act was passed. Whether or not that Act *does* fully comply with the formula 'equal pay for work of equal value' is a question currently under investigation by the European Commission, where it is believed that UK law may be too narrowly drawn.

Ironically, although the ILO Convention may have been a final factor jogging the LCC into conceding equal pay in 1952, its existence provided the perfect excuse throughout the 50s and 60s for the TUC to stagnate once more on the issue and not to give it any active consideration. True, every year from 1960 onwards a resolution was passed at the TUC Congress, but it always centred on urging the government to ratify the ILO Convention. In this way, the TUC put the onus on the government to take the initiative on equal pay, while itself devoting little if any thought or resources to the problem. The exact meaning of 'equal pay for work of equal value' is *still* the subject of debate, although it has been demanded monotonously year after year! Stagnation on the equal pay issue was confirmed and strengthened early on in the Labour government which took office in 1964, when what was virtually a 'gentleman's agreement' was made between the TUC and Ray Gunter, Secretary of State for Employment, to the effect that no action beyond the passing of Congress resolutions was desirable. It was considered that implementation of equal pay in the private sector would be inflationary. The mid-60s, then, saw the TUC acquiescing in the Government's treatment of women as a malleable, second-class, 'reserve' workforce, to be encouraged into employment as far as it suited the Government's economic outlook, but to be kept definitely to one side of the mainstream of the bargaining process, for fear of risking too great a challenge to the economy.

The Ford Strike

It was the strike of nearly 400 women machinists at Ford's in 1968 which brought equal pay the headlines. The women came out over a grading grievance, though this was popularised as an equal pay strike. The dispute stirred up a new wave of militancy through the ranks of the female workforce. In the same year, the women's liberation movement took root in Britain, partly inspired by the Ford women's struggle, partly complementing it, with influence from other quarters, such as the women's movement in the United States and the student movement in this country. The Ford women struck for three weeks and lost Ford's £8 million in export orders. They achieved a rise from 87% of the men's rate to 92%. (The original issue of the grading,

however, has still not been resolved).

The TUC could no longer sit on the issue; its 1968 Congress carried an amendment to the usual equal pay resolution, calling this time for TUC backing for industrial action taken in support of an equal pay claim. The amendment was carried *against* the General Council's recommendation. The Government was also forced to deal with the combined pressure for equal pay from the labour and women's movements and from individual MPs. Establishing a legal right to equal pay was presumably considered politically expedient to prevent an explosion of equal pay strikes which might have posed too great a threat to both exports and profits. The Government had lost the connivance of the TUC and must also have been increasingly embarrassed at an international level at still not having ratified the ILO equal pay Convention, now of nearly 20 years' standing.

Changes in Union Attitudes

The strength of the current within the trade union movement which achieved such a significant change of course at the 1968 Congress had two sides to it. First, there was, of course, a developing genuine political commitment to the move for equal pay, highlighted by individual and well-publicised struggles like the Ford strike. On the strength of the Ford strike, more women trade unionists probably felt inspired to push their own equal pay claims, or became aware of equal pay as a legitimate demand for the first time. Indeed, throughout this period, more and more women *became trade unionists* for the first time, swelling the size of the *active* voice for equal pay inside the labour movement on an unprecedented scale². Women's increased participation in trade unions made all the difference between lip-service and committed action on equal pay, although the development of the action has been, and still is, uneven, from union to union and also within some unions. (Compare the solid backing from the AUEW for the Trico women, to the obstructive and unsupportive behaviour of a different AUEW district towards the women of Electrolux). A similar shift has occurred more recently over abortion; as more feminists have become trade unionists (and vice versa), pressing the unions and the TUC for action on abortion rights, we have seen policies develop from passive support to confident action, such as the massive demonstration in October against the Corrie Bill.

