

The Seventies are over. A fierce assault on women's rights is now under way

Jean Gardiner

Women, Recession and the Tories

No man or woman on the Left can safely ignore the question of how mass unemployment and the decisive swing to the Right represented by the Thatcher government will affect the relationship between men and women at work, in the home and in the labour and democratic movement. It may be tempting to assume that the attacks that women and men are suffering as a result of the capitalist recession and government policies will necessarily bind people together in a united anti-Tory movement. However such a perspective will fail not only to defeat this current government but also, more importantly, to develop the conditions for a popular movement committed to replacing it with a democratic as opposed to capitalist-inspired alternative.

There were a number of important changes in women's lives in the twenty years after the Second World War, including the expansion of job opportunities for women. These changes gave rise to growing aspirations amongst women and increasing awareness of the limits of advances that had been made. This new consciousness has been expressed most clearly in the Women's Liberation Movement but has also been reflected throughout women's organisations in general in the 1970s. Its impact has been felt in a number of social reforms. Yet within the last few years the progress women have made has appeared increasingly limited and vulnerable. Steadily rising unemployment culminating in the present deep recession poses a special threat both to women's jobs and to women's expectations more generally. This threat is reinforced by the economic and political philosophy of the Thatcher government and the attacks on women associated with it. In many respects women are in a stronger position to resist these attacks than was the case in the comparable period of the 1930s. However weaknesses in the women's movement, in the relationship between the women's movement and the labour movement and in the Left's alternative strategy all work against the development of an effective resistance.

THE FORWARD MARCH OF WOMEN?

The economic and welfare reforms implemented in Britain in the period after the Second World War had contradictory effects for women. Women benefitted from the increase in job opportunities associated with a commitment to full employment, from the expansion of education, and from the collective provision of a range of welfare services. Yet none of these changes challenged the traditional assumption that the majority of women would continue to be primarily housewives and mothers dependent on marriage rather than employment. The commitment to full employment did not entail

ensuring that all women with children who desired to work had the opportunity to do so. The expansion in welfare services did not include nursery provision. Vocational training and promotion ladders remained geared to male working lives. Sex stereotyping continued to be reinforced by the education system. Sexual inequality was built into tax and social security legislation. Growing numbers of women, particularly married women, were drawn into a narrow range of relatively low paid jobs, consistent with traditional notions of women's work. Women were expected to retain responsibility for the care of home and family in line with their continued economic dependence on marriage and a male breadwinner.

By the end of the 1960s the aspirations which welfare capitalism had awakened and failed to satisfy were being voiced as demands for equal pay and equal opportunities at work. Many further demands followed in the 1970s, with the development of the Women's Liberation Movement, which emphasised the ways in which the existing welfare state reinforced the traditional sexual division of labour and women's oppression. Their criticisms of existing state services often led

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feminists to opt for the establishment of self help alternative services outside the framework of existing welfare provision, eg, community nurseries, women's aid refuges, pregnancy testing services. Whilst those self help groups which survived were generally forced to negotiate a relationship with the state in order to gain access to financial resources, their development highlights the ways in which feminism in the 1970s rejected an uncritical support for state provision *per se*. Since women are disproportionately the recipients (and providers) of welfare services given their traditional role in caring for the young, the sick and the elderly, the criticisms voiced by the Women's Liberation Movement can be seen as an important part of the groundswell of popular dissatisfaction with state services which the Tory government has sought to exploit in its attacks on the public sector.¹ Pressure from the Women's Liberation Movement and other women's and labour movement organisations resulted in progressive social legislation in the seventies concerned with sexual inequality (the Equal Pay Act 1970, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Employment Protection Act 1975, amended in 1978, and the Social Security Pensions Act 1975). However there were serious limits in the changes required by this legislation. Moreover even the limited scope for action to improve women's opportunities at work which the new laws provided was quickly undermined by the deteriorating economic climate and rising unemployment.

