Socialist Woman

EDITORIAL

# BRITAIN

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#### **EDITORIAL**

The sisters of the American Women's Liberation Movement showed their power on August 26th when they demonstrated in their thousands for equal job and education facilities and opportunities, free abortion on demand and free childcare facilities. They were challenging a society that flourishes on discrimination against women They were rejecting a social philosophy that permits women to die, and suffer pain and permanent ill-health because none of the resources of a wealthy country are used to provide free medical care. They were beginning the first stage of setting women free from their confinement in the home, and to force society to take responsiblity for all its children. Their demands when achieved, will alter the quality of the lives of all American women, and fundamentally change the society in which they live.

This campaign waged by our American sisters shows very clearly how fundamental to the future of all women is the Women's Liberation Fovement and to the re-organisation of society. A member of the Editorial board took part in the New York demonstration of 25,00 women and gave a message of support and solidarity from the Nottingham Socialist Women's Committee at the rally which followed. A full report on this and her one month tour of the American Liberation Movement, will be featured in our next issue.

The news on Equal Pay shows the need for continued female militancy on this issue. Women workers can have no faith in Trade Union leaders in this fight for economic justice. There is no doubt that the Equal Pay struggle will be renewed in the future. We must all be ready to make it successful.

### U.S. ABORTION CAMPAIGN

### Sabina Mack

One of the most successful struggles waged by the Women's Liberation Movement in the states has been the campaign for free abortion on demand, which has united large numbers of women in action. Since the issue of abortion affects almost every woman(principally because it is a fundamental demand-the right to control one's own body), particularly working-class women, it is potentially a key issue for the future in mobilising millions of women.

Support for the abortion campaign has grown rapidly. Under growing mass pressure certain gains have been made. Court cases have been initiated against abortion laws in numerous states across the county. In several states, new laws have been passed making almost all abortions in early pregnancy legal. The ruling of a court

in Dallas, Texas, declared that it is a constitutional right for a woman to be free to decide whether or not she wants to bear a child.

However it is unlikely that the Women's Liberation Movement will be content with these limited gains. In New York, for example, a lot of women have discovered the inhumanity of the medical system as a result of the struggle for Abortion Repeal. The Medical authorities and politicians are doing everything they can to sabotage the gains made by New York women, such as proposing an abortion code which would restrict abortions to the first 12 weeks of pregnancy(the law states 24 weeks) and would further require that abortions be performed only in hospitals or specially equipped laboratories and clinics. Thus these restrictions would make illegal the inexpensive abortion clinics which have been set up, and would have the effect of sending women back to the cheaper lilegal and unsafe backroom abortionists. The rottenness of the system is there for all to see - working people and poor people who can not afford to pay the high fees do not get the benefit of this law.

The Women's Liberation Movement is fighting this by exposing the treachery involved
and by counterposing the demand for free abortion
clinics conrolled by the community, thus laying
the groundwork for a future struggle around
the demand that all medical facilities should
be available free of charge.

It is significant that for the first time in history women are demanding that it is their right to decide on the question of abortion. Clearly, the basic needs of women cannot be met by capitalism, but the winning of partial gains advances the struggle to a new level. Women develop confidence and an understanding of the need to unite in common action on other issues. The Women's Liberation Movement with its basic demand of free abortion is uniting women in an action orientated movement and it would receive a tremendous boost if abortion restrictions were to be lifted. Women would see it as a direct result of their own action and it would increase their determination to continue to fight for liberation.

International Women's Liberation Papers.

The Pedestal: Vancouver Women's Caucus 307, West Broadway Room 6, Vancouver, BC. Canada. \$1.50 a years sub.

Women: A journal of Liberation.

Eastern News, 155 W 15th St.,

New York NY 10011

\$5 a year for 4 issues.

Off our backs: 2318 Ashmead Place NW,
Washington D.C. 20009.
\$6 a year for 24 issues.

It ain't me Babe:Women's Liberation Basement
Collective.
1126 Addison St., Berkeley,
Clifornia 94702.
\$6 a years sub.