The second underlying reason for the new TUC militant stand on equal pay was, therefore, self-interest. Unions wanted to expand; women were the growth constituency; policies which attracted them had to be devised, strengthened, and given priority. Unions such as APEX, hardly known for its militant or left-wing reputation, were nevertheless among the first to concentrate on developing detailed equal pay policies, since they were precisely the unions covering the sectors employing growing numbers of women. Women, in turn, had much to gain by joining a union. The 87% of the men's rate earned by the Ford women at the *beginning* of their strike was a considerably higher percentage than the national average at the same time. In 1970,

Rather than to promote and enforce equal pay, the Act was therefore designed, and has been used, to control and delay it.

the year the Equal Pay Act was passed, women's average weekly earnings were just 49.9% of men's (full-time manual).

The Act Itself

The timing and terms of the Equal Pay Act which emerged, however, make it quite clear that the Government did not intend the advent of equal pay to make any significant impact on the economy. Rather than to promote and enforce equal pay, the Act was therefore designed, and has been used, to control and delay it.

This was done firstly by defining equal pay according to the Act so that only a limited number of women would be covered. Equal pay (and other contractual terms) can be claimed by an individual doing comparable work with a man at the same (or an associated) workplace. If the jobs are different, they either have to be broadly similar with differences of no practical importance, or they must have been rated as equivalent under a job evaluation scheme. But even if one of these two criteria is satisfied, the employer can still escape equal pay if a 'genuine material difference other than sex' can be shown between the man and the woman. Some such differences are clearly acceptable, for example where the man is paid more because of properly-negotiated long service increments. Other reasons, however, which have to date been accepted by employment tribunals as 'genuine material differences', such as being a part-timer, are quite unacceptable and have further narrowed the field of women who might benefit from the Act. Even without these judicial refinements the Act offers no help to the majority of women who work in traditionally female sectors, since they neither work alongside comparable men nor are likely to have benefitted from job evaluation schemes.

The problems which characterise the female workforce are far deeper than could be tackled by any law.

The second way in which the Government sought to dilute the impact of equal pay was by giving the Act five years before coming fully into force. Instead of using those years, as officially announced, to work out the best ways of implementing equal pay, it is well-known that many employers threw their energies into working out ways of avoiding or minimising their legal obligations under the Act when it was finally enforced. This was done mainly by segregating men and women doing comparable work and through job evaluation schemes which concealed discriminatory grading behind unisex labels³.

Furthermore, the most effective part of the Act was out of date by the end of 1975 and has still not been amended. This is the section which gives the Central Arbitration Committee (formerly the Industrial Arbitration Board) the duty to amend collective agreements where male-only or female-only rates are specified. This procedure was effective because it offered a collective as opposed to an individual remedy, whereby usually a large number of women benefitted directly from a single decision under the Act. By the time the Act was enforced, such sex-linked rates had been virtually eliminated, though discriminatory grading in disguise is still common, as indicated above. The CAC's role under the Act should therefore be wider and more flexible, as indeed it has been in practice until recently: in October 1979, a High Court judgement effectively wrote the CAC out of the Equal Pay Act, ruling the CAC must stick to the letter of the law and consider only those agreements which refer to male or female wage rates.

Diminishing Influence

The Equal Pay Act, then, has now reached the point where its only use is as an occasional safety net for individuals. As the graph below shows, there has been a significant rise in women's earnings as a percentage of men's since the Act was passed, but the 1978 figures saw this trend *reversed*. In other words, despite having an Equal Pay Act, women's earnings are still low, and now falling again, relative to men's. Part of the explanation for this decline is the effect which

²In 1962, women were 17.5% of the total TUC membership. By 1975, this had increased by 91%, compared to a rise in male membership of only 11%.

³For a detailed discussion of ways in which the effects of the Acts were minimised by employers, see *The Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts: their impact in the Workplace*, an article by Mandy Snell, *Feminist Review*, No. 1.