THE IMPACT OF THE RECESSION

Since 1974 in the capitalist world there has been lower economic growth and higher unemployment than at any time since the Second World War. The recession of 1974-5 was followed by a brief boom in 1976-8. Since 1979 a new and deeper phase of recession has been entered. Britain has suffered more than most industrial capitalist countries from the effects of the recession because of its relative

recession encourages the development of a right wing anti-feminist revival.

industrial weakness and decline. Moreover since 1979 the British government has been committed to more sharply deflationary policies than any other. For both reasons unemployment has risen more quickly and to higher levels in Britain than elsewhere.

There are a number of ways in which a recession such as the present one undermines the limited progress women have made. Because women are a particularly vulnerable group within the labour market their jobs are more readily threatened and their unemployment less visible than men's. High levels of unemployment greatly reduce training and job opportunities that make it possible for women to enter traditionally male-dominated fields. Moreover the divisive attitudes that unemployment gives rise to can undermine the past progress women have made. If improvements in the relative pay of women are also reversed, women are further discouraged from seeking work. Finally cuts in public services associated with the recession both reduce employment opportunities for women and increase the burden on women in the home.

Women, particularly married women and part-time workers, can be used as a more flexible reserve army of labour than men, being drawn in and out of employment in accordance with the demand for labour. Women move in and out of the labour force more than men because of the birth of children or the need to care for children, sick or elderly relatives. Female employment can therefore often be reduced rapidly by means of natural wastage and without the need to make redundancies. Part-time workers (40% of all women employed) are particularly vulnerable because they lack many of the minimum legal rights of full-time workers and have lower levels of unionisation.²

Firms in many industries have used part-time employment as a temporary and cheap means of meeting demand. For example firms have rarely found difficulty in recruiting or laying off workers for the twilight evening shift, popular with married women who have children. Part-time workers are also bearing a disproportionate share of the current loss of jobs in the public sector. In the early 1970s when both male and female full-time jobs were declining, there was a rapid growth in part-time female employment. However this growth slackened substantially after 1975 and is undoubtedly now being reversed.

Men and women are of course mainly concentrated in different jobs and this occupational segregation has not diminished as a result of the growth in the female labour force in the last thirty years.³ The increase in employment opportunities for women that took place was the result of a growth in demand for labour in typically female occupations, especially in the expanding service sector. The relative vulnerability of women and men therefore also depends on the extent to which different jobs are at risk in the recession. Because women tend to be concentrated in jobs with low levels of skill and authority they are again more vulnerable than men. However offsetting this is the concentration of women's jobs in service industries, eg, finance, distribution, catering, which have not been so adversely affected by the recession as the production industries in which men's jobs are concentrated.⁴ However technological changes are now taking place which will increase the productivity of labour in the service sector and therefore reduce the number of jobs. Most significant for women perhaps will be the impact of the new microelectronic technology on clerical work which has provided more job opportunities for women in recent years than any other single occupation. Two or three word processors can do the work often typists on traditional typewriters.⁵

Less visible

Female unemployment is less visible than male unemployment. Unemployed married women are less likely to register than men, either because they are not entitled to unemployment benefit or because they are unaware that they can register if only seeking part-time employment. Moreover when unemployment is high and job opportunities scarce many married women are discouraged from seeking work and therefore do not even consider themselves unemployed.

It is therefore impossible to get an accurate measure of the overall impact of unemployment on women. However the number of women registering as unemployed has been increasing since the mid-70s faster than the number of men registered as unemployed. The rise in registered unemployment amongst married women has been particularly rapid. The gap between the official unemployment rates for men and women has therefore been narrowing. In December 1980 the rates were 11% for men and 7% for women.

However if unregistered unemployment is taken into account the gap disappears altogether. In 1978 42% of all unemployed women and 56% of all unemployed married women were not registered as compared with 11% of unemployed men. It is therefore necessary almost to double the official unemployment figures for women to get a more accurate picture of actual unemployment.