## EQUAL PAY

### by Felicity Trodd

Agreement was reached on 28th July between USDAW and the supermarket groups on Equal Pay for their 80,000 women shopworkers by 5th April next year. The basic rate for women shop assistants was increased from £9 l\(\pm\) in the provinces (£10.1.6d. in London) to £12 on 3rd August, and will rise by a further £1 in April 1971. This will bring it into line with the men shopworkers basic pay in the provinces of £13, though the proportion of men actually on the basic is far lower than women. A regrading scheme was included in the agreement, mainly of benefit to men.

Surprisingly enough, the employers actually suggested equal pay to USDAW, aptly described by the Times as "one of the least militant unions". Faced with the so-called Equal Pay Bill coming into effect in 1975, the Supermarkets, Tesco, Fine Fare, International Storest, Allied Distributors etc., decided to get what they could out of the situation and equalise as soon as possible. The reason? -USDAW planned an increase of £1 a year in the basic rate of the 40,000 men shopworhers which would be als by 1975. Ferhaps they also wished that the women's comparative lack of militancy could also hold back the men workers and they wouldn't even have to pay the 118 ... If so they must be proved wrong. Another interesting little feature of the employers magnamimous offer, was the proviso that the two lowest grades would be subject to a reduction of of 10s for the first six months, by which time the employers could be fairly sure they'd have left in disgust.

The agreement, which does not apply to Sainsbury's or the Co-op, represented something of a compromise on the original demand for Equal Pay by 3rd August, in support of which demand a conference in Cardiff of delegates from S.wales and Monmouthshire on 26th July, favoured strike action on a national scale. USDAW is now having talks with the retail Food Trade Wages Council on a similar graded wage settlement for the 400,000 workers in food distribution in England and Wales and 50,000 in Scotland, of whom about 75% are women.

We must welcome any steps taken towards
Equal Pay, but before cheering too loudly we
should remember that 50% of women shop-workers
are on the minimum grade- because of unequal
opportunities in training and education, additional responsibilities in the home etc. - and
thus whatever it may appear on paper, the agreement represents nothing like Equal Pay in
practice.

John Phillips, Assistant General Secretary of USDAW, said the new rates would probably mean an increase in food prices."I am sure the housewife would not wish to have her groceries subsidised by the low wages of the assistants serving the", he said. The big supermarket groups should be thankful to Mr. Phillips

for defending their profits for them against the housewife.

10 to 1 against us say the Office Girls.

According to a survey carried out by a Brook Street Bureau most girls think the odds are at least 10 to 1 against the (some say 100 to 1) when it comes to job opportunities or promotion in competition with men in similar positions, with similar qualifications.

The nearly 500 secretaries interviewed all over England and Scotland were in substantial agreement about the inequality or the Uffice situation. 70% thought discrimination was worse in small firms (with under 50 staff). They described how women office workers were at the mercy of the bosses whims and prejudices. One woman who passed her computer programming course with 98% was rejected for a job because she was married with children, and"the compary did not think I could give my full attention to the job." Another programmer said"At my last job my boss deliberately engaged all female staff because he believed they worked harder. His second in command however sacked every girl when he took over because he favoured an all male staff ".

72% of the girls interviewed thought that if 5 wemen and 1 man, all with roughly the same qualifications, went after the same job, the man would always be selected. And 14% of them insisted that they knew they had been turned down because they were women.

Unions and Equal Pay- Marrowing the Gap.

In May, NUFTO submitted a claim for increases from 1st January 1970, of 2/3 per hour for Journeymen time workers, and 2/11 for Journeywomen. A special recall NUT&GW conference voted to accept an offer of increases on general rates of a further od per hour, for men and 10d for women, in two equal installments on 1st April and 28th Sept., this year. This was additional to the 1st January increase of 5d for men and 4d for women. The printing unions NGA & SOGAT accepted a pay deal from the Newspaper Society and British Federation of Master Printers, to affect 180,000 workers in provincial newspapers and general printing, on 5th August. Increases amount to 14% for men and 19% for women.

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# On plagerism and transcending other plagues

Back among our ancient ancestry
We search and search
Asking
Where are our heroines?
Where are those brave, individual, female
Geniuses we know existed?