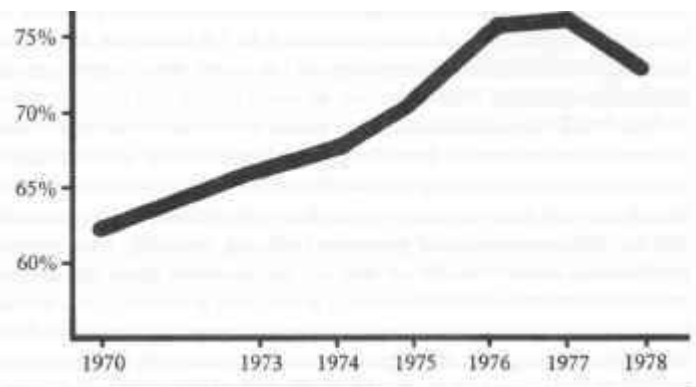
incomes policy limits have had on the composition of earnings over the past few years. Equal pay settlements have always been permitted over and above the agreed limits, yet women have *still* lost out overall because men, generally in stronger bargaining positions anyway, have been forced by the restraint on the basic rate to increase their earnings by higher shift premiums, overtime rates, and so on, which as shown earlier account for a considerably smaller proportion of women's earnings than of men's.

An OECD study of the effect of the recession on the employment of women in Europe, published in 1976, suggested that employment opportunities for women may be less affected at the first stage of a recession than at later stages, because women are concentrated in those sectors of the economy in which a slackened demand does not have an immediate impact in terms of loss of jobs or where the impact is cushioned by shifting from full-time to part-time employment. As the recession continues and demand for labour falls further, women become more vulnerable to lay-offs as the 'last-in, first-out' principle is adopted. The position of women in the British workforce would seem to match this pattern, with current right-wing Government policies making their vulnerability even more acute.

Women's earnings as a proportion of men's earnings, 1970-78.

(Average gross hourly earnings, excluding the effects of over-time pay and over-time hours, of employees aged 18 and over.)

Source: Department of Employment, *New Earnings Surveys*.



Sex Discrimination

The pressure for a law dealing with sex discrimination was not rooted principally in the labour movement, as was the case with equal pay. It grew partly out of the movement for legislation to tackle racial discrimination, which had begun in the 1950s. The supporters of a sex discrimination law learned from the inadequacies of the first two versions of the Race Relations Act in 1965 and 1968. In turn, the current Race Relations Act of 1976 is modelled on the Sex Discrimination Act. The American experience of anti-discrimination legislation was also a crucial influence in the formulation of our SDA.

The inclusion of an indirect discrimination provision is one example of how Labour politicians' thinking on the question of an anti-discrimination law had advanced between 1970 and 1975, largely a period of Opposition for Labour. The influence of ideas from the women's liberation movement, as well as from the States, was an important factor in carrying Labour's proposals for an anti-discrimination law further than the Conservative suggestions in the 1973 Green Paper. It was common ground between Labour and Conservative Governments that an Equal Pay Act without a sex discrimination law seemed illogical. But the 1973 Green Paper had envisaged a law covering employment only. Labour's White Paper of 1974, on the other hand, reflected the pressure from the women's in the fields of education, housing, the provisions of goods, facilities

and services, and related advertising, as well as employment. The White Paper, which led directly to the SDA 1975, also set out more effective enforcement measures than the Conservatives had been prepared to enact, with individuals having the power to take action against a discriminator as well as the Equal Opportunities Commission.

The trade union movement had, of course, taken anti-discrimination policies firmly on board by the time the SDA was passed. But the fact that its practical support for, and promotion of, the SDA has been notably less vigorous than on the equal pay issue may be partly explained by the historical point at which the build-up to the SDA took place. The labour movement had just disposed of the Industrial Relations Act of 1972 and the National Industrial Relations Court that went with it, so may well have felt somewhat suspicious and apprehensive at the prospect of yet another law with strong enforcement powers in the arena of industrial relations, despite its support of the law's principles.

The unions must practice what they preach.

Whatever the potential of the Sex Discrimination Act as it stands, however, the areas deliberately omitted from its scope are the key indicator of the Government's real political will to combat sex discrimination. Tax, social security, pensions, nationality and immigration are the most important exclusions. The Government was clearly not prepared fundamentally to challenge the position of women's dependency on men, whether it be for money or for status; and it did not intend to do anything which meant spending money on achieving equality.