Finally we should add to the unemployed those who give up seeking work and drop out of the labour force altogether when jobs are scarce, amongst whom there are twice as many women as men, again mostly married women.⁶ Overall therefore unemployment has reduced women's job prospects to an even greater extent than men's although the results are considerably more hidden.

A recession affects not only the total number of jobs but the availability of training opportunities and access of women to traditionally male occupations. As firms cut back on training and

men's jobs are threatened there are fewer and fewer opportunities for women to acquire new skills. Divisive attitudes as illustrated by the following example are on the increase:

'I believe a vociferous and militant minority is fostering the discontent among women about equal pay and jobs. A woman wants her man to be in work, not unemployed. Jobs should be first and foremost for him not her. A woman can and should get fulfilment from having and bringing up children'.⁷

Not surprisingly therefore women are becoming even more low paid than before. The limited progress that was made in narrowing the differential between men's and women's pay after the introduction of the Equal Pay Act has been reversed since 1978. This further discourages women from seeking work unless they are desperate for the money.

Since 1976 rising unemployment in Britain has been associated with cuts in public expenditure and services. These have meant not only reduced employment opportunities, most for women, in the public sector but also additional burdens on women in the home. And the more responsibility women have for caring for children, the sick and the elderly, the more difficult it is for women to seek paid work.

THATCHERISM AND WOMEN

All the adverse effects of the recession on women discussed above have been intensified in two ways by the election of the Thatcher government and its first two years in office. The sharp rise in 1980 in the rate at which jobs have been disappearing (registered unemployment alone is now rising by about one million a year) is largely the result of the intensely deflationary monetarist policies the Government is pursuing. Moreover the Thatcher philosophy attempts to provide an ideological legitimisation for both the attacks on women that result from the recession and for policies that take those attacks even further.

It has already been pointed out that a recession encourages the development of a right wing anti-feminist revival. The idea that women should accept that their place in society is to be at home caring for their family appears to make sense to more and more people when jobs are scarce. It is therefore not surprising that these ideas were regaining some popularity in the late 1970s and beginning to be expressed all the more vociferously in response to the impact feminism appeared to be having on society. At that time the major campaign to attract the support of those opposed to the advances women had won was the anti-abortion campaign. Many of the anti-abortion lobby would not, of course be opposed to other aspects of women's rights. However the more generalised anti-feminist stance of many of its constituents is a clear and important aspect of the shift to the right in British politics that the Thatcher government reflects.

However despite the growth in the ranks and confidence of their allies, when it comes to the place of women in their new philosophy, the path the Tories have to tread is a delicate one, not necessarily helped by blatant anti-feminist outbursts like the now famous Patrick Jenkin quote: 'If the Good Lord had intended us to have equal rights to go out to work, he wouldn't have created man and woman'.⁸

Tory ambiguities

For it is important to remember that appealing to women in the electorate continues to be a part of the Tory political appeal which must therefore recognise those changes in women's lives and aspirations which are irreversible as a result of experiences in the last thirty years. Moreover the Tories have neither an explicit nor a united position on women, and probably less so on this issue than on some others, eg, trade unions. Some Tories have campaigned actively for sex equality in some areas. A commitment to women's equal rights can coexist with moral beliefs about the family which give rise to policies

that go against women's interests. The Tory government is neither explicit about its attacks on women nor even probably aware that its policies have this effect.

For example, Geoffrey Howe's proposals to introduce greater financial equality and independence for married women by changes in the tax law undoubtedly owe something both to his wife's former connections with the Equal Opportunities Commission and to strong lobbying on the part of the Conservative Women's Advisory Committee. The explicit aim of these proposals is 'to enable women to be treated as independently as they wish to be treated, but at the same time to encourage and support the family'.⁹ While appearing to remove overt discrimination between the sexes these proposals could encourage married women, with or without children, to stay out of the labour market.¹⁰ The plan is to abolish the married man's allowance and give men and women a higher single person's allowance with the possibility of transferring the tax allowance if one partner is not in paid work to the partner who is. It would be theoretically possible under such a scheme, as it is already within existing tax law, for a wife to be the breadwinner and a husband to stay at home. However role reversal



has rightly stressed how central the control of fertility is in shaping women's opportunities

of this kind is unlikely given the differences in pay and access to jobs between the sexes. Moreover such changes work in favour of high income married couples and against low income families with children.