And we forget that in those Great matriarchal days (Not matriarchal in the sense of patriarchal now) The Mothers Lived in harmony (Of course there were some hang-ups Like getting enough to eat Or finding safe shelter from the night And personal conflicts too To the point where they had to Institute taboos: You couldn't eat your own Or sleep with your own Clan or gens or whatever it was back then ... The first societies were Really social The I was submerged In the glorious We (Or so this poet loftily speculates) And if somen-one had a great idea She'd say "Hey I've got a great idea" In whatever primitive language They used back then And they'd all pitch in And develop the idea And invent fire Or domesticate those first wild cats That came around the caves Or put early chemistry to work And create vessels To contain the fruits of their labours Until, collectively, They developed the first possibility For Leisure And hacked drawings on the walls of caves And made magnificent heiroglyphics Allowing their brains To transcend the animal world With language Much as their hands had done With creative labour ...

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Who were the first cave drawers The authors of those poems On the walls of caves? Tell us their names!! we ask And we forget That the names were not important The individual was not yet So enshrined and debased And anyhow they only lived To be about age 15 And maybe the mothers Were pregnant most of the time Or dying in childbirth Or the entire species Was catching dread and mysterious So they really couldn't be bothered Indulging in egotism Running around getting copyrights On who invented the wheel ...

We've come so far The Mothers got put down Somewhere along the way And the Fathers took over And most of them Got taken over in turn By God-Almighty Private Property And the species developed More Leisure Albeit, a minority enjoyed it At the expense of the vast Mostly female majority But the species pressed forward Until today When we have individual homes And individual parents And individual automobiles And individual aspirations And hopes and desires And individual ideas Which we jealously guard From the predatory brainpickers Who seek to steal them When they can't make us Whore our minds Like they make us Whore our hands and bodies ...

Yet education has once again
Been socialized
And work has been removed
From private fuedal estates and plantations
To great socialized(albeit alienated)
Production lines
At least most work.
Men's work.
Is it not time once more
"o take ideas out of the private realm
And socialize them once again
While we socialize housekeeping
And childbearing and menpamparing
And women's work?

In what kind of society

Can the concept exist

Of an illegitimate child

Or a Blue-Cross insurance scheme

(If you're lucky enough to find

such a plan to pay for your

Hospitalization when ill)?

What kind of society

Creates the contradiction
Where we want to control our bodies
Yet fear the pill because we don't
Even know what's in it?

In what kind of society
Can there be children
Who are parents' heirs
Inheriting whatever slice of life
They were born into?
Miners who can't buy coal
White men in space
And Black men in hovels?

In what kind of society
Can there be in one single apartment building
Four hundred little kitchens
With four hundred fridges, stoves and sinks
And four hundred bookshelves
Each with its own precious pricey books
The owners fear to lend
Because people don't respect books?

In what kind of society
Can there be twenty different kinds of detergent
All the same with different names
And ugly buildings lining our city streets
Thile art is relegated
To obscure galleries most people
Have never heard of
And graffitti is illegal?
In what kind of society
Can exist the concept
Of a plagerized idea?
Our ancient ancestors
Our Mothers

And perhaps
The responsibility
For rescuing the planet
From its madness
Falls once again
To the Mothers.
Us,
The New Revolutionary Mothers
Who understand one doesn't have to
Breed to be a mother
And there is other labour
Besides the labour of childbirth.
Perhaps the fathers
Will simply have to come along
Or fall by the wayside.

We will learn and assimilate The lessons of Our ancient collective heroines And learn them well. And one of our rallying cries Can be: Rationalize the earth Rationalize ideas Internationalize the truth Down with copyrights And degrading individualism Up with creation Of a society where everyone Can be a real individual And ideas are the property f all And not some chosen few ...

## Sheila Maguire

# Women's Liberation & The New Politics

### **Margaret Coulson**

Knew better.

On: Women's Liberation and the New Politics. By Sheila Rowbotham. May Day Manifesto 2/6

In the last few years, movements for women's liberation have re-emerged not only in Britain but in several of the advanced capitalist countries. This development can not be understood as an automatic part of the growth in radicalism among sections of youth, or of greater trade union militancy in some of these countries. For while most of those involved in these movements would pay lip service at least to the rights of women, experience has shown us the uncertainty of the relationships between women's liberation and the socialist movement. Juliet Mitchell's comment that: "The liberation of women remains a normative ideal, an adjunct to socialist theory not structurally integrated with it" . (Women: the longest revolution. NLR Nov/Dec '66 - now reproduced as a separate pamphlet), is true at a practical level also. The "cultural" subordination of women has been very effective, and particularly the general notion that women are best in secondary

positions, and permeates into the actions and think ing of socialists themselves.