The Sex Discrimination Act has meant that some of the most overt forms of discrimination have disappeared, notably the wording of job advertisements specifying male or female jobs. But the difficulties of proof and enforcement have resulted in very little use being made of the Act's more substantial provisions relating to hiring, training and promotion, and virtually no use (as far as court cases go) of the non-employment sections⁴.

Although case law is thin on the ground there are nevertheless signs that the *threat of the law* has encouraged some HP firms, banks, building societies, and so on, to change discriminatory policies and practices. Even so, progress is depressingly slow.

The Wider Impact of the Law

The equality laws have not been a waste of time, despite their feeble results in terms of numbers of cases taken and won⁵. The impact has been positive and helpful, when considered from a wider perspective than purely legalistic or individual interests. In particular, the combination of the Acts' weaknesses and loopholes, the employers' evasive response between 1970 and 1975 to their new obligations and, finally, the chaotic interpretation of the laws during their first year of operation by industrial tribunals, has been a breeding ground for a more sophisticated awareness of the problems of women workers and a new militancy amongst women themselves.

Far from taking the heat out of the pressure for equal pay and opportunities, as some feminists and trade unionists feared would be the net effect of the legislation, the Acts in practice have helped to spark off a growing appreciation not only of how the law could help, if strengthened, but also of how it *couldn't* help, whatever it said, because the problems which characterise the female workforce are far deeper than could be tackled by any law.

Laws on equal opportunity, however limited, can act as something of a consciousness-raiser. This is one of the most significant (and unintended) effects of the Acts. The fact that law was passed led many

people — especially women — to think in a new way about their rights and lack of rights, and has inspired action in pursuit of those rights; before the laws existed, the same women may have felt reluctant to raise their voice over inequalities which seemed inevitable or even 'natural'. One of the best examples to illustrate this point arises not from the Equal Pay or Sex Discrimination Acts, but from the provision in the 1975 Employment Protection Act protecting a woman from unfair dismissal because of her pregnancy. Although it has in fact never been fair to dismiss a woman for this reason, it had been a practice so common that it was accepted by most women as the employer's right, for which there was no redress. Since the wide publicity around the rights under the Employment Protection Act, however, women's attitudes have changed enormously and it would be remarkable today to come across a woman who would not question getting the sack just because she was pregnant.

The law as a consciousness-raiser has also made itself felt in areas

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completely outside its own scope, in ways which illustrate the complex relationship between a shift in society's attitudes leading to a call for a particular progressive law, which in turn inspires further change in those attitudes. A good example is language. By the time the Sex Discrimination Act became law, the sexist bias of our everyday language (chairman, mankind, man-in-the-street, layman, etc. etc) had long been discussed and challenged within the women's movement as symptomatic of a patriarchal society which only uses men and maleness as a reference point, while women are treated as if they were a minority group, if not ignored. The extent to which the Act dealt with language, was of course, minimal: in job advertisements, for example, *salesgirl* was to become *sales assistant*. Yet a good 90% of the media coverage at the time the Act was enforced centred on the onslaught of the law into our everyday language! Endless jokes about 'Personchester', 'ploughperson's lunches' and 'personholes' appeared. The intention was to trivialise the Act, but surely what this panic over language really showed was that even the people most hostile to the idea behind the new law were being forced for the very first time to think about the everyday words they used, in relation to their relevance for women.

What Needs to be Done Now

If the workings of the equality laws have raised consciousness, illustrated the limited role of the law and pinpointed by default the problems as low pay, lack of opportunity and conflict between paid work and domestic responsibilities, what conclusions can now be drawn about more effective solutions?

Firstly, the kiss of death must be given once and for all by the trade union movement and the left generally to any lingering notion that the problems facing women at work, and in particular their low earnings, can be dealt with by putting the problem into a neat, self-contained compartment to one side of the 'mainstream' of industrial and economic concerns. Any solution which is *not* going to have serious, structural implications for employment and industry as a whole is not going to be an adequate solution.