Thus the Tory government can appear to be making a stand on sex equality whilst advocating policies which are likely to have adverse effects on the majority of women. This can only add to the general shock and confusion feminists and the Left in general have been experiencing as our opposition to the status quo has been eclipsed by

¹ See articles by Peter Leonard and Paul Corrigan in *Marxism Today* December 1979

² Jennifer Hurstfield 'Part-Time Pittance', *Low Pay Review* No 1 June 1980.

³ Catherine Hakim 'Occupational Segregation' *Department of Employment Research Paper* No 9 November 1979.

⁴ Peter Elias 'Labour Supply and Employment Opportunities for Women' in *Economic Change and Employment Policy*, ed Robert M Lindley 1980.

⁵ Colin Hines and Graham Searle *Automatic Unemployment* 1979.

⁶ Marie McNay and Chris Pond 'Low Pay and Family Poverty', *Study Commission on the Family* 1980.

⁷ Susan Bower Opinion Column, *Sunday Times* 28 December 1980.

⁸ *Guardian* 6 November 1979.

Conservative Women's Advisory Committee Discussion Document, 'Women and Tax' 1979

¹⁰ Fran Bennett, Rosa Heys and Rosalind Coward, 'The Limits to "Financial and Legal Independence": A Socialist Feminist Perspective on Taxation and Social Security', in *Politics and Power One*, 1980.

the radical Right, personified by the country's first woman prime minister. The fact that some attacks on Mrs Thatcher from the labour movement have concentrated in a sexist way on her femaleness rather than her policies and philosophy have further added to the confusion.

Tories and the family

However the role of the family and traditional values have been given a lot more emphasis in Tory philosophy and policies than equal rights. The philosophy stresses the need to return responsibilities and choice to the family, both of which it claims have been eroded by the growth of the welfare state. Emphasis on the family may have a superficial appeal for women across classes given the importance of families in the lives of most women. However the practical effects of the policies associated with the philosophy, eg, transfers from direct taxation (income tax) to indirect taxation (VAT) and the expansion of private education, will certainly not provide benefits for the majority of women or their families, especially in working class areas.

Moreover policies which claim to favour the family as a unit ignore the structural inequalities within it. The Tories have been noticeably unwilling even to maintain payments to the family which directly benefit women and children, ie, child benefits. Again the switch from direct taxation to indirect taxation works against women and children in families where income is not equally shared. Policies for the family have in practice been policies for the middle class and for married men.

The cuts in public services which had begun as a 'regrettable expedient' under the previous Labour government have been pursued with vigour and ideological commitment by the Thatcher government. Again the philosophy of returning freedoms to the family has been used as a justification for cutting the social wage and, supposedly, increasing take-home pay. Any such redistribution necessarily works against women who depend even more than men on the services included in the social wage. Not only has the Government been enforcing this policy by withholding cash from the public sector but it has also carried through a series of legislative measures reducing local authority obligations in a number of fields, particularly education.

What was previously a very weak statutory requirement on the part of local authorities to provide nursery education has now been removed altogether by the 1980 Education Act. In a context of massive cuts in local government expenditure this will make it very difficult to maintain, let alone expand, the existing totally inadequate provision. The attacks on the school meals service involves another reduction of mostly female paid labour at the expense of female unpaid labour in the home. Even worse, one local authority, Dorset, is now considering introducing continental-style shorter opening hours for schools.

Such cuts in services for children have the direct effect in most cases of tying women further to the home, and of further reducing their availability for paid work except for very short hours and very low pay. All these pressures have been reinforced by the policy of restricting maternity rights which has been incorporated in the 1980 Employment Act.