In this context the questions which Sheila Rowbotham asks and sets out to answer in this book are important ones. Her intention is "to explore thé nature of women's containment, to examine the ways out, and to see how these ways relate to a total social transformation". This also involves an attempt to understand the awkwardness with which Marxism has touched upon the situation of women, which of necessity involves questioning the emphasis of some species of Marxism. The pamphlet is introduced as the beginning of enquiry into these issues and it does not itself deal very fully with all of the. Instead it concentrates largely on the complex process by which the subjective (personal) understanding, which women have of their situation, devlops and may change. Whether or not concentration on this aspect is intentional is not clear, but perhaps in this it does reflect some of the uncertainties of the present stage of the movement in this country.

The pamphlet begins by locating the subordin-

ation of women in the general context of the question of authority and subordination, of control, co-operation, competition. "The domination of women is at once the most complex and most fundamental link in the chain." (of capitalism.? oppression generally?)

This is clearly recognised by those who hold power and yet women acquiesce in their own subordination; they learn and come to believe that theirs should be an inferior position.

Thus the first half of the pamphlet gives a very general and often rute impression of women's situation. But it does not provide the basis for an analysis of that situation: it is an intuitive rather than an analytical picture.

The remainder of the pamphlet is concerned with how the picture might be changed. The importance of learning from the audacity of other oppressed groups is emphasised.

The development of the movement is then traced. Utopian Feminism in which women replace men in positions of domination is identified in myths and legends and contemporarily: the society for cutting up men, but neither is seen to have much political potential. Rather it is suggested, we have inherited the religious, than moral radical revolt. The development of the movement is then examined. Apart from the variety of feminism which seeks to eliminate men, or to replace them as dominators, this development is related to changing ideas, (from lith century onwards) religious, then moral, about individual worth and about the "place of women". The limited reference to the changing economic and social contexts within which these ideas were located means we have a very unsubstantial picture of this development, fo example, it is important to examine the way in which the protests of middle-class women in the 19th century against the uselessness and powerlessness of their position developed into a movement claiming the same legal, educational and political rights for women which middle-class men already enjoyed; while during the same period workingclass women struggles alongside men to bring improvements in working-class conditions generally. (Some elements of these differences persist today with some tendence for middle class women to seek areas of cultural or psychological liberation while working class women may tend to be more pre-occupied with demands for equal pay, equal work, wider opportunities for training etc. However these aspects of the struggle are not separate in any real strategy for Women's Liberation and Sheila Rowbotham correctly recognises that the "liberal Radical feminism" was incapable of making the necessary links and carry the movement beyond the present social framework.)

Attention is then focused on the position of women as housewives, and as workers. This approach is presumably used because it is in these positions that women can clearly recognise themselves, but an analysis which makes the links referred to above, would need to examine more systematically the major factors which determine women's situation.

(Juliet Mitchell argues that the key structures which in their inter-relationship determine women's position are those of production, reproduction, sexuality and the socialisation of children, and this provides a basis for the analysis of the situation of women. Sheila Rowbotham's pamphlet hovers uncertainly between description and analysis.)

The concluding sections seem to summarise the rest of the pamphlet, to re-emphasise the subjective aspects and ways in which these may change: "structural changes will interacto on the way women can can see herself, and will call into question the assumption of social secondariness ... The struggle is not simply against the external mechanisms of containment ... It is against the assumption that men make and define the world whether it is capitalist or socialist". In that the subordination of women is so extensive - economic, cultural, psychological and so subtly perpetuated, the importance of these points is very considerable and yet the tendence to underestimate the structural factors in this pamphlet is a serious weakness which leads to some confusion in the picture of women's liberation which emerges.

One final comment: the style of writing is itself impressionistic, it hints at meaning rather than stating, explaining, clarifying in any precise or substantial way. It may be true that this is an attempt to break out of the constraints of traditional expression, but, for me at least, the effect is to perpetuate the aura of mystery which has been used to perpetuate the subordination of women, and which, if we are to move forward, we have to abandon.

### French Women Organise

PARIS - A Women's Liberation group has just started in Paris. For the moment, it is very small and composed mainly of intellectuals and students. It was initiated by a group of sisters familiar with the American movement (the theoreticians) that fused with dissidents from the wild-cat day-care Centre at the Censier Faculty.