The unions have seen to their cost what happens when the law muscles in unwanted into the arena of 'mainstream' industrial relations — trade union recognition, the independence of unions, the threat of statutory pay policy, and so on. The unions must claim equal pay and opportunities for the mainstream too. They are right to campaign for stronger laws to set minimum standards, but shortsighted if they concentrate exclusively on amending the law in isolation from strong, committed initiatives, irrespective of the law, in pursuit of equality for women. Several unions have set the pace by emphasising in their policies and material that their women members' interests are the interests of all members, but the degree to which these attitudes are reflected at individual workplaces varies.

The left (mostly!), including the Communist Party is used to promoting the view that women's equality cannot be isolated from the overall class struggle. At the same time, we have acknowledged that while women's liberation is an integral and not a marginal ingredient of the class struggle, that special campaigns, specific policies, positive discrimination and an autonomous women's movement are essential. But much more must be done to turn those formal commitments into political practice, if we are to progress along the road to socialism or, more immediately, if we are to offer any imaginative leadership as part of the left within the trade union movement. Despite the Party's unequivocal position on women's liberation, as set out admirably in *The British Road to Socialism*, it was disturbing to read the article by one of our leading members, Mick Costello, in *Marxism Today*, June 1979, which seemed to be promoting precisely the *opposite* of our policy! Discussing the working class and the broad democratic alliance, he sticks doggedly to the position that there is on the one

hand the labour movement and 'issues that affect workers directly', and 'women and the fight for equal pay' on the other. Mutual support is possible and encouraged in his analysis, but the dividing line is quite firmly there.

Secondly, and following on from the proper acceptance of equal pay and opportunities for women as a central concern for the trade union movement, must come a thorough reappraisal of the collective bargaining process. In other words, the unions must practice what they preach. An exemplary model maternity agreement is no good at all if it is always tacitly understood among negotiators that once hard bargaining is under way, the claims for maternity leave or pay will be the first to go. A neutral non-discrimination clause in a collective agreement is not much good either; positive steps for affirmative action to break down traditional barriers between male and female jobs, encourage women to re-train, and integrate maternity and paternity leave into the accepted pattern of employment, are all

Government policies are not only accelerating the decline of women's earnings relative to men's, but challenging the right of (married) women to take paid work at all.

examples of new priorities which must be drawn in to normal collective bargaining procedure.

A re-assessment of 'free collective bargaining' has begun within the women's movement⁶. The aim is to stimulate an awareness in the labour movement that free collective bargaining hitherto has been male-defined and that it must be widened out if it is to be of any real value to women in the present stalemate of low pay and unequal opportunity. The labour movement and the left, including the Communist Party, must be quick off the mark this time and take up the discussion alongside and in conjunction with the women's movement. Women are still seriously disadvantaged by under-organisation at the workplace; they must be convinced that joining a union, and spending time being active within it, will be worthwhile.

It is especially important in the present political climate to keep up the pressure for positive, innovative policies on women within the trade union movement. It is all too easy to become exclusively defensive when existing rights are as heavily under attack as they are by the Thatcher Government.

Government policies are not only accelerating the decline of women's earnings relative to men's, but challenging the right of (married) women to take paid work at all. This combination of the economic and the ideological attack on women demands more urgently than ever a strong alliance between the women and the labour movements.

Finally, it is vital that the autonomous women's movement, especially the socialist-feminist grouping within it, continue to muster sufficient numbers and energy to do more than simply keep abreast of the many single-issue campaigns it has to fight. The Tories' ideological offensive on women must be matched, and it is feminism rather than trade unionism which will lead on this particular front. •

⁴To date, there have been only about a dozen cases heard under the non-employment sections of the SDA. Precise figures are not available as the Equal Opportunities Commission are not informed by the county courts when a SDA case is listed.

⁵To the end of June 1979, industrial tribunals heard 635 cases under the Equal Pay Act, of which 210 were won and 425 lost. In the same period, 288 SDA employment cases were heard, of which only 68 were successful.

⁶See *Red Rag* No. 14, article by Beatrix Campbell and Valerie Charlton. This discussion was then taken up at the *Feminist Review* forum in June 1979.