ARE WE GOING BACK TO THE 1930s?

Whilst mass unemployment and the beginnings of a reaction against women's right to work revive memories of the 1930s there are many ways in which British capitalism in general and the position of women in particular have changed over the last 50 years.

The British economy is now a lot weaker relative to the rest of the capitalist world than it was in the 1930s. The effects of the recession are therefore felt more sharply in Britain than in many of the other capitalist industrial countries. British industry in the 1930s was more

shielded than it is today by imperial markets and protection of industries supplying the home market. Pressures to restructure the economy and the workforce are therefore more intense today.

The economy now depends on female employment, and particularly the employment of married women and mothers to a much greater extent than was the case 50 years ago. Also because of the continuing occupational segregation of men and women, and the fact that women are concentrated in the lowest paid, least skilled jobs which it would be difficult to persuade most men to accept, the increase in the ratio of women to men in employment is difficult to reverse unless the predominantly female jobs are the ones that are disappearing. (In fact even in the 1930s the ratio of women to men in the labour force remained constant.) The prospects for occupational change are uncertain as has been discussed. Whilst certain predominantly female jobs are likely to suffer a decline, particularly as a result of technological change and cuts in public services, others, especially in the private service sector may increase. However as male unemployment worsens there may well be a growth in the number of men going into previously female areas of work.

The underlying changes

Given the general uncertainty about economic trends it is important to take account of the social and political changes which will influence future outcomes for women. Socially there have been a number of major developments affecting women which are very unlikely to be reversed.

While attempts have been made and will continue to be made to whittle away advances in women's control of their fertility, by the attack on abortion rights, a complete reversal to the position of 50 years ago cannot be imagined. There is no sign of a comprehensive attack on contraception. The Women's Liberation Movement has rightly stressed how central control of fertility is in shaping women's opportunities in all other fields.

Secondly while educational opportunities remain unequal between the sexes in many respects the overall growth in education that has taken place since the Second World War has encouraged new aspirations amongst women in all areas of their lives.

Thirdly liberalisation of divorce laws has reinforced a growing tendency towards marital breakdown. Increasing numbers of women have opted to end marriages which fail to satisfy new aspirations. One in four marriages can now be expected to break down. This has led to an enormous increase in the number of single parent families, mostly headed by a woman. In 1976 11% of all dependent children were in single parent families. Most single parent families have been forced to live in poverty as supplementary benefit claimants. However because of the cost this imposes on the state there has been growing pressure on non-married mothers to get paid employment, both in the form of concessions to single parents who work (eg, the reduction in the minimum hours a single parent must work to 24 in order to claim family income supplement) and in the form of the campaign against 'scroungers'.

These changes in the pattern of marriage and divorce affect women's work expectations in two ways. First because growing numbers of women in the labour force are family breadwinners the traditional justification for regarding women's jobs as of secondary importance becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. (Of course it is not only single mothers whose earnings are crucial for supporting families. The number of two parent families living in poverty would treble without the contribution of a mother's wages.) Secondly married women, conscious of the rate at which marriages break down, are increasingly concerned about the need to establish their own financial independence. The ideology that women's place is in the home depends on the assumption that marriage lasts for ever and



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provides an adequate permanent financial support.

A fourth major social change is the growth in women's dependence on and expectation of state supported social provision in fields such as health, social services and education. Whilst much has been done, especially by the present government, to create a crisis frame of mind in which people are persuaded that the country cannot afford to maintain social provision at its previous levels, many people are increasingly aware that alternative familial and community systems of support generally do not exist and cannot be created without further state expenditure.