From what we know, the group has so far made only one public appearance, a meeting around the fountain at the Vincennes Faculty which constituted a relatively bitter experience. On this occasion sisters were clearly able to see the extent of the male chauvinism and sexism within the French Movement: the Maoist & Anarchist "militants" present joined forces with hard-core reactionary types welcoming the women with cries of "Strip!" "Suffragettes!", "Dykes" and "Counter Revolutionaries!" not to mention obscene proposals and bullying.

After this traumatizing experience, the sisters spent most of their time in discussion sessions and brainstorming. There is no question that the sisters in the movement as a whole have been awakened. But the group feels that it faces almost insurmountable odds.

Report from: EVERYWOMAN: 6516 West 83rd St.
Los Angeles, Calif. 90045.

How about sending messages of solidarity to our French sisters. Address of Paris group can be obtained from above journal.

We salute these women who are breaking through the myth of the advanced stage of equality and respect supposedly enjoyed by our French sisters in te French Left Movement.

# LIBERATION MUST ALSO INCLUDE THE WOMEN OF AFRICA

by Sonya Okoth

Reprinted from AFRICA AND THE WORLD, June 1970

The battles for independence from colonial rule have borne out the indelible imprints of the African women's practical contribution to the political emancipation of the continent.

This truth at once removes any shade of doubt as to the ability, mobility and vulnerability of the African woman to the revolutionary struggle. But what becomes the real issue now is the status of the moman, her position in the whole fabric of African society, that is the part she plays in social production.

The magnitude of the significance of this question can be properly percieved not only when estimation is made of the numerical strength of the women and the contribution which they towards the welfare of society in their capacity as an indivisable and indispensable part of Africa's labour force, but also, and this is primary, when the concept of the present struggle in Africa begins to embrace the question of liberation of the masses from economic exloitation and the abolition of all forms of social oppression, that is, the social emancipation of labour, this issue becomes a cardinal part.

Scientists and leaders of the liberation movements in Africa have defined the main character of the present struggle. It is generally accepted that Africa has entered the second phase of her National Liberation Revolution, for the consolidation of political independence and for winning economic power from Imperialism. But a lasting solution of these tasks is inconceivable within the capitalist system.

Capitalist development inevitably means foreign economic domination of Africa and therefore, the social and political hegemony of the few over the majority, thereby further developing, prolonging and intensifying the social conflict in Africa. The present battles in Africa throw both the willing and the unwilling, the conscious and the unconscious, the oppressed and the un-opp ressed, the exploited and the unexploited, into fierce conflicts over the question of which way capitalism or socialism—is to be the new path for Africa.

Within the context of this class struggle



although it is always unanimously agreed that the main struggle is between capital and labour, the woman question has remained obscured, un-: touched and even obliterated. It is often, regrettably, even by some dedicated, progressive Africans, forgotten that women are an inseparable part of labour and hence the woman question is and indivisble part of the labour-capital conflict.

This may be due partly to the limited number of women at present in the contingent of African hired labour. But the chief reason is that many people, the majority of whom are men, still remain prisoners of their own prejudices which hold that women are no more than material supplements of men and that woman's real place is in the back yard. Lenin accurately described men's attitude to women as the most deep-rooted, habitual, case-hardened and ossified... outrage and barbarism..." (Lenin, International Women's Day, 1918).

How far is it possible to draw the masses into the new struggle without the full aid and active participation of the women "-is the question we must ask ourselves. In "Momen and Society", Lenin wrote inter alia: "It has been observed in the experiences of all liberation movements that success of a revolution depends on the extent to which women take part in it". Lenin's statement of fact has been borne out by the part played by African women, which no sensible African can deny; that it did substantially contribute to the successful victory overy colonialism. It becomes appropriate therefore to begin by asking - what is the woman question? It must be stated unequivocally that the woman question consists of her abominable position in African society, a position which impedes her full and active participation in the revolutionary movement.

She is the bearer of petty monotonous house-hold work; in the majority of families she is the farm digger, child-rearer etc. In the rural society she bears more than her share of family problems which justifies her being called a slave of her husband rather than his equal partner. She is generally regarded as a mere instrument of production, both in the economic and social sense.