Political contrasts

Finally there are two important political changes if we compare the position of women today with the 1930s. First there is the nature and breadth of the women's movement. The earlier women's movement of the first quarter of the 20th century concentrated its energies on the vote, equal rights and welfare reforms, most of which had been conceded to some extent by the late 1920s. By the 1930s therefore feminism had been quiescent for a number of years. By contrast the feminist movement of the 1970s always emphasised the limited nature of single issue campaigns and legal reforms by comparison with the deep structural and ideological causes of women's oppression. For that reason it has tended to gain strength rather than lose momentum as a result of legal battles won. Although the Women's Liberation Movement itself, which has inspired many of the diverse sections of the women's movement today, has suffered from weaknesses which will be discussed below it still has considerable dynamism and the ability to go on attracting new groups of women.

The second important political change is the position of women within the trade union movement and the basis this provides for a new and stronger link between the women's movement and the labour movement. Not only has there been a large increase in the female membership of unions but also growing pressure from women members has forced more and more unions to give attention both to involving women more actively and to issues of particular concern to

women. Whilst unions still have a long way to go in eradicating both sexist attitudes and male oriented policies and practices enormous changes have taken place, most clearly demonstrated in the 1979 TUC supported march against the Corrie Abortion Amendment Bill. The fact that this Bill was later defeated demonstrates the power that the trade union movement in alliance with the women's movement can bring to bear.

Grounds therefore exist for optimism that women are in a much stronger position in the 1980s to resist attacks on their rights than was the case in the 1930s. Many of the changes in women's aspirations including their expectation of greater financial independence are unlikely to be reversed. However in analysing the position of women it is also important to stress how much has not changed and how vulnerable this makes young women especially who have never experienced financial independence, involvement in the women's movement or trade union membership. We can expect increasing numbers of young women who remain unemployed after leaving school to marry and have children without any experience of paid employment. This may well lower their expectations both of marriage and of work.

DEVELOPING THE RESISTANCE

Whilst a complete reversal in women's position may be unlikely the conditions for developing an effective resistance to present attacks do not yet exist. Within the Women's Liberation Movement and on the Left there is a real need for an honest appraisal of the weaknesses that hold us back as well as the strengths that can take us forward.

The Women's Liberation Movement has had a very great impact on society, not just through the social reforms it has helped fight for and defend and the thousands of women who have been directly involved and influenced by it but also through its influence on the attitudes and consciousness of many more people who would not directly identify with it. People have been forced to think about relationships between men and women to a much greater extent than before and there are now reminders in the language for those who might otherwise forget (sexism, chairperson etc).

However there are two major political weaknesses which feminists will have to tackle if we are to keep women's liberation alive as a movement and an ideology over the coming years. One weakness is the position of children in feminist philosophy. The other is the

problem of developing effective mass action.

Feminists have rightly fought for women's right to choose whether or not to have children and for the right of women who have children to be able to lead a life which is not totally circumscribed by that fact. They have also correctly highlighted ways in which the interests of children and women are separate, and the need for women to be aware of and able to assert their own interests. However in this process insufficient attention has often been given to the central role that children play in the lives of most women, and to the way in which attacks on women are often attacks on children too. An obvious example of this is the present Government's attack on nursery provision and the way this will undermine the educational opportunities of children as well as the rights of mothers.

If more and more women are to unite in a movement of opposition to present Government policies the Tory rhetoric about the family must be exposed as an attack not just on women but also on children. Moreover policies that favour middle class women at the expense of working class women or childless women at the expense of women with children must be opposed even when they appear superficially to be sexually egalitarian.

Mass action

A movement's ability to develop forms of mass action is crucial not only because of the power such action can have but also because of the confidence it can generate in the movement itself. Without it demoralisation can easily take over particularly when the government of the day is set on a course of action in total opposition to the aims of the movement. There must be ways of showing that there is widespread support. One of the problems of the Women's Liberation Movement is that often the knowledge of its influence has been confined to the women directly involved within it. The fact that they

have taken many of its ideas and methods into other organisations like trade unions and campaigning groups has not always been apparent.

Where mass action in support of one of the demands of the women's movement, the defence of abortion rights, has been organised it has been successful in both achieving its aims and demonstrating a very wide basis of support in and outside of the labour movement. What is needed now are initiatives in other areas that can mobilise large numbers of women as well as the labour movement in opposition to the attacks being mounted. Small scale localised action is no longer sufficient.

The support of the labour movement will only be mobilised if there is an active campaign to oppose divisive and anti-feminist attitudes within it. This will only happen if the Left and the Communist Party take up these issues.

A DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE

Resisting current attacks, however difficult a task, is not enough on its own and probably will not succeed unless alternative policies that relate to the present and an alternative philosophy that makes sense to masses of women and men can be offered. Whilst the alternative economic strategy, as a set of economic policies, is an important advance in this respect, the fact that it has nothing directly to say to women is a major weakness. There is as yet no recognition that major structural changes will be necessary for social and economic progress to mean something genuine for women.

The alternative strategy will have to tackle the whole relationship between men's and women's work and between work and home. It is not enough to say that the economy will be reflat and more employment created. Steps must also be taken to equalise employment opportunities for men and women. This will depend ultimately on reducing hours of work to make it possible for the

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present division between part-time and full-time employment to be gradually eliminated. In the shorter term moves in this direction could be made by reducing the hours that parents (fathers as well as mothers) are required to work as well as introducing parental rights to paid leave for family sickness. Positive discrimination will also be needed to break down the occupational segregation of men and women.

In committing itself to an elimination of some of the gross inequalities in Britain today the Left as yet has nothing to say on the inequalities that exist between men and women and between childless adults and families with children. Inequality is structured into not only the wage payment system but also into taxation and social security. It is no use responding to these issues by merely pointing out how far removed the left alternative must be from a society in which the Communist principle of 'from each according to his/her ability to each according to his/her need' can operate. If genuine egalitarianism is our long term aim there must be steps, however small, in the short term that can be taken towards it. If none can be found then doubt will necessarily be cast upon the Left's long term aims.

New priorities

Given the pace at which British industry has been declining any Left government that came to power in the future would be likely to inherit an extremely weak industrial base lacking the capacity to expand quickly to provide goods for private consumption. Any reflation that takes place would depend initially to a large extent on expanding public services and the social wage whilst increases in take-home pay would be limited. This would provide the opportunity for expanding many services that would be of particular benefit to women, eg, nurseries and other forms of child care. It is therefore crucial that the Left's plans take account of criticisms of existing services that have

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been made by feminists, and by workers in the public sector. Alternative plans must be more than a commitment to restore cuts. They must highlight what changes in priorities are required and indicate how services can be democratised.

There are many other issues that a democratic alternative strategy would need to tackle in order to satisfy women's aspirations, many of them concerned with attitudes and values rather than economic changes. The alternative strategy will have to be more than a set of economic policies. It will also need to embody a political philosophy concerned with transforming relationships between men and women at work, in the home and in all democratic organisations. Such a strategy will only emerge if the women's movement is actively involved in its development. This will only happen if the Left can overcome its tendency to see the women's movement as a luxury in the present crisis period. Without the support of the women's movement it will go on failing to reach the mass of women. To get that support will require positive steps to involve women more effectively in decision making and the development of strategy. Equally without the support of the Left and the labour movement, and a willingness to examine its own weaknesses, the women's movement will also find itself increasingly isolated and ineffective. If an alliance of this kind can be developed it will represent a powerful political force capable not just of resisting Thatcherism but also of showing masses of women and men that the Left has the only credible democratic alternative strategy to put in its place.

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The cartoon shows a woman being carried away by a large, winged figure. A man in a suit stands nearby. Speech bubbles contain the following text:
 - "I'm afraid NOTHING NAME is just OUT OF THE QUESTION"
 - "What do you DO with such MEN?"
 - "send them spare Rib for Christmas!"
 - "and deliver yourself out of their hands by SUBSCRIBING TO IT YOURSELF"
 - "Buy me for a friend rather than an enemy"
 Below the cartoon are two forms for sending money to the National Abortion Campaign:
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