In the urban areas she enters into bourgeois relations. She joins the industrial labour force as a part of the exploited proletariat while retaining her household work. She becomes therefore

slave of both the urban employer and the married a well-off man, she would be relieved of the household tasks by the employment of servants.

But the woman is still worse off in a polygamous family. Here her role becomes more economically motivated. She forms part of a communal (or family) labour force, that is the breadwinner; in addition, if she has financial earnings these are used to bolster the husbands private enterprises - a further source of his domination over her. Dowry is one of the many aspects of the woman question. Dowry expresses the woman's inferior position in relation to the social status of her husband. It is generally alleged that dowry is an expression of thanks to the girls parents. This is not borne out in reality. In practical life dowry enhances a man's material superiority over woman, it manifests the exchange relationship which places the woman in the position of an exchange commodity- a commodity received in exchange for another commodity.

The exchange terms in the dowry are regarded as the exchange of two equivalents, and since this exchange takes place between the woman and another commodity, and does not take place between the man and any commodity or the man and the woman, shows the expressed inequality between man and woman. The position of wealth owned by the man accords him the right to buy a wife, and sometimes he buys more than one wife, while possesion of wealth by a woman ( which is rare ) does not give her the right to marry even one husband at a time. Moreover he would have to still pay dowry to her parents. In a number of African communities the marriage is only supposed to be a free contract entered into purely on the free will of t e two contracting parties, but in reality, it is not a free will or contract. Farents, especially the poor peasants, artisans and workers, treat their daughte's as mere commodity stocks in which a revolving capital has been invested and will be disposed of when the time comes. The daughters are a source therefore, of family income and a family investment against the future. It is a common practice that the amount of dowry, in kind or in money, (the latter was less practised in pra- independence days) is decided upon exclusively between the girl's parents and the parents of the boy, and sometimes with the participation of the boy. The decision is reached through bargaining. Consent of the girl is rarely sought, but in any case it does not always determine the fate of the marriage. The parent's decision is often paramount.

It is a practice in some communities that when the marriage breaks down and there are no children, paid dowry under normal circumstances. is refunded to the boy's family. If children were born during the marriage, a part of the dowry is left with the woman's family to balance up the production, children. That still confirms the fact that the property position by man is what gives him a dominant position over his wife (or wives). Although she may be respected, even loved, both she and her husband think her backyard position is irreversible and is eternally provided by God.

She generally acknowledges the questionable right of her husband to marry more than one wife. This puts her in a situation of unequal respect and unequal love. The question posed by this private property - a factor which gives the man the role of dominant element in the family - raises another question. It is the question of the social emancipation of woman.

In the context of the present struggle, the social emancipation of the woman is a class question and may be solved only through class struggle. This is contrary to what some Africans (men & women alike) think about this issue. It is often ideally suggested that it suffices only to bring about a change in the attitudes of men. It is further argued that the present position of women is due to her lack of education. This latter argument may be partly true but cannot be the answer to the whole problem of the social position of women.

Education may enhance the role of the women in society and may also contribute to the revolutionary struggle. This is evident in the case of women in the developed industrial bourgeois states. But this cannot solve the problem of inequality between man and woman, the exploitation of her labour and that of household drudgery.

This is why it prompted Lenin to say in his message at the International Women's Day that:" the abolition of the private ownership of land, the factories and mills" is a principal step towards the emancipation of the woman from "domestic slavery" by passing from a petty, individual, domestic economy to a large scale social economy.

Africa is fighting for a new path of development. This new path therefore presupposes the birth and development of a new African. It means the redemption of the African people from archaic socialrelations and from all agencies of oppression which obstruct their unimpeded move towards a higher cultural, social, economic and intellectual growth.

In order to attain this goal Africa needs a down-to-earth social revolution, the establishment of a common ownership of the means of production, and the abolition of inequality in every sphere of social production. Under a revolutionary government, it is not only the enactment of the law abolishing all that which makes women inferior to men, but the implementation of those social reforms which would eliminate the material basis of that inequality which must play the decisive role.

WOMEN'S STRUGGLE: Bulletin of Women's National Co-ordinating Committee. Price 1/-, 10/- a year. 3 Rona Road, London N.W.3.

Second issue of ENOUGH, price 2/-, write to Janet Parham, 8 Clifton Pk. Bristol 8.